James P Grant School of Public Health
BRAC University
Monograph Series : 10

Brainstorming Session on "Sexuality and Rights"

Venue: Conference Room, James P Grant School of Public Health

Date: July 14, 2008

Report prepared by

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Organized by:

James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University and

Realising Rights Research Programme Consortium

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Preface

A brainstorming session was held on July 14, 2008 with the aim to gather initial feedback on a proposed research study on Sexuality and Rights in Bangladesh, under the Realising Rights Research Programme Consortium (RPC) and being funded by Realising Rights RPC.

The research is envisioned to inform future training and workshops planned by James P Grant School of Public Health (JPGSPH). The brainstorming brought together a group of key persons and experts interested in or working in the field of reproductive and sexual health, sexuality and rights to provide suggestions and critical feedback before launching the research activities. The session also hoped to gain perspectives from potential beneficiaries of the research so that gaps could be identified and the research design would be enriched further.

The session was organized by the JPGSPH, BRAC University, under the umbrella of the Centre for Gender, Sexuality and HIV/AIDS: A UNAIDS Collaborating Centre. The Centre is coordinated by Dr. Sabina Faiz Rashid, Assistant Professor at JPGSPH.

A total of 22 participants from different professions attended the session. Ms. Mahrukh Mohiuddin, Senior Research Associate and Dr. Farah Mahjabeen Ahmed, Continuing Education Officer from JPGSPH, BRAC University played the roles of coordination and communication respectively. Dr. Sabina Faiz Rashid facilitated the brainstorming session. Dr. Dina Siddiqi, Consultant of the research presented the concept note of the research proposal.

This report was prepared by Ms. Shahanoor Akter Chowdhury, Senior Research Associate, Realising Rights RPC, JPGSPH, BRAC University.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Dr. Sabina Faiz Rashid, Assistant Professor and Coordinator for the Centre for Gender, Sexuality and HIV/AIDS at James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University for her mentorship and Dr. Hilary Standing, Director, Realising Rights RPC for her valuable comments. The session was funded by the Realising Rights RPC. The author expresses her appreciation for the financial support (Grant no. HD43) provided by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) for the Realising Rights RPC. The views expressed are not necessarily those of DFID. Special thanks go to Dr. Dina Siddiqi, Consultant and the participants of the session.

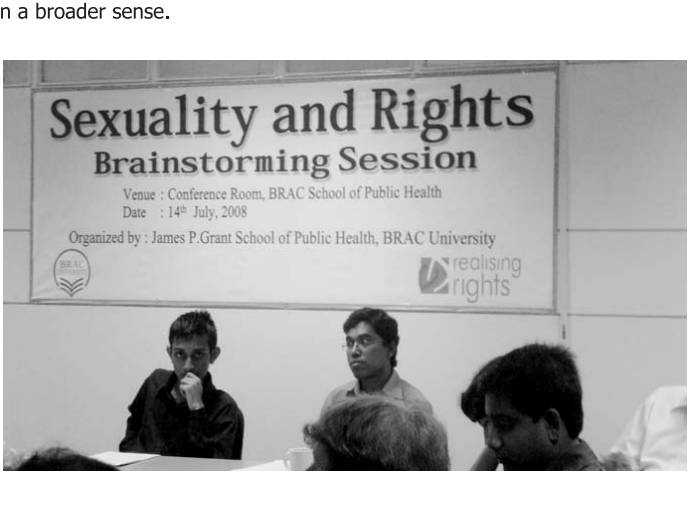
List of acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
BWHC	Bangladesh Women's Health Coalition
CTRDW	Centre for Training and Rehabilitation of Destitute Women
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DGHS	Directorate General of Health Service
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
JPGSPH	James P Grant School of Public Health
MSM	Male having Sex with Male
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
RPC	Research Programme Consortium
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
VAW	Violence Against Women
WHO	World Health Organization

Introduction:

A brainstorming session on "Sexuality and Rights" was organized by James P Grant School of Public Health (JPGSPH), BRAC University, under the umbrella of the Centre for Gender, Sexuality and HIV/AIDS, a UNAIDS Collaborating Centre, and funded by the Realising Rights Research Programme Consortium (RPC) on July 14, 2008. The primary aim of this session was to gather initial feedback on the concept proposal of the research to be held on Sexuality and Rights in Bangladesh and to get additional suggestions before launching the research activities (see ANNEX 1 for Concept Note). The session also aimed at gaining perspectives from potential beneficiaries of the research so that gaps could be identified and based on that the research design would be enriched further.

In Bangladesh and elsewhere, sexual rights are an important emerging issue, although relatively underdeveloped from a conceptual, operational and policy perspective. Some conceptual frameworks for sexual rights have already been proposed (e.g., by WHO). Rather than starting from notions of abstract, universal rights, this sub-programme takes as its point of departure people's lived experience of sexuality and how this contributes to or detracts from sexual well-being in a broader sense.



Sexuality and Rights
Brainstorming Session
Venue : Conference Room, BRAC School of Public Health
Date : 14th July, 2008
Organized by : James P.Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University
realising rights

This perspective is important in two respects. First, the framework assumes that individual sexualities always develop within larger social systems, and that the individual is embedded in the community in which he or she lives, not outside of it. In other words, this framework reflects the need to think about sexual rights from a social/collective perspective and thus goes beyond individualistic concepts of rights.

Second, in many contexts, the language of rights is not necessarily how people frame their understandings of sexual wellbeing or their sense of entitlement to it. We know much less about alternative framings of sexuality and wellbeing that do not take rights as their starting point and how they intersect with poverty and other dimensions of well/ill-being. Yet they are critical from the perspective of interventions through public health, law and social policy.

