



Gender and Access to Child Health Services in Dhaka, Bangladesh

Bruce Caldwell, *NCEPH, ANU*

The role of gender on household decision-making is an important factor in determining whether a Bangladeshi family obtains effective access to health and other services. This paper draws upon data from two related projects in Dhaka city, the first undertaken in 1999-2000 and the second in 2005-2006. The two surveys involved a combination of quantitative data collection (1,600 respondents in the earlier survey, 1,000 in the later one) and qualitative in-depth interviews with selected sub-samples of male and female respondents. The key issues investigated included factors influencing the use of health services and the household decision-making processes. Gender roles are sharply differentiated in Bangladeshi society. Men are responsible for all activities requiring interaction with the outside world including economic activities. Women are responsible for household duties including childcare. This paper argues that gender roles have a different effect on child health in urban than rural areas. In rural areas families can draw on the experience and resources of the extended family. In urban areas decisions on a child's health usually have to be made by the sick child's parents with little input either in terms of advice or resources from family members who live elsewhere. Young parents are inexperienced but more open to the use of modern health services. Such services are more available in the cities but are often expensive and inconvenient. The parents, especially the mother, consequently have to make decisions that their rural counterparts rarely face.