

Women's Access to Health Care Increased: Researchers

By LALIT K JHA

Wednesday, August 4, 2010

WASHINGTON — A community-based maternal health delivery program has dramatically increased access to maternal health care for internally displaced women in eastern Burma, say American researchers.

The study carried out by researchers from the prestigious Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health found that there was a 10-fold increase in the proportion of women assisted at delivery by workers skilled in providing emergency obstetric care, because of the MOM Project (mobile obstetric medics).

The researchers believe that the MOM Project could be a model for maternal health care delivery in settings where resources are extremely limited. The study appeared in the Aug. 3 edition of the journal *PLoS Medicine*.

"The MOM Project's focus on task-shifting, capacity building and empowerment at the community level might serve as a model approach for delivering needed maternal health care in severely constrained areas," said Luke Mullany, lead author of the study and an associate professor at the school's Center for Public Health and Human Rights.

Conducted in collaboration with four ethnic health organizations working along the Burma-Thailand border, the MOM Project provided a three-tiered network of community-based providers, which included traditional birth attendants to improve antenatal care services, health workers to provide supplies and prevent post-birth complications and maternal health workers who were responsible for oversight and training, as well as providing emergency care.

According to the analysis, 72 percent of women received antenatal care after implementation of the MOM Project, up from 40 percent prior to the start of the project.

Postnatal visits within seven days following delivery doubled, while contraception use increased from 24 percent to 45 percent, reducing unmet need for contraception by 35 percent.

"Innovative alternatives like the MOM Project are urgently needed in a wide range of settings," said Chris Beyrer, a senior author of the study and director of the Center for Public Health and Human Rights.

Such projects can bring services directly to displaced women and can be delivered outside traditional settings, he said.