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Summary Report

Workshop on Sexuality, Health and Media March 2009



James P Grant School of Public Health
Dhaka, Bangladesh

**James P. Grant School of Public Health
BRAC University**

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Summary Report

Workshop on Sexuality, Health and Media, March 2009

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Introduction

The workshop on Sexuality, Health and Media was held at BRAC Center Inn on March 13 and 14, 2009 in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The workshop was organized by The Center for Gender, Sexuality and HIV/AIDS at the James P Grant School of Public Health (JPGSPH), BRAC University, with financial support from International Women's Health Coalition, IWHC, New York and partial funding support provided by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) for the Realising Rights Research Programme Consortium (RPC).

Participants were primarily correspondents from various newspapers and media houses many of whom were Salma Sobhan Fellows¹ or members of the Health and Environmental Journalists' Network of Bangladesh (HEJNB)². A number of participants came from the leading advertising agencies in the country.



The speakers at the opening ceremony

Feminist filmmaker and Shohini Ghosh, Sajjad Zaheer Professor at the A J K Mass Communication Research Centre, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, India was the workshop trainer. Barrister Sara Hossain also facilitated one session on legal issues and rights at the workshop.

The aim of the workshop was to sensitize and promote critical thinking amongst media

professionals and advertising agency personnel working on issues of sexual rights and health, especially to critically reflect on media representations and or their lack of certain themes and communities. The specific topics discussed were concepts of gender and sexuality, the relationship between sexuality and the law, sexuality and popular culture, gender identities and sexual orientation, "sexual wrongs versus sexual rights," pleasure, desire and fantasy, and sexual rights campaigns. Several relevant films were screened at the workshop including "Teen Kanya" by Satyajit Ray and "Tales of the Night Fairies", a film on sex workers' rights movement in Kolkata, directed by Shohini Ghosh.

¹ Salma Sobhan Fellowship for Women in Journalism was jointly initiated in 2004 by Protichi Trust Bangladesh, an organisation set up by Nobel Laureate Professor Amartya Sen and BRAC, to create and train district-based women journalists in Bangladesh who were sensitized to development issues

² HEJNB is a local based voluntary network of journalists specializing in reporting about health and environment

Ms. Mahrukh Mohiuddin, Lecturer/Senior Research Associate of JPGSPH, coordinator of organizing the workshop began the training by inviting some speakers to open the three day long media training. Professor Dr. Anwar Islam, Director of JPGSPH delivered the welcome speech. Dr. Sabina Faiz Rashid, Associate Professor and Coordinator, Centre for Gender, Sexuality and HIV/AIDS and Dr. Hilary Standing, Director of Realising Rights RPC also spoke on the occasion. Professor Shohini Ghosh, introduced herself and her plans for the three day long media training. The brief opening introduction was followed by personal introductions of the participants and a pre-workshop evaluation to record their expectation and measure existing knowledge regarding workshop topic

This report is organized in chronological order of topics discussed during the workshop. The questions and comments raised during the sessions and any clarifications made at the workshop are listed at the end of the relevant sections.

Day 1

Media and Free Association of Gender and Sex

Professor Ghosh began the session by describing the normal perception of the media. The large visibility of the media leads people to believe that it highly influences culture. However, the media does not function independently; rather it is embedded within society. Therefore media interacts and communicates with the public.

Professor Ghosh stated that journalists, film-makers, and media personnel should be careful about portraying and perpetuating stereotypes, assumptions, and pre-conceived notions that come across in representing a given demographic community. For example, if Islamic fundamentalists are portrayed as bearded men in white *tupis* (skullcaps) then hostility may grow towards people who are not fundamentalists but wear the same look to follow religion.

Besides providing visibility, the media plays several other roles. Communication studies state that the most effective form of communication is interpersonal communication. In order to create an impact, media should not be chosen as only form of communication.

Media includes movies, television, radio, newspapers and so on, each with its own characteristics and unique history of development. So, every medium has its own way of portraying and influencing targeted audiences. For instance, cinema may portray the metaphorical representation of conflicts and problems that arise in real life. The popularity of particular characters or particular plots in cinema depends on the current events in a society and whether they are relevant to the current status of the viewers. However, cinema portraying revolutionary ideas and concepts may or may not be accepted by the audience. Television, at present, airs programs that have high TRP (television rating points) and

hence attract advertisements. A problem arises when low TRP rated socially relevant programs close down because they fail to bring advertisements to the television channels.

Finally, Professor Ghosh concluded by warning journalists, filmmakers and media personnel that they should be mindful of how they communicate social and cultural issues since they influence social changes.

Next, the participants were asked to share their experiences related to gender, sexuality and media, and any expectation that they had about the workshop. Professor Ghosh also commented on the participants' experience.

Questions/comments posed during the session are summarized below:

- The participants expressed their interest to learn more about gender and sexuality. Field-level journalists wanted to gain more knowledge of how to portray



Professor Shohini Ghosh speaking to the participants

sexuality issues effectively. Some of the participants proposed a long course/workshop since a two-day workshop was too short to discuss such a wide range of issues. It was also suggested that such workshops should be held to bring awareness among the policy-makers of the media. It should be ensured that there is equal number of male participants compared to females.