Objective of the Research:

The proposed title of the research is 'Sexual Rights and Wrongs: Understanding Sexuality, Health and Well-being in Contemporary Bangladesh'. The purpose of the research is to conduct an initial documentation of the situation of sexuality and rights in the country. The exploratory study will be drawn on for teaching, training and as material for advocacy purposes. The knowledge generated can be used to inform policy interventions that promote sexual health and well-being.

The long-tern aim is to:

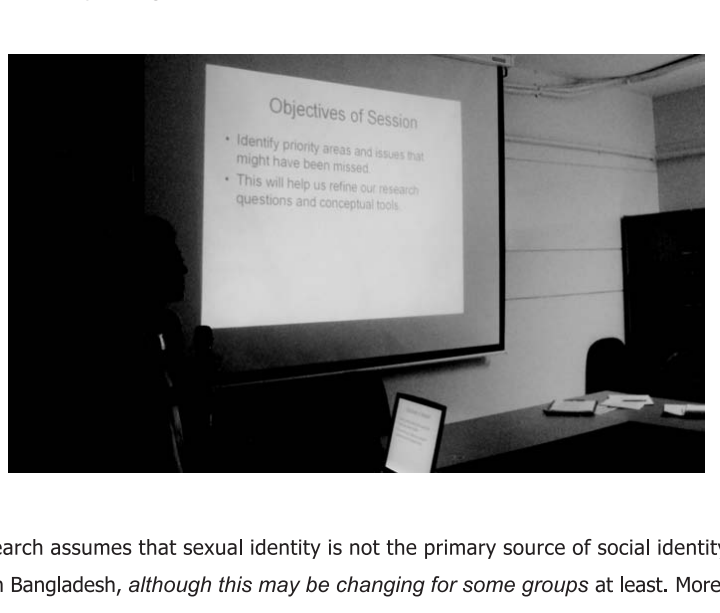
- Build capacity of individuals/organizations working in relevant areas (health providers, health program staff, legal aid workers, persons working on women's rights and reproductive and sexual rights, media persons, academics, students, minorities) to help them incorporate notions of sexuality and sexual rights into their thinking and activities/plans
- Influence policy and advocate for further dissemination and understanding of the issues around sexuality and rights.
- Build alliances and network of organizations already/actively working in this area

The intended outcome from the research activities conducted over a three month period will be to:

- Share findings with larger audience to build awareness on issues related to sex, sexuality and rights
- Share case studies/research materials to develop advocacy/training materials to share positive and negative experiences (e.g. agency, pleasurable experiences, and stigma, discrimination)
- Documentation of best practices (cases of already existing positive experiences of working in this area to promote awareness and create a base for sexual well-being and rights)

Process of the Brainstorming Session:

The brainstorming session was participatory and informal with free flowing discussions. A total of 22 participants attended the session (see ANNEX 2 for Agenda and ANNEX 3 List of Participants). During the session the participants reflected on their own knowledge and experience of 'sexuality and rights' issue at local level as well as global. They actively analyzed the relevance of research on the issue of 'sexuality and rights' in Bangladesh and positively shared experiences and feedback on the upcoming research.



Objectives of Session
Identify priority areas and issues that might have been missed
This will help us refine our research questions and conceptual tools

The research assumes that sexual identity is not the primary source of social identity for most people in Bangladesh, *although this may be changing for some groups* at least. Moreover since we are aware that sexuality is one way through which individuals and communities exercise power and domination (men over women, heterosexuals over homosexuals and so on), the study will examine the relationship between sexuality and power, keeping in mind class distinctions. Thus, the study will explore both the personal level (attitudes and practices, stated norms versus actual practice, the primary influences that inform sexuality, sexual health and decision-making) and the social (how sexual discourses work at the community or social level through discourses of power and morality).

The research team sought feedback during the brainstorming session to help them refine their research questions and conceptual tools. They also hoped to identify priority areas and issues that might have been missed from the existing conceptual framework. The team also asked the participants to help them with language and translation of concepts and narrow down the focus.

The session started with detailed personal introductions by the participants followed by welcome address delivered by Dr. Sabina Faiz Rashid from JPGSPH, BRAC University and Dr. Hilary Standing, Director of the Realising Rights RPC. Dr. Sabina Faiz Rashid welcomed the participants by stating the objectives of the brainstorming session and the previous work on sexuality and rights done at JPGSPH, BRAC University while Dr. Hilary Standing talked about the Realising Rights RPC and how the issue of sexuality and rights became a part of the work of RPC.

Dr. Dina Siddiqi, Consultant of the research gave a presentation on the overview of the research and the brainstorming session titled "Sexual Rights and Wrongs: Understanding Sexuality, Health and Well-being in Contemporary Bangladesh" (see ANNEX 4 for the Presentation). The session then followed an open-floor discussion on the issue of sexuality and rights. The discussion was held both in Bangla and English. The brainstorming session focused on issues related to sexuality, sexual health and rights; real life experiences of the participants were used for understanding the above concepts and challenges they faced while working on the issue. The interest and involvement of the participants determined the flow of the discussions during the session.

