



## Letter to the Editor

## Development of psychiatric services in Bangladesh



The historical aspect of Bangladesh psychiatry has been recognized as an under addressed entity (Arafat, 2019). Here, we aimed to review the traceable landmarks of mental health services in Bangladesh.

The first mental health service set up was identified as an asylum which was built in Dhaka in 1815 during the British Raj (Arafat, 2019). The asylum was consisted of two tile sheds along with three single story buildings where, about 323 inmates (278 males & 45 females) can be lodged (Arafat, 2019). The Pabna mental hospital was the first specialized mental health services center in Bangladesh which was established in 1957 in an abandoned house named *Sitlai House* when Bangladesh was under Pakistan as East Pakistan (Rabbani et al., 2016; Karim et al., 2006). Initially, it was 60 bedded which was transformed to 500 indoor beds gradually. After the liberation, National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), Dhaka was established which was started as *organization of training in mental health* in 1981 (Arafat, 2019) that was further expanded and renamed as institute of mental health and research (IMHAR) in 1984. The mental health & psychiatric nursing courses were started at National Institute of Advanced Nursing Education and Research (NIANER), which was established in 2013. The latest mental health act has been passed on November 14, 2018 which nullify the Bangladesh Lunacy Act, 1912 (Mental Health Act, 2018).

## 1. Specialized degree in psychiatry

After liberation, the first specialized course for psychiatry was offered by the former Institute of Postgraduate Medicine and Research (IPGM&R, now the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, BSMMU) in 1975 and the course was named as Diploma in Psychological Medicine (DPM). The Bangladesh College of Physicians and Surgeons (BCPS) offered fellowship in psychiatry in 1979 which is a post graduate course in psychiatry. The DPM course was replaced by an Master of Philosophy (MPhil) course in 1995 (Mullik 2007). Since 2001, Doctor of Medicine (MD) course in psychiatry was started at the BSMMU. The MPhil degree was closed later while MD was started. Member of College of Physicians and Surgeons (MCPS) in psychiatry was also started under BCPS later, which has been continuing. The courses and curricula for psychiatry training are being regulated by the Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council (BMDC) (Mullick, 2007).

## 2. Development of child and adolescent psychiatry

- 1975: Establishment of child guidance clinic in Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH)
- 1977: Society for Welfare of the Intellectually Disabled (SWID) was established
- 1984: Establishment of Bangladesh Protibondhi Foundation (BPF) for developmentally disabled children so that they become independent, self-reliant and contribute the society, which is a non-profit and non-government humanitarian organization.

- 1991: The first child development unit was started within Dhaka Shishu (Child) Hospital
- 1992: Establishment of Institute of Child & Mother Health (ICMH)
- 1998: Establishment of first child mental health clinic in BSMMU (former IPGM&R)
- 1998: Establishment of child development center in Chattogram Maa-O-Shishu (mother & child) Hospital, in Chattogram
- 1999: Child and adolescent psychiatry was started as a separate wing in BSMMU
- 1999: Starting of child development center in BSMMU & International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR,B)
- 2000: Starting of child development & neurology care center in DMCH
- 2001: Department of Child, adolescent and family psychiatry was started at NIMH, Dhaka
- 2013: Establishment of Neuro-Developmental Disability protection trust
- 2014: Establishment of Shuchona Foundation which is not-for-profit advocacy, research and capacity-building organization specialized in neurodevelopmental disorders (NDDs) and mental health
- 2016: The MD course in child and adolescent psychiatry was started in BSMMU

## 3. Prominent advocacy groups

- *Bangladesh Association of Psychiatrists (BAP)*: It was established in 1975 with the aim to promote mental health and to advance the subject of psychiatry across the country.
- *Bangladesh Association for child and adolescent mental health (BACAMH)*: It is a national organization for professionals working in the area of child and adolescent mental health which was established in 2008 with mission of promoting mental health among child (ren) and adolescent(s) and families through training, services, research, advocacy, peer support and collaboration.
- *Association of Therapeutic Counselors, Bangladesh (ATCB)*: It was founded on 23rd June 2010 as a national and non-profitable organization dedicated to enhance the counseling profession as well as to offer better service in this field.
- *Bangladesh Clinical Psychology Society*: It was initially started with different name in 1999, subsequently took the current format with aim to promote mental health by improving psychosocial wellbeing and scientific knowledge.
- Bangladesh Psychological Association (BPA)

## 4. Development of private clinics for mental health services

Private sector has been contributing significantly in the mental health services in Bangladesh as the available public services are found

to be inadequate. The first private clinic for psychiatric patients of Bangladesh was the *Dhaka Monorog Clinic* which got registration in 1984 though it has been started in 1980 by Professor Hidayetul Islam (Islam et al., 1993). At the same time, *Zaman's Clinic* was also started as another private services setting for mental health in Dhaka.

As a country, Bangladesh has inadequate services to cope the current burden of mental disorders which is a consequence of poor attention in mental health in the past. Adequate attention is warranted to start services sectors for mental health patients which could mitigate the future demands.

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