- The perspectives of the policy-makers need to be changed so that this allows for action at the implementation level. Journalists cannot cover or print articles on gender or sexuality issues if they do not get any support from their editors or senior colleagues.

Professor Ghosh suggested that the changes can be made even from the root-level. It is not necessary that all changes need to come from institutional top; people can try to bring about changes at other levels. Change has always emerged from the bottom in the areas such as development, globalization etc.

- It was unanimously agreed that sexuality is not yet established as an important issue. Participants showed their concern about the fact that only a few reporters are aware about the issue and even though some reporters write on such topic, editors tend to give them low priority with the excuse of limited readership of such articles.

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- Many participants complained that only a few of their articles related to sexuality are sent to print by the editors. Also, some participants mentioned gender-bias in sending reporters to cover events. For instance, when there is any event on women's issues, there is a tendency that the editor will send a woman journalist to cover the event. And in most cases the reports or articles are published in *Naree Pata* (Women's Pages).

Professor Ghosh refuted this by saying that issues around sexuality do not necessarily have limited readership because people in general are curious about those issues. However, since it is forbidden, people, instead of openly discussing it, resort to the internet for information.

- Political instability was identified as a reason for less focus on sexuality than other issues. Newspapers tend to give more preference to political news rather than on social news.

Professor Ghosh commented that instability of politics in this sub-continent is not likely to disappear very soon. So, gender, sexuality and health issues need to be addressed along with political news.

- 'Sexuality' is a term which is assumed to refer always to women. Many complained that in our country whenever we talk about sexuality and health, the issue of 'AIDS' takes center stage. However, other important factors are ignored. A journalist, who has recently worked with indigenous women narrated that they hardly seek any health care/support for maternity or other diseases such as STIs. People usually think that it is only women who need to take measures for STIs, and even newspapers perpetuate those misconceptions. But the fact that men also need to seek medical care for STIs, is not addressed in the media properly. Another journalist shared an anecdote about how her male colleagues who attended a seminar were later teased by press club officers for being in an event that celebrated "Women's Day".
- Urban news takes precedence over suburbia journalism. Although suburbia reporters cover important issues that affect rural and suburban lives, city-centric editors do not print their articles. In addition, proper remunerations is not offered. As a result, rural and suburban people suffer from ignorance or misconceptions about sexuality and health.
Professor Ghosh concurred "this is a problem everywhere around the world, where cities are given more preference".
- Representations of women in media was thoroughly discussed and criticized. Example was drawn from the advertisement jingle of a soft drink, with the lyric "*RC er moja koto tomar moton jakhon jemon chai*" (RC is so much fun like you; whenever I wish I can get it the way I want). This is an example where

women are portrayed as commodities. Participants voiced their concerns that ad agencies need to decrease propagating negative stereotypes. Movies, for instance, also give little focus on the issues of health and sexuality even if they are in the script vaguely. In typical Bangladeshi cinema, sex is normally shown in its lewd form as an mode of exploitation.

In many cases, when a woman is raped the heading of the report says, "*Shundori romoni dhorshito*" (beautiful woman raped) as if the woman being beautiful seems to be the main reason for rape.

Professor Ghosh elaborated on this by talking about a condition she labeled the "Tight Sweater Issue" where a woman is blamed for creating a situation in which she provokes or incites men into harassment so that the men are never blamed. Example was provided to explain the syndrome. A woman residing in a hostel was harassed when she was out late one night. Hostel authorities questioned the woman's judgment in staying out late, holding her responsible for incident. In response to the incident, the hostel authority set an 8 pm curfew on all female residents. Thus, to protect women from harassment, the hostel decided to lock them up indoors.

- Bangladeshi media is not isolated from world media. In Hollywood as well as Bollywood, women are portrayed as commodities. Bangladesh will be undoubtedly affected by those generalizations.
- Despite criticism, some positive changes were mentioned as well. Many sexist Bengali words have been modified while used in print media before. For example, the word "*romoni*" (attractive lady) is not longer used. Although the legal term for the female reserved seat in the parliament is "*Mohila Ashon*" (women's seat), the print media have come up with "*Nari shongshod shodoshsho*" (female Member of Parliament), which is a more neutral than the other. [The term "*mohila*" refers to a woman, who lives inside the house (*mohol*).] Nowadays, the photograph of the raped female victim is no longer published in the newspapers; instead the photograph of the rapist is published to generate awareness about the criminal.

According to some, positive changes include phenomena like both females and male voices being used for advertisements currently. Compared to the past, more issues around sexuality are being addressed in the media (although it is not enough). Many documentaries, movies, articles and literature are being produced on gender issues.

Professor Ghosh acknowledged that change will gradually come since discrimination of sexes is inherently rooted in our cultures.

Introduction to Sex and Gender

The participants were asked to identify and differentiate between sex and gender. They identified gender as the difference between male and female. Participants generally identified gender as how the society, culture and norms define how differently a male or female should perform where sex is the natural difference between male and female.