Key Issues Discussed at the Brainstorming Session:

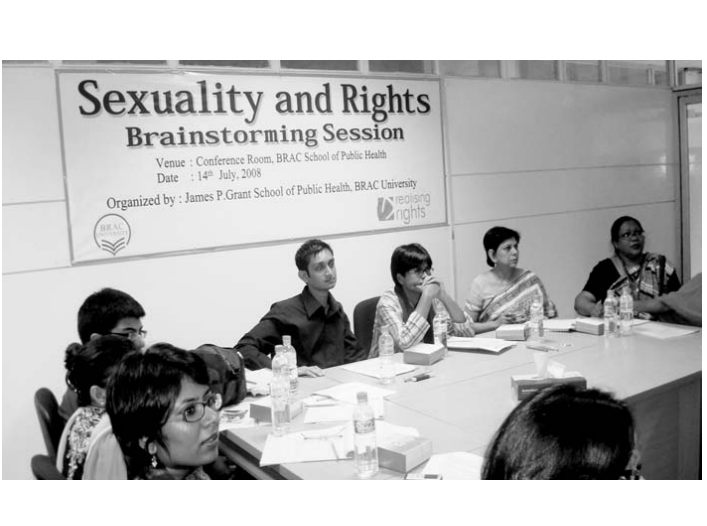
The key issues discussed at the brainstorming session are as follows:

Definition of sexual health, sexual rights and meaning of sexuality

From her many years' experience of working with Bangladesh Women's Health Coalition (BWHC), Dr. Julia Ahmed shared that she found it very difficult to move activities from reproductive health to sexual health, and the concept of sexual health was still less understood by the community. It was also very hard to get funding for activities on 'sexuality-related' work. She thought that reproductive health problems, problems around dowry and around violence could be mitigated if we would study 'sexuality' as a whole.

Professor Dr. Anwar Islam of JPGSPH, BRAC University brought up the issue of the definition of 'sexual rights'. He said the whole point of the research was really to understand what 'sexual rights' is or how we define 'sexual rights'. He suggested that the team was mixing too many things, from pleasure to love and beyond. The research might become really unfocused if this remained the case. Professor Islam emphasized that the team should narrow their research questions so they could limit their expected outputs.

The issue of the meaning of 'sexuality' was raised by Ms. Samia Haq, Pathways RPC. She asked the research team if they were going to keep the concepts of sexuality, sexual norms and identity separate or put them together. She further mentioned that one's sexual identity here might not be as encompassing as it is in the west. It might be a part of a larger identity. She also wanted to know whether the research would look into gendered identities or not address these at all. Mr. Hasan Ashraf from the Department of Anthropology, Jahangirnagar University proposed that the research team should also ask people about their socialization process or their lived experience because sexuality or sexual identity is a part of the broader identity process where sexuality comes through one's socialization process. He said the research would be able to find what was dominant and what was excluded. From Pathways RPC and Naripokkho, Professor Firdous Azim further added, "Positions are determined by our sexual positions, married, unmarried…so it's the cornerstone of identity."



Another participant from Naripokkho and Utsho Bangladesh, Ms. Mahbooba Mahmood, shared her experience of attending a seminar in the year 1983 where she saw a presentation on 'sexuality' and that was when she first understood that 'sexuality is about relationships between persons'. Ms. Mahbooba Mahmood pointed out that the concept of 'sexuality' differs among persons on the basis of their status ***(bitto)***. She gave the example of people living on the streets who have different life experiences. It is likely that their perceptions of sexuality will differ as a consequence. She also found that rural girls were more open to talk about their sexuality than urban girls. Another point she mentioned was that sex workers were able to make clear distinctions between their business and their sexuality. They were also very open to talk about the issue.

Starting the research with sexual minorities

Professor Firdous Azim said she liked the idea of carrying out the research in urban areas. She also suggested the research could start with sexual minorities and move forward to the mainstream population.

Mr. Tanveer Reza Rouf of Queer Bangla and BRAC University supported Professor Azim's point, on starting the research from the 'unusual' and then moving to the 'usual,' for instance, starting from sexual minorities and move to the 'mainstream'. He further mentioned, *"…here under marginalized community we talk about transgender, gay, lesbian, bisexual and MSM. But being a member of gay community myself and having done research on them, on my own community, I can say that there is huge difference between all these communities. We don't know any lesbians in Bangladesh. I just got to know a lesbian person just two months back. And it was like a huge revelation that there is a lesbian woman in Dhaka, you know. Lesbians don't know many transgender, transgender don't know gays and gays don't know MSMs…"*. Mr. Tanveer Reza Rouf emphasized that sexual minorities could be a huge research subject in themselves. So, he suggested that the research could start with that, focusing on them to see where they intersected. He added that a lot of work had been done on MSMs because of the issue of HIV/AIDS. Some work had been done on gays, but no work at all has been done on lesbians. So, he suggested the team could focus on sexual minorities.

Dr. Sabina Faiz Rashid, from JPGSPH, BRAC University emphasised the challenge of getting access to those sexual minorities. It is a very difficult process actually getting people to start talking about these issues. For those who work with MSMs through different organizations, access was easy because of ongoing HIV/AIDS interventions. Dr. Sabina Faiz Rashid considered it a very good suggestion to help the research team think it through the other way around; however, she further mentioned they would like to also include in the research design perceptions, practices, and the state of love and courtship even in heterosexual relationships because discussions were lacking in those areas as well.

Mr. Tanveer Reza Rouf, found in his own research experiences that once the discussion started, people generally opened up and spoke freely on love and romance.

Professor Mehtab Khanam of Psychology Department, Dhaka University asked whether the category of 'transsexuals', was going to be explored as it was not mentioned in the presentation. She said that despite there being a blurring between 'transgender' and 'transsexual' since she was dealing with actual cases, she found there were few differences between these two groups of minorities. She suggested exploring these differences. Professor Mehtab Khanam found this group of population very neglected, despite the high rates of suicide among them. She said, *"There are a lot of anxieties and depression among transsexuals. We should narrow down and I also fully agree with Firdous that to start with minorities is very important because their situation in Bangladesh is very bad. And I think we have some responsibilities towards this population. If we feel that urge or responsibility we should start from them. Then we can continue to the general people's issues."*

Dr. Hilary Standing, Director of the Realising Rights RPC said that discussion has been going on in the Realising Rights RPC over the last two years about the issue of framing sexual rights. She was keen to see research also reflecting on sexual rights as a whole population issue. She was reluctant to focus just on sexual minorities. In this case, she said "there is a risk that when you focus on sexual minorities you reinforce the view that sexual rights belong to sexual minorities. It has nothing to do with ***shadaron manush*** (general people), somehow." She suggested that one should not make a sharp distinction about the starting point but instead recognize that there is a huge spectrum even in a conservative ***poribesh*** (environment). This was what the research was actually finding so there is a case for not worrying about the starting point of the research.

