

The comparison of urban versus rural education in Bangladesh

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BACKGROUND: Senior nursing students from the University of Vermont traveled to Bangladesh to complete their public health nursing course. Community assessments were undertaken in two communities- Nodinghy (rural) and Uttara (urban). These assessments enabled the students to draw conclusions about how varying degrees of education within the communities impact the different aspects of social life.

METHODS: Within the communities, data were collected by interviewing local community members with the assistance of an interpreter as well as by direct observation. The majority of people interviewed were women and children traveling to school, but other community members also volunteered their time. Qualitative analysis of the data were done.

RESULTS: The government of Bangladesh subsidizes education so that boys can complete primary school and girls can complete secondary school for free, as well as providing free books for the students. In rural settings, such as Nodinghy, school facilities were smaller with one or two open rooms, no library or cafeteria. The ratio of students to teachers was very high and the students had to provide their own uniform. There were higher incidences of drop out related to boys having to start working for the family and girls marrying, which also caused the rate of students continuing on to university lower. In comparison, the more urban setting that we observed, Uttara, had many different schools available to students with better facilities to learn. Students were able to stay in school longer as the responsibilities of the family were lessened and the awareness of other cultures was greater from increased exposure. Health care facilities were more available and more specialized in comparison to the rural settings, indicating the presence of higher education, which also increases the ability of families to have access to health education. Finally, the ability of Bangladeshi people to communicate in English was noticeably better in urban compared to the rural communities due to greater opportunities to practice English.

CONCLUSION/IMPLICATIONS: It can be concluded that the urban populations have a greater access to education, thus impacting many different aspects of life, from health to nutrition. Access to education will positively impact future generations, as women can pass important lessons on to their children. Improvement of education throughout Bangladesh will help to bring social determinants of health to a more universally acceptable level.