Professor Ghosh clarified the difference between the terms - gender and sex. Sex can be defined as the anatomical body of an individual. On the other hand, gender is a social or cultural construct which individuals learn through experience. When a child is born, s/he



Participants at the workshop

learns how her mother and father behave differently, how clothing determines gender and other differentiations. Everybody grows up by learning and recognizing certain behaviors and characteristics linked to certain sex, which can be explained as gender. For example, according to gender, women are weak, motherly and introvert where as men are strong, rough and extrovert.

However, gender can be radical if one can separate it from the body. A person born with a female body may not behave like a female. In a television interview, a speaker once stated that females are naturally nurturing, therefore nursing is an ideal profession for them. But that statement excludes the fact that men can be nurturing too. The society has given gender roles to different professions; nurse, gynecologists, etc. are assigned to females

whereas pilots and doctors are assigned to males. But there are both female pilots and male nurses. Generally, women are seen as peaceful while men are considered violent. But Gandhi, the man famous for promoting non-violence was a male. Thus, society and culture have conditioned how we perceive masculinity and femininity.

It is said that gender roles of male and female are naturalized. Although we often use the terms, “natural” and “normal” interchangeably, there is a distinct difference. What is normal may not be natural. If everything that society follows is promoted as “natural”, people would not have worn clothes, cooked food or maintained many norms of the society. Nature is full of “incest and taboos” which have been created and forbidden by society. All creatures that follow the natural law perform a lot of activities that humans would not perform bound by societal rules. However, when the term, “natural” is used, the term “normal” is drawn on and when people think something is not normal, they label it as immoral. But it is not often asked on what moral grounds a particular thing is rejected. Is it because it is harming someone? If it is not harming anyone, then why is it rejected? Does the rejection come because that particular thing is not normal? Who defines what is normal? When these questions are asked, society feels that the questions are harmful. Questions about sexuality are contradictory because they challenge society’s belief system. The questions challenge the very pillars that have given birth to society’s norms.

Screening of “Teen Kanya” by Satyajit Ray

A brief introduction was made about the movie “Teen Kanya” before screening. “Teen Kanya” was produced in 1961, portraying three female protagonists from the stories, “Monihara”, “Postmaster” and “Shamapti” written by the Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore. “Shamapti” was shown to the participants.

Synopsis:

A young man studying in the town comes back to the village. His mother wants him to get married to a traditional girl from the village. However, the man falls in love with a young girl who is known for her spontaneity. Eventually the young man marries the young girl who was unwilling to marry and the story narrates the gradual transformation of the rebel girl.

Discussion

After screening, there was a discussion about the characters and story of the movie. Participants provided their own interpretations of the film. Many thought the male protagonist exercised tolerance by allowing the female character time to evolve; while others thought the male character had robbed the girl of her independence, the very quality which initially attracted him. Some labeled the man as open-minded because he tolerated the girl’s unruly behavior whereas question was raised how can an open-minded person

marry a girl without her consent. While some saw the transformation of the rebellious girl to a gentle lady as positive, others viewed the change as typical of society pressuring girls to conform to their rules.

The discussion clearly showed that the same movie can have different impact on different people who form different opinions. Professor Ghosh pointed out these differences in opinion and explained why a film-maker should be careful about what s/he is creating because the impact of the film will be varied. Viewers of the film varied in opinion because people who believed firmly in marriage felt that since the girl is married, she is bound to fall in love with her husband, while others felt that no reason was given as to why the girl should fall for the man. The film failed to explain many aspects but in the end showed what the society considers as the ideal happy ending.

Professor Ghosh pointed that there are many untold stories behind the over-arching story. The viewers narrate the untold stories in their own convenient ways. That is why some felt that the girl needed to fall in love with her husband since she was already married. As a movie, this story cannot be termed as very progressive. It is shown that in the end, even a forced marriage can have a happy ending. Many label it as the Bangla version of "Taming of the Shrew". However, the film has its own cinematic space and it indeed shows that a man can fall in love with a rebellious girl who does not embody typical traditional qualities. It gives space for a girl to be portrayed in different role than what is normally accepted. Even with all contradictions, the film portrays revolution in its own way.

The following concepts were illustrated as important factors for a film:

- Representation
- Spectatorship
- Impact on Media

It is significant to understand what is shown in a film and how it is represented. The director of the film creates a whole world with his own ways of portraying certain things. Previously, the "puppet theory" from France was popular which preached that it is necessary to understand what the director wants to say. As a result, directors like Satyajit Ray were interviewed intensively to comprehend the film.

Cultural studies state that once a film is made the director dies, thereby only leaving behind the text and the viewer. The directors at different times give different explanations about their films and it is difficult to judge which should be taken into consideration. Also, the director does not realize what he has created or what he likes or dislikes.

The discrepancy between likes and dislikes arise because of the unconscious process that functions when a film is made or viewed. Spectatorship is the reason behind it. How a person watches a movie and how things are comprehended depends on factors that are

beyond what is portrayed in the film. A viewer comes back with a 'portfolio of interpretation', that is connected to 'impact on media'. A viewer may not always comprehend what the author wants to say.