Dr. Dilruba from CTRDW (Centre for Training and Rehabilitation of Destitute Women) agreed and argued that starting the research with sexual minorities would marginalize them more.

Ms. Samia A. Rahim from Pathways RPC commented on the fact that the research should also include in the minority categories of people who remained outside the institution of marriage.

Mr. Hasan Ashraf agreed and shared his experiences of working in rural Dinajpur. During his work he was surprised to find the differences in sexual relationships and its many dimensions. He said although marital sex was seen as the norm, there were a lot of sexual relations outside marriage, and people were aware of it.

Moral and ethical issues to be considered

Moral and ethical issues were a very important point discussed at the brainstorming session. Professor Dr. Anwar Islam said as sexuality is culturally a very sensitive issue one should discuss the moral and ethical aspects of it before starting the research. Professor Mehtab Khanam agreed. She was talking about the transsexuals who went through many anxieties and depression and needed psychological therapy. She said, *"We should not also forget the social force, the society's power that always influences us. Society is too powerful; whatever sex we belong to society changes us and we have to keep this in mind that society is such a powerful influence that our sexuality or psyche, everything is revolving around the social values, norms and prejudices and beliefs, attitudes, everything is influencing us. We should not forget the ethical and moral issues because we are working on a very sensitive issue."* She thanked Dr. Dina Siddiqi, the Research Consultant, as well as JPGSPH and the research team for thinking about such important issues. She reminded the team about the sensitivity and challenges of the sexuality issue.

Dr. Dilruba also noted that 'sexuality' is a very private and personal issue. Many personal things might come up during interviews. So, she forewarned the team that the respondents might need psychological counselling. Professor Mehtab Khanam shared her experience of working on a Global Study on Violence Against Women. During the study she found that lots of women became very emotional and disturbed, and they needed counselling afterwards. In reply Dr. Sabina Faiz Rashid mentioned, *"You brought up a really important issue. We are not experts in this field, but we can refer them to counsellors and we hope to rely on you for support in terms of referrals.* She further said as sexual health issues would be raised, the research team could be trained to refer the respondents to health care providers and appropriate counsellors.

Methodological issues

During her presentation, Dr. Dina Siddiqi talked about the methodology of the proposed research. The team was planning to conduct two FGDs and at least four in-depth interviews with members of each group. One FGD with male garment workers and one with field level staff of NGOs working on SRH Rights would be conducted. Professor Dr. Anwar Islam and Professor Mehtab Khanam both agreed the research might be trying to extract too much information from the limited number of FGDs. Professor Mehtab Khanam proposed, rather, the team start with an 'attitude survey'. However, Dr. Sabina Faiz Rashid stated that the purpose was to collect in-depth detailed personal narratives on sexuality, identity, which would be difficult to capture in a survey. Secondly, time constraints make it difficult to do a large scale 'attitude survey'.

Dr. Nazneen Anwar from Directorate General of Health Service (DGHS), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Bangladesh was also doubtful about how much information could be captured in FGDs and how much they would help the research. From Naripokkho, Ms. Sadaf Saaz Siddqi pointed out the need for sensitivity in interviewing. She said that both the person who would conduct the FGDs and interviews and the person who would take notes must be very careful in their approach. However, some of the other participants argued that FGDs can sometimes allow for or open up discussion of very sensitive issues, which can then be probed further in in-depth interviews.

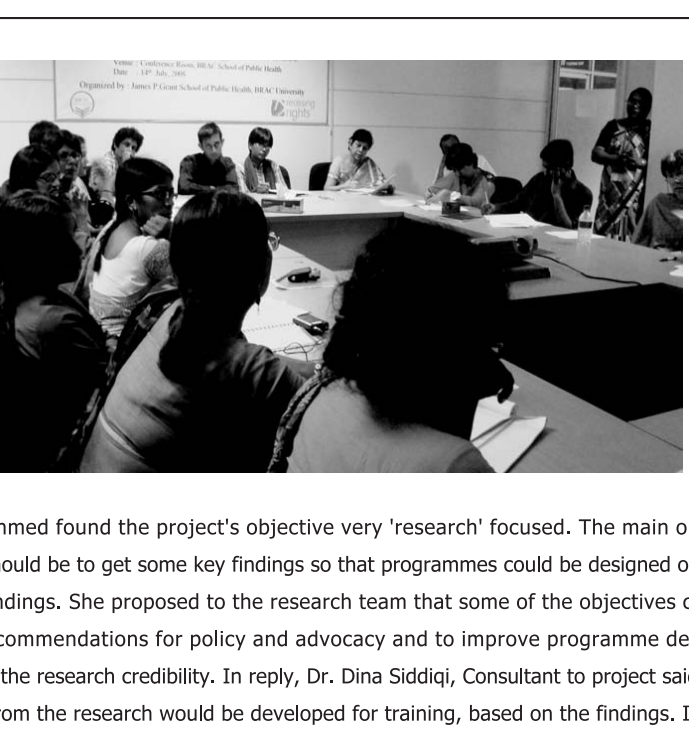
Mr. Ilias Mahmud, Lecturer, JPGSPH, BRAC University raised two issues concerning FGDs and in-depth interviews. He suggested it might be difficult to conduct the FGDs among university students and even garment workers because they might not feel comfortable discussing the topics in a group. He proposed increasing the number of in-depth interviews and reducing the number of FGDs. He suggested that the researchers might need to ask many probing questions to get information, and they should be very careful not to impose their views onto the respondents. Given the importance of sexuality education, Dr. Julia Ahmed asked the research team to have an adolescent group in the research.

