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A Commentary: Bangladesh to take over the training of midwifery educators

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Abstract

While Bangladesh has made gains in maternal health provisions, there are still gaps and unmet need for services. Bangladesh has trained over 7 000 midwives, and many more midwifery educators are needed to serve the country's population of 140 million with midwifery services. In April 2016 the first nursing faculty teaching midwifery students at nursing institutes across Bangladesh were enrolled in a blended online and onsite master's programme with the Dalarna University, Sweden. The programme content focused the subject sexual, reproductive and perinatal health and was the first of its kind in Asia. The graduating faculty members were expected to be in a position to deliver higher quality education to the midwifery students (1, 2). To date, the team of teachers from Dalarna University has trained 150 midwifery educators (3). The current proposal from the University is that an equivalent to the Swedish Master's programme should be established in Bangladesh. While Bangladesh has made gains in education of midwives, there are still gaps and unmet need for educators with skills and knowledge in the subject of midwifery. During a period of transition, open seminars will be held at Dalarna University for all alumni who want to attend, with the hope on the part of the team of Dalarna university teachers being that they provide inspiration for high-quality midwifery education in Bangladesh.

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Background

In Bangladesh, there are currently 47 public and 105 private midwifery training programmes. With 150 of the educators on these programmes holding degrees from Dalarna University, Bangladesh now has the capacity to take over the education of its own midwifery teachers. This means that it will be able to extend training to other nursing educators and not just those with a background in sexual, reproductive and perinatal health. Midwifery students and educators have stated their sense of inadequacy in their work with doctors and nurses because many educators neither have formal training in the field of midwifery, nor have they practiced midwife-led care (4-6).

Midwifery education in Bangladesh presents several challenges since both programme and course syllabi are provided in English with a content that would benefit from being provided in Bengali for better understanding of complex phenomena. At the same time, midwifery students are

unable to acquire the amount of practical training they need to complete their studies, such as attendance at live births and antenatal meetings with women, children, and families. As a result, newly trained midwives often require additional mentorship in their new profession. In the same way, current trainee midwifery teachers also need mentoring to help them understand and interpret their course syllabuses, which are in English, not Bengali. They need support so that they can situate their teaching at a theoretical and practical level that is appropriate for their students. Several studies from Bangladesh confirm what midwifery students and midwifery educators say about the challenges of introducing a new profession and education (4-9). Interview studies with midwifery students and midwifery educators demonstrate that their learning environment needs to improve and biopsychosocial challenges, like age and social status, need to be addressed if quality midwifery education is to be possible (5, 7).

Bangladesh has achieved a great deal and the commitment on the part of the Government of Bangladesh continues as strong as ever. The Prime Minister of Bangladesh believes midwives are important advocates for women. Furthermore, Bangladesh can now serve as a role model for the rest of Asia. India and Nepal are now looking to introduce the midwifery profession and are keen to learn from Bangladesh, which is now considered to be at the forefront of birth management strategies among countries in this field. One factor that the countries introducing midwifery education have in common, as made clear by the experiences in Bangladesh, is that midwifery as a profession needs to be accepted in both the healthcare system and the society in general (10).

In 2016, Dalarna University was commissioned by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Bangladesh and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) to train

midwifery teachers (1, 2). On December 5, 2022, a grand leaving ceremony took place in Dhaka. It was attended by 162 trained midwifery educators, five doctors, several government officials and four representatives from the privately run midwifery training schools. Doctors and government officials have stated their intention to give their full support to the Bangladeshi midwifery leadership and their efforts to set up a local system for advanced midwifery training. Within the private sector, it has been acknowledged that there is a great need to invest in the training of midwifery educators. The Dalarna University midwifery programme has been very successful, with graduates rating the teaching very high. Indeed, in 2022 international students ranked Dalarna University as the best in Europe (11). Currently, the 162 midwifery educators who graduated from Dalarna University are taking part in open online seminars so that they can continue their professional development and contribute to the success

of the midwifery training programmes in Bangladesh. These midwifery educators now find themselves in positions of leadership within the wider midwifery profession. They are working to provide support for new educators by starting and running mentorship programmes in other midwifery programmes in and around the country (12).

With support from the UNFPA, staff from Dalarna University who have been instrumental in setting up this midwifery partnership continue to ensure that the Bangladesh midwifery curriculum and syllabi maintain a high quality (3). Those of us here at Dalarna University, working together with local professionals, can reduce the gap between reality and theory and, through the possibilities presented by online education, make high-quality education in the developing world a reality. Dalarna's ability to deliver curriculum content at a distance during the Covid 19 pandemic has proved to be a key factor in the success of the Bangladesh midwifery

programme. We can be role models for how midwifery educators can work together to ensure the high quality of midwifery education. Midwives in Bangladesh now have their own professional title and Bangladeshi law recognises midwifery as a profession. We are grateful that Dalarna University has received additional funding from SIDA and the Swedish Research Council (3) so that it can continue its efforts to ensure the successful introduction of midwifery as a profession in Bangladesh and thus make its training programme a model example within Bangladesh and neighbouring countries.

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YouTube Link to a film about the master's programme in Bangladesh: https://youtu.be/tH-18s8_-QY

QR-code to click to get to see the film:

