

Understanding Sexuality and Rights

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THE Center for Gender, Sexuality and HIV/AIDS (CGSH) at the James P Grant School of Public Health (JPGSPH) of BRAC University shared the findings of a pioneering research project on sexuality and rights in urban Bangladesh on November 9, 2009 at Spectra Convention Centre, Dhaka. This exploratory study, the first of its kind, maps the manifold and changing understandings of sexuality, identity and rights among university students, factory workers, and sexual and gender minorities in Dhaka city. This study has been funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) for the Realizing Rights Consortium RPC.

Dr Dina M. Siddiqi, Visiting Professor and Coordinator of the Sexuality Network at CGSH, along with Mahrukh Mohiuddin and Hasan Ashraf, have completed this innovative study delving into contemporary sexuality in Bangladesh. The objectives of the research were to provide a situational analysis of sexuality and rights that can become the basis for teaching, training and advocacy; expand tapered public health discourses on sexuality; provide progressive strategies for social mobilization; and finally, to triangulate the research findings, social mobilization strategies and policy prescriptions to inform one another. Groups including university students; marginalized communities; garment workers as well as activists from organisations working on sexuality, reproductive rights and Violence Against Women (VAW) issues were studied for the purpose of the research that explored several important issues like how do different groups understand, articulate and experience their sexualities; the relationship between sexuality, identity and well-being; how do different groups of people conceptualize sexual rights; 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 sexual rights etc.



The event was also a part of a historic international campaign "One Day, One Struggle" organized by the Coalition on Sexual and Bodily Rights in Muslim Societies (CSBR), an international network of which CGSH is a member. Dr Siddiqi was the coordinator for Bangladesh for this network. On this day, a very diverse group of NGOs, activists and scholars in 11 countries across North America, Middle East, South and Southeast Asia conducted simultaneous events and public demonstrations to assert that sexual and reproductive rights are universal human rights based on the inherent freedom, dignity and equality of all human beings.

The event was attended by a good number of academicians, representatives from media, and several NGO activists including CGSH coordinator Dr Sabina Faiz Rashid, Associated Professor at JPGSPH; Dr Firdous Azim, Chairperson, ENH, BRAC University; Dr Hilary Standing, Director, Realizing Rights Consortium and Dr Anwar Islam, Associate Dean and Director, JPGSPH.