

A Summary Landscape of Neonatal Nursing Education Programs in sub-Saharan Africa

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Significance

Globally, about half of all under-5 deaths happen during the neonatal period (UNICEF, 2020a). While Neonatal mortality trends downwards, it is often at a slower rate than under-five mortality (UNICEF, 2021). Neonatal Mortality rates are highest in sub-Saharan Africa, with neonates having 10 times the risk of dying than in high-income countries (UNICEF, 2020b). There are many reasons for this disparity, one of them being access to quality healthcare (Gage et al., 2019). Healthcare access and quality of care both impact health outcomes. 61% of newborn deaths in the first 28 days are attributed to low-quality healthcare (UNICEF, 2020a).

Quality care, among other factors, increases with advanced educational opportunities for healthcare workers. For care of the sick newborn, nurses are integral in providing life-saving support. Specialty advanced degrees for Neonatal Nurses have improved capacity for care of newborns in the critical first month of life (WHO, 2020). There is, however, a gap in nursing care for small and sick newborns, especially in regions with limited healthcare access. Caring for neonates requires advanced and specialized training.

Programs focused on building the skills of nurses caring for newborns can happen at the pre-service, in-service, on-the-job, at the certificate level, and in advanced degree program specialization programs. This landscape analysis focuses on identifying Bachelor (BSc) and Master's (MSc) Degree programs at the University level that have a specific specialization in Neonatal Nursing within the sub-Saharan Africa region. The World Health organization (WHO) recommends that Neonatal Nurse advanced or postgraduate programs be part of a nationally accredited education program, usually lasting between 3-5 years (WHO, 2020).

Landscape Goals and Vision

The WHO published the [Roadmap](#) on Human Resources Strategies in 2020 which highlights 10 strategies to improve newborn care in health facilities in low- and middle-income countries (WHO, 2020). This landscape analysis aligns with *Strategy 4: Create and train a new cadre of specialized neonatal nurses* and examines the extent of such Neonatal Nursing Bachelor and Master degree programs that are in existence or in development that aim to prepare this cadre in sub-Saharan Africa. Sources used for this process included online searches, published documents such as the WHO strategies document, knowledge from discussions with global networks of professionals, and iterated conversations to enquire and validate information with various institutional and other stakeholder contacts between November 2021 and March 2022.

As such, this landscape analysis is a snapshot in time and will be ever evolving with the addition of more Neonatal Nursing Programs and could be seen as the first in a series of Neonatal Nursing Degree Program Landscape Analyses and updates that can include other geographic regions throughout the globe. Periodic updates can be feasible through continual amendments and additions with accurate descriptions and details of BSc and MSc Nursing programs from stakeholders from sub-Saharan Africa and collaborators in the form of shared comments in the [google spreadsheet](#) created for this purpose.

Current Neonatal Nursing Education Programs in sub-Saharan Africa

Updated March 2022

Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSc)			
Country	Institution	Degree Specialization	Duration
Ethiopia	26 Academic Institutions (See spreadsheet for details)	Neonatal Nursing	2 years 6 months
Malawi	University of Malawi, Kamuzu University of Health Sciences (KUHeS)	Neonatal Nursing	Final 2 years of 4 year degree program
Sierra Leone	University of Sierra Leone College of Medicine and Health Sciences	Pediatrics and Neonatal Nursing	Final 2 years of 4 year degree program

Master of Science in Nursing (MSc)			
Country	Institution	Degree Specialization	Duration
Ethiopia	Addis Ababa University, College of Health Science, School of Nursing and Midwifery	Neonatal Nursing	
Rwanda	University of Rwanda - College of Medicine and Health Sciences	Neonatal Nursing	
Zimbabwe	University of Zimbabwe	Nursing Practice with Fetal and Neonatal option	Part- and full-time options

Neonatal Nursing Degree Programs in Development			
Country	Institution	Degree Specialization	Duration
Nigeria	Unconfirmed	Masters in Neonatal Nursing	TBD
South Africa	University of North Western	Masters in Neonatal Nursing	2 years fulltime
Tanzania	Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences	MSc Neonatology Nursing	2 years fulltime

Key Takeaways

Creating long-term and sustainable improvement in Neonatal morbidity and mortality, and subsequently child health, can be achieved with sustainable and long-term education programs in Neonatal Nursing. Collaborations between different stakeholders such as universities, ministries of health, global health organizations, professional organizations and regulating bodies is vital for sustainable education programs. This collaboration is necessary to build adaptable curriculum and scope of practice including faculty preparation and clinical preceptorship that meet global standards. In addition, academic institutions with accreditation and regulations can provide graduates with postgraduate job opportunities, salary advancements, and leadership roles (WHO, 2020; Bruce et al., 2018). The ultimate goal of expanding standardized and accredited neonatal nursing education, with local adaptability, is to strengthen neonatal nursing capacity to care for small and sick newborns with quality health care.

Sources:

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