Programme implementation, policy advocacy and networking based on the research findings

Mr. Shale Ahmed from Bandhu Social Welfare Society emphasised the importance of proper incorporation of the issues around sexuality into interventions and policies. He also said that it would be good if the research could make some practical policy recommendations.

Given the usefulness of the suggestions that came out during the discussion, Dr. Sabina Faiz Rashid said they would revisit their research objectives in terms of what they wanted to achieve. She appreciated the importance of advocacy. She further told the audience that case studies or narratives developed from the research would inform various organizations about the issue of sexuality and rights. There was a possibility to incorporate the findings in developing curricula for future training programmes and even doing policy advocacy with other interested organizations/individuals working in this area. Dr. Sabina Faiz Rashid hoped to continue getting feedback from the participants as the work progresses on how to shape the research further.

Ms. Sadaf Saaz Siddiqi from Naripokkho stated that Naripokkho really wanted to take the issue further. She also added, "*…going from what Sabina said about networking and partnerships…we think we are very interested in it, because we have done a lot of action research and we have a lot of staff in rural areas. So it will be excellent to use (the research findings) as a tool for advocacy activities in the future.*"



Dr. Julia Ahmed found the project's objective very 'research' focused. The main objective of research should be to get some key findings so that programmes could be designed on the basis of those findings. She proposed to the research team that some of the objectives could be to provide recommendations for policy and advocacy and to improve programme designing. It would give the research credibility. In reply, Dr. Dina Siddiqi, Consultant to project said that case materials from the research would be developed for training, based on the findings. In addition, the Centre aims to share the research reports widely, so it can be utilised by other interested organisations and groups. She further mentioned that the research would be conducted in several phases. In the next phase it is hoped that the team would try to incorporate the issues missed in the first part of the research.

The problem with the language and terminology of the issues around sexuality

Some of the issues raised were around language. Dr. Nazneen Anwar questioned the operational definition of sexuality and the (Bangla) term they would use for sexuality. Dr. Dina Siddiqi said they wanted to find out what terms people use and how people would talk about sexuality. She also showed concern about the translations of the terminology of 'sexuality', as did Ms. Sadaf Saaz Siddqi of Naripokkho: *"I think one of issues that you brought out towards the end is language… I think it is very important."* Sharing her own experiences of research on sexuality, she said she found it very difficult to distinguish between the ideals and beliefs about 'sex' and actual sexual behaviour. She was worried that even if the interviewer was very well trained or the documentation was done accurately, there was a possibility of getting the wrong meaning of the issue, as people might not have the language to express precisely what they mean.

Talking about the terminology of sexuality, Dr. Dilruba said, *"I have been working for last six/seven years to understand the terminology of sexuality. It is so difficult! What I should understand, what (I should) not, what it is and to get clarity of meaning of sexuality. So, if you go to even upper level people, it is my assumption that many of them will not understand what sexuality is and what it really means."* She further suggested, *"...In case of sex and the practice of sex, it is only one part of sexuality. It is not the whole thing of sexuality. So, we have to take all the parts of this 'word' - (sex) together when we want to study or bring out something. It is my request!"* Mr. Hasan Ashraf suggested while interviewing collecting all the terms that describe relationships between men and women, such as ***shami-strir shomporko*** (relationship between husband and wife) or ***dampotto shomporko*** (conjugal relationship).

Changing sexual behaviour and violence within sexual relationships

Mr. Hasan Ashraf also emphasized looking at the moral side and norms of sexual behaviour, the impact of globalization on changes in understandings of sexuality, and how the state propagates these. In line with what he said, Mr. Tanveer Reza Rouf also suggested finding out the stories of change in relation to 'sexuality' among the groups.

"We talk about the sexual behaviour; we should explore the new behaviours like phone sex or masturbation. Masturbation, we don't talk about much. But masturbation is a very commonly practiced thing. These issues should be asked", said Professor Mehtab Khanam.

Talking about the interface with violence, Ms. Sadaf Saaz Siddiqi mentioned that quite often sexual experiences were a 'kind of metamorphosis'. This interface should be understood by the researchers and analyzed by going deep into it, although it is difficult. In this particular issue Ms. Mahbooba Mahmood emphasized conducting research among women who were victims of domestic violence and looking at the issue of sexuality among this group. After many years of experience in this field and after talking to many women, she found it was an important issue requiring further exploration.

For Mr. Tanveer Reza Rouf, another important issue was violence within relationships among the sexual minorities. He informed the audience that it was very hard to find literature on violence in same-sex relationships.

Other possible issues to include in the research agenda

Mr. Ilias Mahmud raised the issue of men's SRH Rights. He said, *"...there is huge gender inequality in terms of getting services. In this case, I think our health service is maternal and child health focused, and the family planning programmes are targeting only women. Men's sexual and reproductive health is neglected in mainstream health services and health delivery system. They are spending money for health services, but they are not going to the formal sector (health service providers). They go to informal sector. But when women think that they have problems, they go to the government health sector. But men, they are (only) going to informal sector. If we look at the number going to government facilities, only a few are men. This is not intentional but this is probably because the priority goes to the activities which are mostly women focussed; and they forget about men's needs."* Ms. Samia A. Rahim placed importance on exploring male sexual activity. She assumed men engaged differently with their wives than with other partners.

Mr. Hasan Ashraf suggested the team also explore the relationships between the male body and male sexuality, and what these implied for definitions of sexual 'well-being'.

