

THE BUSINESS STANDARD

Bangladesh Health Watch hosts conference of SRHR

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Bangladesh Health Watch (BHW), a citizens' platform working as a watchdog to promote the health of Bangladesh citizens, organised a day-long conference on "The Emerging Challenges to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) in Bangladesh".

The conference was held on Saturday (3 December) at BRAC Centre Inn in Mohakhali, Dhaka, said a press release.

Rounaq Jahan, Chair, Advisory Group, BHW presided over the conference.

Paying tribute to Adrienne Germain, Rounaq Jahan talked about Adrienne Germain's pioneering role in the 1970s and early 1980s in promoting girl's and women's rights and health through funding support of innovative government and non-government projects and programs to improve maternal and child health and increase opportunities for women's employment and income.

SRHR is selected as the theme of the conference to pay tribute to the memory of Adrienne Germain as she was a pioneer in developing SRHR approach of programming in health and population policy and programme.

All the papers presented at the conference underscored the need to recognise the socio-economic determinants of women's health. They recommend the adoption of specific measures to address the disadvantages women face.

The first session on Women, Girls, and SRHR in Bangladesh was chaired by Shams El Arifeen, Senior Director, Maternal and Child Health, icddr,b. Three papers were presented in this session.

Kaosar Afsana, Professor, BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University, in her paper "Women at the Margin: The Reductionist Approach to Maternal Health" asserted that although Bangladesh has seen a decline in maternal deaths over the years, social determinants, which impede further progress have been overlooked.

Sabina Faiz Rashid, Dean and Professor, BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University, spoke on "Fault Lines in Public Health: Young Women's Lives in Dhaka Slums" and asserted that gender, sexuality, and the human dimension of health need to be discussed in order to have contextually relevant programs and policies for young women living in slum environments.

Halida Hanum Akhtar, Senior Associate, Johns Hopkins University, Bloomberg School of Public Health and Altaf Hossain, Executive Director, Association for Prevention of Septic Abortion, Bangladesh (BAPSA), in their paper "The Bangladesh MR-MRM Programme: Successes, Challenges and Way Forward" said that to achieve the SDG 3 target by 2030, Bangladesh needs to reduce unwanted pregnancy and its consequences on women's lives. Bangladesh has in place a well-designed Menstrual Regulation (MR) programme, post-abortion care (PAC) services, emergency contraceptive

pills and community-level awareness programmes through social communication activities.

The second session of the conference focused on SRHR of Vulnerable Groups in Bangladesh and was chaired by Judith Bruce, Former Senior Associate, The Population Council.

She outlined several priorities including early and comprehensive support for the rising generation of girls -beginning in early adolescence in the communities characterized by persistent child marriage and poverty as well as those experiencing acute shocks of climate change and conflict.

Tasnim Azim, Adjunct Professor, BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University, in her paper explained that sexual and reproductive health are inextricably interlinked, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) affect both.

Sajeda Amin, Senior Associate, The Population Council, in her paper titled The Pathway of Climate Change Impact on SRHR expressed that there is an elevated risk to maternal health in coastal regions from increased salinity that increases the risk of eclampsia and pre-eclampsia, higher risk of child marriage and elevated risks of insecurity leading to sexual violence and rights violation as a result of displacement to urban slums.

Sara Hossain, Honorary Executive Director, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), in her paper 'Knowing and Using the Law to Shape Women's and Girls' Rights to Health', suggested that there are laws that still discriminate against rights of women and girls to equality, not allowing women to participate freely and responsibly in decisions and processes that affect their lives.