

# UTILISATION OF MATERNAL HEALTHCARE SERVICES DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN DISASTER-PRONE AREAS OF BANGLADESH

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Satkhira, BANGLADESH

## Context

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused devastating impacts on the lives and livelihood of millions of people across the globe, with severe impacts on reproductive health in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC).

Relying on the intersectional perspective, this study aimed to examine the resiliency of maternal healthcare services (MCS) in Bangladesh—an LMIC with a population of more than 165 million—during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also sought to identify effective strategies for ensuring adequate access to MCS during the pandemic, focusing on disaster-prone areas.

Using a parallel mixed-method approach, researchers collected quantitative and qualitative data from respondents in two disaster-prone sub-districts (Ashashuni and Shyamnagar) of Bangladesh.

## Objectives

The broader objective of the project was to examine the access of poor, vulnerable, and disadvantaged women to maternal healthcare services (MCS) during the COVID-19 pandemic in disaster-prone areas of Bangladesh. Specific objectives were as follows:

- To identify the effects of COVID-19 on the factors that influence MCS utilisation for poor and vulnerable women
- To evaluate changes in utilisation of MCS during the pandemic
- To detect underlying causes of lower access to MCS during the pandemic
- To identify gender-specific vulnerabilities related to MCSs experienced by mothers, mothers-to-be, and health workers during the pandemic

*Water logging nearby the respondent's household in Satkhira*

*Credit: U. of Dhaka*



- To generate effective strategies for tackling lower access to MCSs for poor and vulnerable women during the pandemic.
- To identify gaps and necessary reforms in the existing institutional and regulatory frameworks for improving access to MCS during the pandemic
- To delineate strategies for ensuring and synthesising improved MCS for poor and vulnerable women of Bangladesh, and wider South Asia

## Findings

Study findings have provided valuable insight into changes in maternal health trends, causes for lower access to MCS, gender-specific vulnerabilities experienced by healthcare workers and caregivers, and limitations of current institutional and regulatory frameworks.

Findings have also identified effective policy interventions and implementation strategies.

## Recommendations

- Develop a disaster risk reduction framework for health under the sectoral plan of health, integrating a provision to deliver minimum essential sexual and reproductive health services during an emergency.
- Create more employment opportunities for all, focusing on women, and sustained income opportunities for all, with a greater emphasis on rural areas in which people were disproportionately affected by the pandemic.
- Recruit adequate healthcare providers and provide adequate support services to prevent decreased home visits of healthcare providers due to the pandemic.
- Strengthen disaster-related coping strategies and provide adequate financial support to households for a quick return to disaster conditions.
- Promote public-private partnerships to ensure better access to healthcare services during disasters and pandemics.
- Increase mental health support to people during the pandemic by ensuring adequate counsellors/mental health care providers.



*Respondent in front of a household structure in disaster-prone coastal areas in Bangladesh.*

*Credit: U. of Dhaka.*

## Utilisation of maternal healthcare services during COVID-19 pandemic in disaster-prone areas of Bangladesh

Individual researchers of the University of Dhaka