Another important issue Ms. Dilruba mentioned was 'religion' which she felt controlled our sexuality strongly. Whatever we wanted to do in understanding sexuality, conducting a research or even setting up a programme, we must address the issue of religion in-depth. Mr. Hasan Ashraf raised another important issue of 'negotiation'. He asked the team if they could investigate how non-marital sexual relations were negotiated in urban areas.

Mr. Tanveer Reza Rouf asked the team if they could include a question for the minorities on the awareness of "377"[1] . "Even police are not aware of 377. They arrest (people) under 54", replied Dr. Dina Siddqi.

A participant from the State University of Bangladesh, Ms. Bashabi Barua, gave the view that there should be no specific chapter on alternative sexuality. At this issue, Mr. Tanveer Reza Rouf suggested that the research team might ask the respondents how they would like to be represented. Through this the research would be giving power to them (minorities).

Concluding Remarks:

At the end, Dr. Sabina Faiz Rashid thanked everybody for their participation at the session on behalf of JPGSPH and the Realising Rights RPC. She also said the research team appreciated the extremely valuable and useful feedback on the proposed research. Dr. Sabina Faiz Rashid further mentioned that the participants were free to write to the team if they had new ideas or wanted to share anything else and that the initial findings of the research would be shared with this group of participants.

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[1] Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with [imprisonment] for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine. **Explanation**. Penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse necessary to the offence described in this section. [The Penal Code, 1860 (ACT NO. XLV of 1860), Chapter XVI of Offences Affecting the Human Body; website: http://bdlaws.gov.bd/]

ANNEX - 1 Concept Note

Realising Rights: Research Plans on Sexuality and Rights

Research on Sexuality and Human Rights in Bangladesh

Objective

The purpose of the research is to document the situation of sexuality and rights in the country. The finished study can be drawn on for teaching, training and as material for advocacy purposes. The knowledge generated can be used to inform policy interventions that promote sexual health and well-being.

The long-tern aim is to:

- Build capacity of individuals/organizations working in relevant areas (health providers, health program staff, legal aid workers, persons working on women's rights and reproductive and sexual rights, media persons, academics, students, minorities) to help them incorporate notions of sexuality and sexual rights into their thinking and activities/plans
- Influence policy and advocate for further dissemination and understanding of the issues around sexuality and rights.
- Build alliances and network of organizations already/actively working in this area

The intended outcome from the research activities conducted over a three month period will be to:

- Share findings with larger audience to build awareness on issues related to sex, sexuality and rights
- Share case studies/research materials to develop advocacy/training materials to share positive and negative experiences (e.g. stigma, discrimination)
- Documentation of best practices (cases of already existing positive experiences of working in this area to promote awareness and create a base for sexual well-being and rights)

Background and Context

Sexual rights (SR) are an important emerging issue, although relatively underdeveloped from a conceptual, operational and policy perspective. Some conceptual frameworks for SR have already been proposed (e.g., by WHO). Rather than starting from notions of abstract, universal rights this sub-programme takes as its point of departure people's lived experience of sexuality and how this contributes to or detracts from sexual wellbeing in a broader sense.

This perspective is important in two respects. First, the framework assumes that individual sexualities always develop within larger social systems, and that the individual is embedded in the community in which he or she lives, not outside of it. In other words, this framework reflects the need to think about sexual rights from a social/collective perspective and thus goes beyond individualistic concepts of rights.

Second, in many contexts, the language of rights is not necessarily how people frame their understandings of sexual wellbeing or their sense of entitlement to it. We know much less about alternative framings of sexuality and wellbeing that do not take rights as their starting point and how they intersect with poverty and other dimensions of well/ill-being. Yet they are critical from the perspective of interventions through public health, law and social policy.

In this regard, the study also assumes that sexual identity is not the primary source of social identity for most people in Bangladesh, *although this may be changing for some groups* at least.

Moreover, since we know that sexuality is one way through which individuals and communities exercise power and domination (men over women, heterosexuals over homosexuals and so on), the study will examine the relationship between sexuality and power, keeping in mind class distinctions. Thus, the study will explore both the personal level (attitudes and practices, stated norms versus actual practice, the primary influences that inform sexuality, sexual health and decision-making) and the social (how sexual discourses work at the community or social level through discourses of power and morality).

Broad Issues to explore:

- Taking a gender and age disaggregated approach, we will focus on marginalized populations, university students, and people working in sexual and reproductive health in an academic or project capacity, and exploring their understandings and behaviour relevant to sexual rights and responsibilities.

- Tackling coercive sexualities (e.g. social hierarchy of power and how that plays into coercive sexual behaviour)

- Engaging with minority sexualities in environments where they are stigmatised or unacknowledged.

- A better understanding of how different cohorts and age groups think about sexual well-being in their own lives and what this entails for a policy focus on sexual rights and in the health arena.

- Positive aspects of sexuality and the role these play in people's lives and how to redress the balance from the focus on disease and harm that characterises most of the current agenda on sexual behaviour and sexual health.

Other issues to consider:

- What are the main influences that shape individual attitudes, beliefs and practices toward sexuality? For instance, religion, media, family, the free market, education, larger public culture and so on. How does lived experience vary by gender and class?

- What kinds of changes are taking place? How are notions of manhood and femininity changing? What are the main influences and where do we see the changes (marriage patterns, sexual behavior, more open premarital sex etc; shifting taboos and role models. Have there been shifts in definitions of good and bad behavior? What are the tensions between stated norms and actual practices? How does this also impact on behavior?

- Emergent trends, acceptability of alternative discourses, especially following the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the interventions it has generated and to a lesser extent, global movements for reproductive rights and gay rights.

- What impact has the reproductive rights/family planning movement had on perceptions of sexuality? (since we know that the local and global are intertwined necessarily). Problems and concerns; especially accessing health services (discomfort, shame, lack of knowledge or comfort on the part of the service provider, worries about confidentiality, lack of information, fear of stigma); Coping mechanisms. Questions will be different for providers. What they constitute as sexuality, their own prejudices and changing conceptions, with experience and exposure.