Very often, movies or books are banned because of a certain portion that is considered unacceptable. The author cannot really control how a text is interpreted by the viewer. Different audience will have different interpretations of the same text. When a viewer watches something, he begins to negotiate in his mind about what he takes in and what he rejects. This negotiation is different for different people and hence spectatorship is unique. It is necessary to understand that no text can mean a specific thing and therefore, a film does not perfectly encapsulate the goal of the author. Professor Ghosh acknowledged that through what is written or created, the author may not provide the right answers for the viewers but what they can pursue to do is to ask the right questions.

Sexuality and Law

Barrister Sara Hossain, who practices at the Supreme Court in Dhaka and is also a human rights activist, conducted the session on how law is related to sexuality. She started by giving a brief overview of how the legal barriers like constitutional silences and criminalization of certain acts need to be confronted and how the challenges need to be faced through advocacy policy.



Barrister Sara Hossain speaking in the workshop

Human Rights is protected by the Constitution of Bangladesh, International Human Rights Law and National Laws, which includes Code of Criminal Procedure and Family Laws. The constitution clearly establishes many human rights that have been internationally acknowledged. However, most of the laws in Bangladesh (including those regarding sexual rights) have been in practice since 100 years and have not been reformed.

Barrister Hossain listed the fundamental rights in Bangladesh as: equal protection of law, non-discrimination, life, personal liberty for all and equality before law, equality of opportunity, movement/expression, association, and assembly/profession for the citizens. The constitution or laws of Bangladesh does not clearly state anything on sexual rights issues. However, this does not mean that these things can be addressed freely-on the contrary, these issues are quite restrictive.

Barrister Hossain recounted some important cases that are significant for sexuality issues. The cases are briefly described below:

- In Nurjahan's case, which was brought before the High Court in the late 1990s, a *fatwa* (a religious opinion or verdict) at a shalish declared Nurjahan should be stoned for living "illegally" with her husband (a third person had apparently overheard her husband uttering the word "Talak" three times in a row, a customary way of giving verbal divorce). Unable to bear the humiliation after the verdict was carried out in public, Nurjahan committed suicide.

The court punished the fatwa-givers (of the Nurjahan case). Hence, a milestone was created in establishing sexual rights. However, many similar incidents continued to take place that were widely covered in the media. In this context, two

persons claiming to be religious scholars (muftis) filed an appeal claiming that a judgment which sought to prevent them from issuing fatwas was a violation of their right to freedom of religion and to expressions this case remains pending in courts.

- In the 1990s, there was a court case on the sex-workers in Tan Bazaar. The sex workers were evicted from their houses on the ground that they were a bad influence on society. Lawyers on behalf of the sex workers argued that citizens cannot be evicted overnight without providing them with alternate means of shelter or of livelihood. The High Court created a milestone by giving the verdict that those who earn their living by sex-work cannot be uprooted from their profession, not even by providing them an alternate profession unless they are willing to switch to a new profession.

- In a recent case of forced marriage, a British-Bangladeshi doctor, Humaira Abedin was kidnapped and locked in a sanitarium in Bangladesh by her parents in order



Participants of the workshop

to coerce her into marriage. When her friends back in England could not contact her, they filed a case in an English court. Ain o Shalish Kendra, a legal aid and human rights organization in Bangladesh also petitioned the courts.

In its ruling, the court

clearly stated that men and women have the right to decide about who they would marry and whether they marry.

- In a high profile sexual harassment case at Jahangirnagar University, a male was accused of sexually harassing his female students. In a progressive court judgment, the following factors were considered. Firstly, the neutrality of the university in dealing with this matter was questioned; secondly, unwanted sexual attention and contact was deemed as a crime; and thirdly, female students' accusations were given more weight because culturally women think twice before making such accusations.
- In many cases, laws meant to protect citizens from abuse can be used against them. For example, the law declaring that no one can be forcefully kidnapped and

coerced into marriage can be distorted to work against females. In cases where individuals of different faiths choose to wed against their parents' wills, the law can be used to victimize the female partners. The female's parents can file a case claiming that their daughter was kidnapped and raped by her male partner. While the girl is taken into custody, the parents plot to prove that their daughter is mentally incapable of making her own decisions. In cases where the female partner refuses to return home to her parents, she is kept in miserable conditions in safe-homes. In a society where the legal system is so important; the law provides little assistance to people. A female's identity beyond marriage is highly undervalued.

In the Nurjahan, Tan Bazaar and Dr. Humaira case, some sort of public authority was involved and the where and how the victim was harmed were clear. However certain laws criminalize acts that do not justify how it inflicts harm.

Law Section 377 of the Penal Code states "Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal shall be punished with imprisonment...which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine," gets into private matter. This law essentially negates free will. This law can punish voluntary, private, and consensual sexual behavior without the need to prove inflict harm has occurred.

Section 377 not only addresses a sexual act it also brands unnatural the desires and lives of those in same sex relationships. Although s377 is used in various ways to prosecute cases of child sexual abuse, it is also used to harass MSMs (males who have sex with males) through threat of prosecution, arrest, detention, extortion (by police, mastans, and family members). The stigma against homosexuality is great, and yet we do not see cases for prosecution under s377 although we see routine harassment by using it as a Damocles sword - for example there is only one reported case before the high court since independence and of course no statistics are available for pending or decided cases in lower courts.

