

Day 10: Dhaka Children's Hospital

Today we visited Dhaka Shishu (Child) Hospital and were lucky enough to meet some of the Psychology team there. Monowara Parveen, Senior Child Psychologist, met us at the busy entrance and then took us on a tour of the departments her team work in. We began with the Department of Developmental Neuroscience, which runs a range of busy outpatient clinics for children and their families. General Developmental Assessment clinics run every day, as do the many different specialist clinics that they run for families of children with issues such as autism, epilepsy, and cerebral palsy. Some children have no organic neurological difficulty but instead their parents are experiencing emotional difficulty which impacts on them, in this case the team provide the parents with counselling.

Health care is not free in Bangladesh and the first appointment in this clinic - the General Developmental Assessment - costs 30 taka (around £0.27 pence) after that each specialist clinic appointment 300 taka (around £2.60p). As a result this service is mainly used by more wealthy middle class families. However, the same services are available at Medical Colleges through Dhaka and elsewhere in Bangladesh at a much cheaper rate of around 20 taka (£0.18 pence) per appointment. Although much cheaper, this still means that families on the lowest incomes will inevitably miss out on this service.

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Today the epilepsy follow up clinic was in progress and we got to observe how Developmental Psychologists and Paediatricians work collaboratively with each family. Monowara explained how important a multidisciplinary approach was in this team.

We then met two young Developmental Psychologists who worked on all the different specialist clinics. The Developmental Psychologists all complete their academic training at Dhaka University and then further practical training at the hospital before becoming Psychologists.

Monowara then took us to visit the EEG department, where brain scans help to identify neurological conditions in children such as epilepsy, and then on to the inpatient ward where the children and their mothers stay and the Developmental Psychologists work with them.

We then visited the Psychology Department, where children are initially assessed for psychological conditions and where appropriate seen for further psychological treatment or referred on to the Department of Developmental Neuroscience.

We were excited to see some of the toys and resources that the Psychologists use for assessment and therapy with the children. These included small dolls, figures, furniture, that children could use to create worlds and make up stories. These toys are often known as small world figures in Play Therapy and used in a similar way by children in Play Therapy sessions.

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The similarities between Play Therapy and how these Psychologists' worked with children did not end there. The team also emphasised the importance of play for children to express and work through their emotional difficulties. Child & Adolescent Mental Health Specialist, Farzana Islam, was particularly passionate and eloquent on this point. She explained how keen the team were for Play Therapy training to occur in Bangladesh, so that they could ensure that professionals were working with children experiencing emotional difficulties in safe and effective ways.

We left Dhaka Shishu Hospital feeling extremely positive about the future of Play Therapy in Bangladesh. Not only are the Psychologists very keen for Play Therapy training and skills, it appears that Play Therapy is highly compatible with the values and approach of leading professionals already working with children with emotional difficulties here.

We at the Orphan Trust have a vision of offering Play Therapy to the vulnerable and disadvantaged children of Bangladesh - and this will only be possible if Play Therapy is embraced and integrated in to existing specialist mental health services like that at Dhaka Shishu Hospital.

By Catriona

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