- Personal narratives; Positive and negative experiences (e.g. discrimination from health providers, from family, peer, community etc). Best practices and lessons learned. Progressive strategies for social mobilization (e.g. documenting examples/cases of creating/negotiating space for self, groups etc).

Methodology

The proposed research will gather data using qualitative research methods across different settings, taking different cohorts that represent poor and middle class women, marginalized groups (garment workers), women working as activists, academics, students, etc. and different sexualities (minority community). The School will be responsible for taking the activities forward.

Focus group discussions and In-depth interviews will be used as tools with structured/semi-structured questions to gather life stories and case studies from the research participants.

Potential participants in the research will be from the following groups/communities:

- University students (Public universities only, for uniformity of sample)
- Marginalized communities (transgender, gay, lesbian, bisexual, MSMs)
- Possible sources of contact maybe Bandhu, Durjoy, Badhon
- Garment workers - male and female
- Staff/activists from local organizations that work in sexuality, reproductive rights and VAW issues.

- 2 FGDs and at least 4 in-depth interviews will be conducted with members of each group.
- I FGD with male garment workers and 1 with field level staff of NGOs working on SRHR issues will also be conducted.

A study of this nature obviously cannot be comprehensive or fully representative. The four groups chosen above represent a diverse cross-section of the population. The results of the study will be indicative of larger trends and will inform the initial findings for this research project.

The study will be urban based. Among other things, this will give the study a degree of coherence and commonality. Urbanization has been a significant factor in initiating social change in the last three decades. It has opened up new possibilities - the potential anonymity of urban spaces makes it easier - theoretically -- to challenge norms and to exit communities, that is, to get away from the "eyes" of the ***shomaj*** (Society). Moreover, the effects of globalization, mass media, commodification are much more visible in urban spaces. There is in general a sense that sexuality and sexual issues are more openly on display today.

Objectives of brainstorming workshop

The primary aim of this workshop is to gather initial feedback on the concept proposal and get additional suggestions before launching the research activities for RPC deliverables. We will also gain perspectives from potential beneficiaries of the research so that gaps can be identified and the research design can be enriched further.

This feedback will help us refine our research questions and conceptual tools.

Identify priority areas and issues that might have been missed from the existing conceptual framework.

Help with language and translation of concepts (How do we ask these questions? What kinds of vocabularies make sense on the ground? Always the problem of the language of research and theory versus common sense everyday understands. In the case of sexuality, more difficulty because there's so little direct research and concepts are not articulated directly in the culture.)

Research Timeline

Activity	July (week)				Aug (week)				Sep (week)			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Preparation for brainstorming workshop	▨											
Brainstorming workshop		▨										
Gathering contacts of research participants	▨	▨	▨									
Preparing questionnaires	▨	▨	▨									
Interviews and FGDs				▨	▨	▨	▨	▨				
Analysis and writing								▨	▨	▨	▨	▨

ANNEX - 2 Agenda

SEXUALITY AND RIGHTS BRAINSTORMING SESSION

Programme Agenda

Date: July 14th, 2008

Time: 3:00 pm - 5:30 pm

Venue: Conference Room, James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University

3:00 pm - Begin the session - Introduction by Participants

3:15 pm - Welcome address by Dr. Sabina Faiz Rashid, Coordinator, Centre for Gender, Sexuality and HIV/AIDS, James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University and Dr. Hilary Standing, Director, Realising Rights Research Programme Consortium

3:25 pm - Presentation by Dr. Dina M Siddiqi, Lead Researcher - Sexuality and Rights for Realising Rights Project (timeline, objectives of research)

3:50 pm - Open floor Discussion

*Facilitation by Dr. Dina Siddiqi with support from Ms. Mahrukh Mohiuddin and Dr. Farah Mahjabeen

* *Tea will be served during discussions*

5.30 pm - Wrap up

*Rapporteur of the Session: Shahanoor Akter Chowdhury, Senior Research Associate, Realising Rights RPC.

ANNEX - 3 List Of Participants

(On alphabetical order)

1. Professor Dr. Anwar Islam, James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University
2. Bashabi Barua, State University of Bangladesh
3. Dr. Dina Siddiqi, Research Consultant, Realising Rights RPC
4. Dr. Dilruba, CTRDW
5. Dr. Farah Mahjabeen Ahmed, James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University
6. Dr. Julia Ahmed, Freelance Consultant
7. Dr. Nazneen Anwar, DGHS, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of Bangladesh
8. Faisal Karim, James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University
9. Professor Firdous Azim, Pathways RPC/ Naripokkho
10. Dr. Hilary Standing, Realising Rights RPC
11. Ilias Mahmud, James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University
12. Hasan Ashraf, Department of Anthropology, Jahangirnagar University
13. Mahrukh Mohiuddin, James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University
14. Mehbooba Mahmood, Naripokkho, Utsho Bangladesh
15. Professor Mehtab Khanam, Department of Psychology, Dhaka University
16. Dr. Sabina Faiz Rashid, James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University
17. Sadaf Saaz Siddqi, Naripokkho
18. Samia A. Rahim, Pathways RPC
19. Samia Haq, Pathways RPC
20. Shahanoor Akter Chowdhury, Realising Rights RPC, James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University
21. Shale Ahmed, Bandhu Social Welfare Society
22. Tanveer Reza Rouf, BRAC University/ Queer Bangla

ANNEX - 4 Presentation

Sexual Rights and Wrongs:

Understanding Sexuality, Health and Well-being in Contemporary Bangladesh

Realising Rights Consortium

July 14, 2008

Broad Objective of Research

- To provide a situational analysis of sexuality and rights that can become the basis for teaching, training and advocacy
- Chart directions for future research