The law of Bangladesh also criminalizes many voluntary sexual acts such as male adultery and polygamy (without the consent of the first wife). This law does not recognize female adultery because at the time of enactment only males were considered to be full legal subjects. Also, law does not criminalize forced sexual acts like marital rape (if the wife is above 16).

Barrister Hossain concluded by stating that social comprehension of the legal acts are needed in order to understand what is lawful and unlawful. Thus, media can play a big role to raise awareness among the common people even before a case is filed in the court or a

law is made in the parliament. The first day concluded with the request to remember the essence of the message of the slogan of Kolkata Prime which proclaims “we are all different, we are all equal”.

Summary of Day 1

The sessions of Day 1 were summarized under the following themes:

- Consent
- We are different, we are equal
- Sexual wrong vs. sexual rights

Day 1 started with a brief talk about how media works and how it affects people and is affected by them. As the discussions progressed the participants were asked to define and differentiate gender and sex. The interactive sessions brought out different problems that the society in general and the media professionals in particular face regarding sexuality. Journalists acknowledged how sexuality as an issue is often neglected and how reproductive health is often linked with only women; in fact both men and women need information and knowledge on reproductive health. It was also highlighted how women are often portrayed as “objects” of pleasure in the media. Through the interactive sessions, various examples and anecdotes of everyday life were revealed.

Later on, the movie “Teen Kanya” by Satyajit Ray was screened, which was followed by discussions on stereotypical gender roles and differences as exemplified by the film. The sessions also highlighted the importance of mutual consent in any form of human interactions to prevent violation of rights.

The first day ended with a session by Barrister Sara Hossain who discussed legal issues and ethics regarding sexuality and rights. The discussed topics included various court cases that helped to establish sexuality rights in Bangladesh, the controversial Section 377 and sexual rights and sexual wrongs defined by law. With the appeal to remember the slogan: “we are all different, we are all equal”, the day was closed.

Day 2

Day 2 consisted of an interactive discussion with the screening of many clips.

Topics of discussion on Day 2:

The topics broadly covered on Day 2 are as follows:

- Sexuality and popular culture
- Sexual wrongs vs. sexual rights
- Gender identities & sexual orientation
- Pleasure, desire and fantasy (shifting perceptions of women's bodies)
- Empowerment vs. protection
- Sexual rights campaign

Professor Ghosh acknowledged that although popular culture is often blamed for portrayal of sexuality in its typical form, 'for popular culture to become popular, it has to be everything to everyone.' The nature of popular culture is that it consists of elements that an individual believes and disbelieves. Popular culture is said to be 'as progressive or as regressive' as society deems.

In sub-continental society, there is not much consensus about sexuality. In this context, the Naz Foundation, an organization working on HIV/AIDS and sexual health of MSM and transgender communities presented a petition in the Delhi High Court challenging Section 377 that addressed same sex activities as punishable acts. The foundation stated that unless homosexuality was decriminalized, they could not provide help to those people.

Professor Ghosh illustrated the difference between the terms gender identity and sexual orientation. Gender identity reveals the confusion of where to place transgender as they do not fall into either of the male and female categories. Although, heterosexuality had traditionally been considered as normal, now many other gender identities are addressed. There are homosexuals, as in lesbians or gays; bisexuals; and different types of transgender who are addressed by the term LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender). However, it must be acknowledged that there are differences among them. Sexual orientation on the other hand addresses who an individual is attracted to, as in whether a male is attracted to a female

Professor Ghosh gave examples of how sexual orientation and gender identity were addressed in Indian movies amidst the social taboo regarding the matter. Participants were shown the clip from a film called "Shabnam Mosei" based on the true story of an Indian MP who despite being transsexual (Hijra) fought the political system.

After the screening, the context of the clip was discussed. The clip showed one of those rare occasions such as marriages or baby showers, when Hijras mingled with so-called normal heterosexual families. The existence of Hijras is something that is ignored in the day-to-day life of mainstream society. Movies like *Tamanna*, *Shabnam Mosi*, *Bombay*, and *Welcome to Sachinpur* introduce transsexuals as mainstream characters and highlight their significant presence in society.

It was explained how 'coming out' (revealing publicly one's sexual orientation) of homosexuality gradually took place by first portraying it as a mistaken identity of characters. Then the trailer of the film '*Dostana*' was shown which indicates that love stories are not necessary only heterosexual but can also involve homosexual couples as well.

Professor Ghosh then pointed out how difficult it can be to understand how a male or a female body is shown in a film that may appeal to people with different sexual orientations. Then a clip from the film '*Sawariyan*' was shown where the hero dancing and singing in his towel became very popular amongst the gay community. In the discussion that followed, it was identified that the address of the portrayal in the film was ambiguous and hence may appeal to a girl or a guy.



