



An Afghan National Army nurse receives her diploma after finishing a three week course designed to give first responders basic skills for dealing with issues common to women. They will take these skills to women in rural and remote areas where there is little or no healthcare for women due to cultural beliefs imposed by the Taliban.



Afghans target maternal mortality in rural areas

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KABUL, Afghanistan – A class of 20 female Afghan National Army soldiers and Afghan National Police officers graduated from a specialized three week course designed for emergency first responders.

There were a few differences separating this course from the standard course that normally trains first responders. This class was for women, designed to treat women and dealt directly with issues common place only to women.

“Afghanistan has a very high maternal mortality rate,” said Karima Akbari, program assistant. “In some rural areas women are not allowed to go to hospitals. The students learned how to control maternal mortality and to help women who are not allowed to come out of their homes.”

Akbari is an Islamic law student and her job with the program is to teach these students what women’s rights are under Islamic law. When the Taliban were in control, they distorted what Islam said and subjugated women to the point of denying them basic health care.

“Islam teaches us to help others,” she said. “The students

who have learned how to help patients and are practically helping patients, will, according to Islam, receive virtue.”

The care is focused around pregnancy and prenatal care.

There is a lack of prenatal care, especially in some of the remote rural areas dominated by tribal customs and by giving first responders basic prenatal training, the hope is to get more medical care to these women while they are pregnant.

The people who were targeted for this training are the ones out there among the population, said Sharifa Mahboob, nursing commander, Kabul Military Medical Center.

“We did not only train medical professionals during this course, but police officers who are in the mix,” she said. “They are the ones interacting with women in rural areas of Afghanistan. These police officers are our best chance to educate and care for these women.”

The hope is these initiatives will decrease the high mortality rate currently suffered by Afghan women and their newborn children.