Background and Context

- Sexual rights is an important emerging issue
- Sexuality is an integral aspect of identity but not always adequately highlighted.
- The notion of sexual rights can be abstract, not how people themselves experience their everyday lives.
  - Explore this from a holistic perspective, encompassing rights, norms, stated practices, health, health behavior, cultural identity and so on

Starting Point for Study

- This study focuses on **lived experience**, not abstract notion of rights.
- It assumes that the individual is shaped by the community (*shomaj*/society) in which he or she lives.
- That is, sexuality is a part of larger social systems affected by many factors (social, economic, cultural, religious)

State

- Individual identity and sexual rights are also affected by the state (e.g. Laws that criminalize homosexuality affect the rights of men who do not wish to have sex with women or that criminalize sex work take away certain citizenship rights).

(Rashtro ebong shomaj ubhoi)

Sexuality as Social Identity

- The study assumes that sexual identity is not usually the primary source of social recognition for most people in Bangladesh.
  - Who you have sex with defines who you are
  - And also where you belong, defining "normal" and "abnormal" and "moral" and "immoral"
- We want to capture perceptions of how people understand these categories and live it in their daily lives. E.g. As a gay man, you may have internalized stigma against homosexuals
- This may be changing, for some groups at least, eg. Gay men may see themselves as gay first, then…

Presentation

Sexuality and Power

- Sexuality is one way in which individuals and communities and states dominate others (men over women, heterosexual over homosexual etc, housewives over sexworkers) **Khomotar shomporko toiri hoi.**
- The study will keep this in mind.

Sexuality and Health

- Individual Identity
- Class and Power
- HEALTH
  - Experiences of body and health including with service providers
  - Issues of stigma, discrimination, fear, lack of social support in addressing mental and physical health issues, guilt

Sexuality, Health and Pleasure

- Sexuality is not all negative.
- Women's sexual health is much more than reproductive health.
- Capture positive understandings and experiences of sexuality, health and pleasure.

Methodology

- Focus group discussions and In-depth interviews will be used as tools with structured/semi-structured questions to gather life stories and case studies from the research participants who will be drawn from four groups/communities

Methodology

- University students (Public universities only, for uniformity of sample)
- Marginalized communities (transgender, gay, lesbian, bisexual, MSMs)
- Garment workers – male and female
- Staff/activists from local organizations working on sexuality, reproductive rights and VAW issues.

Methodology

- 2 FGDs and at least 4 in-depth interviews will be conducted with members of each group. I FGD with male garment workers and 1 with field level staff of NGOs working on SRHR issues will also be conducted.
- *A study of this nature obviously cannot be comprehensive or fully representative. The four groups chosen above represent a diverse cross-section of the population. The results of the study will be indicative of larger trends.*

Presentation

Limitations

- The study will be urban based, living in urban spaces will be a common experience among these four different groups.
- Urbanization has been a significant factor in initiating social change in the last three decades. It has opened up new possibilities
- Moreover, the effects of globalization, mass media, commodification are much more visible in urban spaces. There is in general a sense that sexuality and sexual issues are more openly on display today.

General Issues to explore

- What are the main influences that shape individual attitudes, beliefs and practices toward sexuality? For instance, religion, media, family, education, and so on.
- What are the tensions/gaps between stated norms and actual practices?

General Issues to explore

- Emergent trends, acceptability of alternative discourses, especially following the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the interventions it has generated and to a lesser extent, global movements for reproductive rights and gay rights. (since we know that the local and global are intertwined necessarily)

General Issues to explore

- Personal narratives;
  - Positive and negative experiences. Best practices and lessons learned. Progressive strategies for social mobilization.

Objectives of Workshop

- To gather feedback and get additional suggestions before launching the research activities, which is based on our RPC deliverables for 2008.
- Gain perspectives from potential beneficiaries of the research and service providers so that gaps can be identified and the research design can be enriched further.

- Identify priority areas and issues that might have been missed.
- This will help us refine our research questions and conceptual tools.

Presentation

Potential Questions

- (Individual perception and experiences)
- What is considered deviant? What is considered risky?
- What sanctions "irresponsible" behaviour?
- If one defies sexual conformity, how do they come up with affirming themselves?
- How do they find positive reaffirmation (role of others, providers, friends, family and media etc)
- Who do they see as vulnerable? Do they consider themselves as vulnerable?
- Why or why not?

Workshop Objectives

- Help with language and translation of concepts
- How do we ask some of these very sensitive questions? What is your experience? What kinds of vocabularies make sense on the ground?

- Problems and concerns; especially accessing health services (discomfort, shame, stigma, lack of knowledge or comfort on the part of the service provider, worries about confidentiality).
- Experiences with police, public hospitals etc.

- Personal narratives; Positive and negative experiences. Best practices and lessons learned. Progressive strategies for social mobilization

Collective perception and experiences

- Do members of marginalized groups feel the need to connect, or feel the responsibility to connect (with organisations, institutions, individuals)?
- How do individuals or group find space or create a space for themselves/others? What space gives them comfort?
- What kind of alliances are possible between groups to build better connectedness?

Health

- What are the major barriers to seeking care? (e.g. if one is in a homosexual relationship and suffering from an STD or if a young girl is sexually abused or pregnant seeking an abortion etc.)
- What kind of treatment do individuals/people working in this field expect to be meted out at health facilities or by providers?

Presentation

Other categories to consider

- Questions on love and relationships, sexual and romantic
- Do men and women think about relationships differently?
- Questions about sexual pleasure and satisfaction
- Questions about relationships, society and social norms

Questions to Consider

- Questions regarding sexual minorities and socially marginalized groups.

Thank You!!