Participants with the trainer Professor Shohini Ghosh

The participants were shown a documentary on Chapal Bhadur, a man who does female impersonations in plays. The clip showed him talking about his acting career and the way he transforms from a male to a female. This was followed by clip from the movie '*Between the line*', which portrayed an important Indian transsexual activist called Laxmi.

After these, a discussion was opened on what the participants thought regarding homosexuals and transsexuals and any questions they had regarding the issue.

Questions/Comments addressed during the discussion.

- Participants asked about the difference between gays and MSMs. Professor Ghosh clarified that MSM is a term used by NGOs to provide support to this particular class, but this is also their lifestyle.

- A participant commented that the presence of transsexuals and homosexuals was rare in the country which was refuted by another participant who pointed that the number of registered MSMs in just Dhaka city is 80,000.
- There were discussions about how transsexuals have difficulty in their gender identifications since any papers and identity cards just identify the two genders: male and female.

Professor Ghosh informed that in the state of Tamil Nadu, there is a third option as "T" (Transsexuals) to identify them.

- Participants shared their experience related to homosexuals and transsexuals.
- A participant narrated her experience of covering the story of the transsexual community during the election and how she learnt their lifestyle is similar to hers.
- One participant shared his experience about a conference where a Pakistani participant refused to share a room with a gay participant.
- Another participant shared the story of a Hijra who believes that he became a Hijra because his family dressed him like a girl when he was a young child.
- Another participant shared her experience of interviewing Joya, the secretary of an organization of transsexuals in the city. She elaborated how she got to know about lifestyles of the Hijra community and how they're working for their rights.



Certificates were given to the participants at the end of the workshop

- Concerns were raised about why families do not create space for transsexuals; then they would not have to move out and live a secluded life.
- There were also concerns about the general perception towards homosexuals and transsexuals. Often these people, who have choice and preference like any other individuals, are taken for granted as if they are always willing to offer themselves to anybody who desires them.

Then a clip from the documentary *Summer in My Veins* was shown. The documentary showed how an Indian Harvard graduate Nishith Saran came out about his homosexuality to his mother. The home-video taped clip showed the reaction of his mother when she learned that her son is gay. The clip intended to show how gays just like any other individuals face the fear of how their loved ones will react to their sexual orientation.

After the screening, a discussion ensued. Questions were raised about the fact why we distinguish homosexuals and heterosexuals as different; why do we categorize as “we” and “them”? Why aren’t “they” a part of us? Why are we setting us as the standard of normality?

Screening of *Tales of the Night Fairies* and following discussions

The documentary *Tales of the Night Fairies* film is directed by Professor Shohini Ghosh. The film portrays the struggle of the sex-workers of Kolkata. The film has been critically acclaimed.

After the screening, the speaker talked about her own perspectives related to the film. She mentioned why she used different music, how she shot different sequences and how she felt about the different characters. Several elements that came out of the discussion are as follows:

- One school of thought believes that sex-work is all about violence and nobody comes to this profession of their own will. Another school claims that if any one chooses to the profession they should be allowed to do so.
- Sex-workers have their own identity as a profession and they have their own right to choose as in any other profession.
- All classes of people, starting from high to low (economic) class, visit sex-workers which may explain why the sex-workers are so well-spoken.
- The existence of sex-workers is a reality in society. So they should be acknowledged so that they can establish their proper rights. If sex work is established as an industry like tourism then sex workers can enjoy better security.
- Society stigmatizes sex-work on grounds of morality. However, we all know that sex is not only for procreation, but also for pleasure. Then why does society taboo sex-work? We should look at consent as a principle of having sex
- In Bangladesh, sex-workers are at a disadvantageous position regarding their rights since most of them are unaware of their rights.

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- The children of sex-workers in Kolkata are sent to school with their mothers' identity; however in Bangladesh, the children of sex-workers are sent to schools exclusively set up by NGOs and are identified by imaginary fathers' names.
 - Individuals at all levels are satisfying their interest regarding sex in different ways. If the silence regarding the issue is stopped, then there can be more progressive changes in society.
 - The sex-workers should not be called "bad" for their profession. The individuals should be given all options to earn their living. If someone chooses to be a sex-worker she should not be stigmatized based on choice.
 - Perceptions about sexuality cannot be changed by rules or laws. We need to change our perspective and unite our personal and professional actions to bring about change in the society.

Summary of Day 2

The second day broadly covered the following issues:

- sexuality and popular culture
- gender identities and sexual orientation
- pleasure, desire and fantasy (shifting perceptions of women's bodies)
- empowerment versus protection
- sexual rights campaign

Through portrayal of many movie clips and participatory dialogues, numerous questions regarding sexuality, homosexuals and transgender were addressed. Different clips that gave media visibility of these forgotten groups were shown and their impacts were discussed. The trainer explained the process of how the Indian and international media have provided space to accommodate a diversity of sexuality regardless of cultural taboos

Further questions and answers concentrated on the fact that homosexuals are discriminated as different and are not considered as part of the very society which they belong. Why are we setting "us" (the heterosexuals) as the standard of normality? The dialogues identified how the society disregards even the existence of these communities, although continued deprivation of their basic human rights remain prevalent.

Later, the highly acclaimed and award-winning documentary, "Tales of the Night Fairies", directed by the session speaker Professor Shohini Ghosh, was screened. The film portrayed the struggle and the achievement of sexual rights campaign of the sex-workers of Kolkata. Concerns regarding how rights were violated in the name of protection and empowerment were taken into account. The dialogue included how the society, nation and state disregard the rights of the sex-workers, even though their existence remains undeniable. Professor Ghosh also shared her insights and perspectives regarding the background and making of the film.

The interactive discussions throughout the day concentrated on building awareness of those who are denied their rights. Areas covered media works and campaigns that has given visibility to the marginalized groups like homosexuals and sex-workers who are stigmatized in the society.

Conclusion

At the end of the workshop, a dinner reception was hosted where participants were given certificates. Eminent media personalities, lawyers, development and rights activists including Hameeda Hossain, Khushi Kabir, Shireen Huq, Sara Hossain, Faustina Perriera, Tareq Masud, Catherine Masud, Luva Nahid Chowdhury, Simeen Mahmud, Khurshid Irfan and Syed M. Hashemi were present at the reception.



Dignitaries at the dinner reception

Although many questions regarding sexuality often lurk in the mind, there are few places where one can raise these questions freely and obtain basic answers. Despite sexuality being the most natural aspect of every individual, it is still considered a sensitive issue that is generally shadowed during discussions. Since media plays an important role in informing and educating mass public, it is imperative that those working in the media are conscious about the issues of sexual rights and health so that they can promote further social awareness amongst women and men alike

The workshop resulted in more 'sexuality-awareness' among participants who requested that more similar workshops can prove to be helpful for better informed and conscious media professionals. Through the sessions, the message was repeated that the audience should ask questions to better understand the things they see and read. The purpose was to engage and motivate the journalists and media personnel to carefully think about communicating sexuality and gender issues which are indispensable issues where social change needs to occur.

Appendix I

Summary of some comments of the participants from the pre and post workshop evaluation:

Pre-evaluation:

1. In your opinion, is the media addressing gender issues satisfactorily? Reason behind your opinion	Yes 3	No 22	Not sure 9
Some comments:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Professionals who work in the editorial board and most journalists of the media are not adequately aware or educated regarding these issues.● Even though media is not fully successful, it is trying. Currently, through news, advertisement, drama etc. media is portraying gender issues. The newspapers are doing this through their reports.● Gender issues do not get much importance in the newspapers of our country. Readers have more interest in politics, crime and sports, rather than gender and health. If readers are ever interested in these extra issues, then these might be thought about.● Those who work in the area of health are not addressing the issue to the relevant media.● In our country, sexuality is still not a free issue. The environment to talk about this issue has not been created yet. Besides that, media is still city-focused. The perceptions, lifestyle of the field-level are ignored by the media.● People who are in the decision-making role in media still have patriarchal mentality. Females are mostly working are in the policy implementation level but in the policy making level, they have little role. Also, there are many commercial reasons.			
2. How important is media in bringing about social change in respect to gender issues?			
Some comments:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Media has a big role to play for social change, but often the concerns and needs of the media people are not well addressed. For example, the difference of sex and sexuality is not very clear to media people. If a journalist is not well aware about an issue, how will s/he make others aware? Media perhaps have been and will be the biggest contributor to bring about social changes to improve women's life. NGOs have also played crucial role.			

- The role of media regarding this is very important. This is because now media has reached every house at present. Newspapers can inform people in details, while similarly television can reach out to people who cannot read.
- Media has worked as the main weapon behind the fact that today Bangladesh is almost freed from diseases like Diarrhea, Polio etc. So, if media wants, it can play a strong role in making any changes.
- If media represents the gender issues positively, then general people will be comfortable to take the issue positively. As a result, general people in the society will have a chance to be gender sensitive.
- Gender issue is not the no. 1 issue in our society. It is not even no.2, 3 or 4. The media has not yet been able to solve the other issues.
- To a large extent. If media is expanded, if sufficient work is done in the media, the revolutionary change can be brought regarding gender issues.

3. Why were you interested to attend the workshop?

Some comments:

- To be aware of the recent perspectives regarding gender and sexuality
- Because I am working in this field and want to contribute more for society
- This is well-discussed, but new phenomena in Bangladesh. So, I intended to do this.
- Since many media professionals would be working here, we can share our experiences. If we take training about public health, I can increase the horizon of my knowledge and rectify my wrong concepts.
- Since I am working in the media, the subject of the workshop seemed relevant to me. Knowledge gained here will help me to write reports.
- Because I will get to know in details about sexuality, health and media.

4. Have you attended any other workshops/training of this kind before?	Yes 13	No 16	Not sure 4
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5. If yes, when and what it is about?

- Sex, health and HIV
- Gender sensitive reporting, June 2008
- Sexual health, organized by BRAC University
- Reproductive health, BRAC University
- Workshop on gender, media and representation
- Gender issues and HIV/AIDS
- Maternal health.
- Female representation in film
- Gender, sexuality and HIV/AIDS-organized by HASAB in 2008
- Gender issues, organized by Manusher Jonno Foundation, conducted by Faryua Khan.

Post-evaluation:

1. Mention one concept or idea shared at the workshop that you think will stay with you when you go back to your workplace? Something that really struck you as new?

- Rights of a sex worker that was portrayed in the documentary of Shohini Ghosh. I am not ashamed to admit that I have not thought about it like this before.
- Limitations of satellite channels, popular films to address sexuality, sexual health in deeper form and the debate of sex sell as a 'profession'.
- Strong insight, existence of a large MSM group in Bangladesh, homosexuals, Hijra, sex-workers etc. We should aim to create an enabling environment for everybody.
- Consent.
- I am touched about those who want to identify themselves as the "Third gender". This has opened a new field for my thoughts. Their life/lack of rights has made me thoughtful.
- The documentary about sex-workers has driven me to think a lot about the human rights of people in the society. These will touch me more in the future and help me think differently.

2. Any issue/subject that you want to know more about?

- Case studies about the 'sexual rights' and other issues
- Sexual health; Laws about sex; Gender and sexuality in details
- Issues around consent, particularly is it okay if a father and daughter or mother and son have sexual relations consensually (off-spring is of age 8 able to give consent?) I am really confused about this.
- About the lifestyle of sex-workers in Bangladesh and about different activities and government rules about them.
- Hijras, gays and homosexuals
- About the sexual rights of all people in the society, not only about sexual rights of deprived people in the society.

3. What were some of the issues covered in the workshop that you didn't like, or you feel that it could have been done differently.

- I liked everything, but if the time-length of the workshop was longer, then we could have known in more details.
- The workshop covered a variety of topics but did not get to the depth of the issues. More in-detailed discussion would have been possible if there were more time.

-
- While discussing about transgender, the main topic was about their sex life. I think we can think of different aspects regarding this.
 - More discussions need to be done regarding legislations.

4. In future, if we plan to do similar workshops, what are some changes that you think we should make?

- I think same tools and more time will do.
- To include the problem of males in gender discussions. The problems that they face while growing up should be discussed.
- To enable people with different experiences from different professions specially sex-workers to share their opinion.
- For this issue, the legislative side needs to be discussed with more time.
- Equal number of participants from all fields, if needed, the participation of issue-related people will give a better result.

Appendix II
List of Participants

Salma Sobhan Fellowship for Women in Journalism

SL	Name	Newspaper	District coming from	Email Address
01	Laila Noor	Prothom-alo	Sylhet	lailanoor711@gmail.com
02	Laili Begum	Prothom-alo	Kurigram	laili_kgm@yahoo.com
03	Henrieta Shuk	prothom alo	Khagrachari	Henry.sukh@gmail.com
04	Mariom Shely	Jai jai din	Chuadanga	Salil67@gmail.com
05	Shameema Nasrin Shoma	RTV	Gazipur	Shameema_n@yahoo.com
06	Sherina Afroj	ETV	Pirojpur	
07	Chingme Pru	ETV	Khagrachori	chingme.mc@gmail.com
08	Anameka Saha		Dhaka	anameka.ore@gmail.com
09	Rawnak Abid		Kushtia	
10	Rumi Akter Poly		Dhaka	rumi_poly@yahoo.com
11	Sabia Siddique		Dhaka	sabia_ah@yahoo.com
12	Shahnaz Biswas Yeasmin	Freelance	Dhaka	Yeasmin19@yahoo.com
13	Smrity Chakraborty	Student of PIB	Jhalokathi	smritychakraborty@yahoo.com
14	Shahnaz Sharmeen	ABC Radio	Dhaka	Sharmeen_73@yahoo.com
15	Anjuman Ara		Natore	anju_200874@yahoo.com
16	Towhida Akhter	Freelance	Norsingdi	Towhida_ak@yahoo.com
17	Tamanna Islam	Freelance	Dhaka	

Members of Health and Environment Journalist Forum (HEJFB)

SL	Name	Newspaper	District coming from	Email
18.	Abul Khair	Ittefaq	Dhaka	
19.	Kazi Hafiz	Amar Desh	Dhaka	hafiz0202@yahoo.com
20.	Salahuddin Bablu	Inqilab	Dhaka	
21.	Abdul Mannan	Jugantor	Dhaka	jugantor@link3.net
22.	Kawser Rahman	Janakantha	Dhaka	
23.	Maruf Mallick	Bdnews24.com	Dhaka	Maruf.mallick@gmail.com
24.	Saiful Hoque	Channel One	Dhaka	saifulmcj_du@yahoo.com
25.	Md. Saiful Islam	BSS	Dhaka	shameembss@yahoo.com
26.	Supriti Dhar	Journalist	Dhaka	Supriti.dhar@yahoo.com
27.	Partha Sharothi Das	Shapahik	Dhaka	Partha_syl@yahoo.com

Other Professionals

SL	Name	Company	District	Email Address
28.	Bipesh Raj Bhowmick	Asiatic	Dhaka	raj@asiaticjw.com raj_bipesh@gmail.com
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34.	Mr. Ariful Islam	Mattra	Dhaka	ariful@mattra.net
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