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Experiment Findings · December 2020

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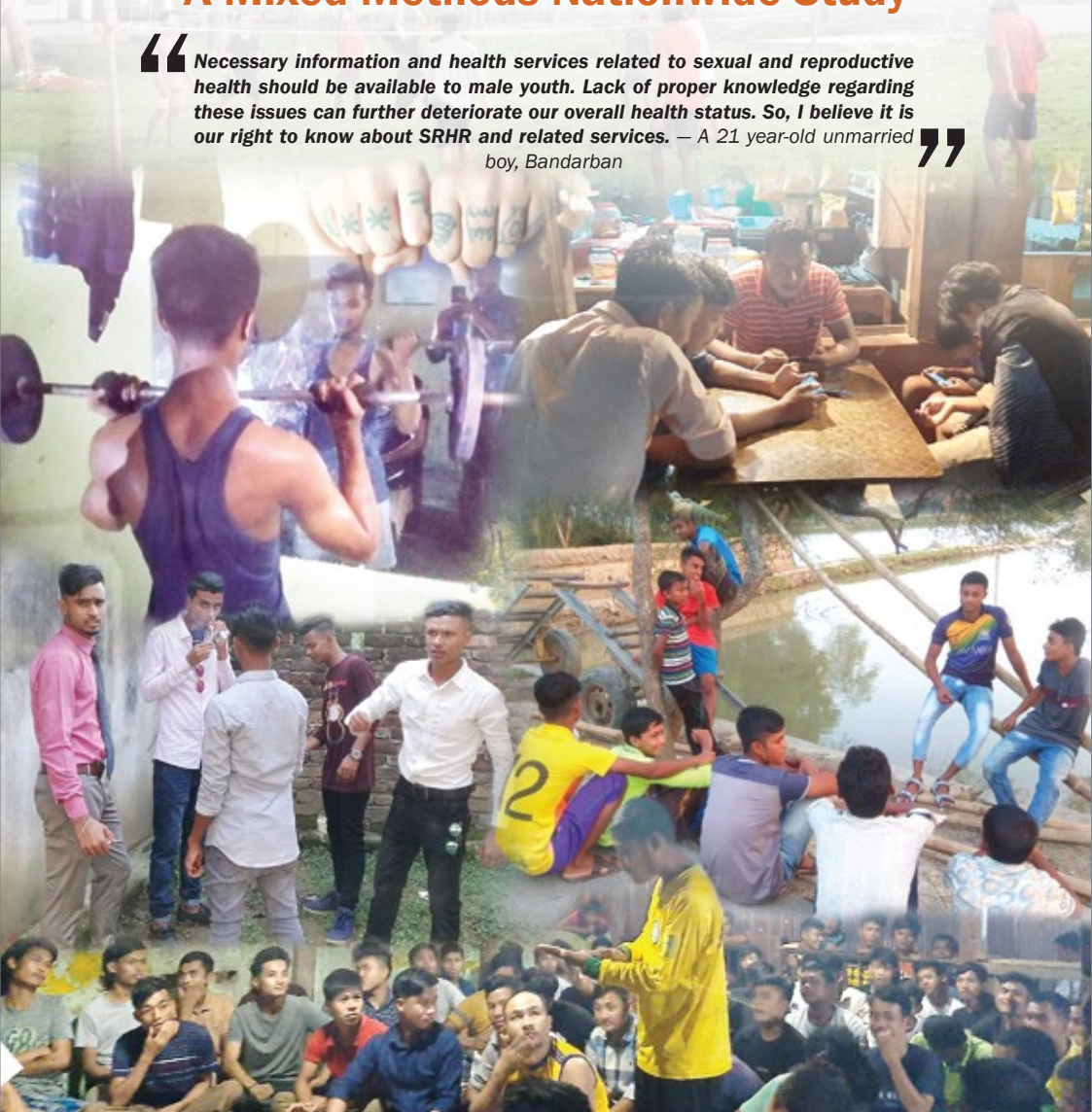
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# Male Youth and their Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) in Bangladesh: A Mixed Methods Nationwide Study

“Necessary information and health services related to sexual and reproductive health should be available to male youth. Lack of proper knowledge regarding these issues can further deteriorate our overall health status. So, I believe it is our right to know about SRHR and related services. — A 21 year-old unmarried boy, Bandarban”



**Project Duration:** 18 Months

**Project Location:** 64 Districts in Bangladesh

**Population:** 15 to 24 Year-Old Male Youths

**Funded by:** Embassy of the Royal Kingdom of the Netherlands

**Background of the project:** Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) is an important issue for everyone. However, it is being neglected for young males (15-24 years) in Bangladesh. A majority of SRHR research and interventions are female centric. Although the government of Bangladesh has taken many initiatives to improve the sexual and reproductive health and rights of the general population, the male youth segment has not been prioritized in most of these interventions. A few programs engage male adolescents (up to age 19 years), but a major portion of youth (aged 19-24 years) remains underserved. As the male youth population was not previously targeted, there is also a gap of research evidence to understand their SRHR knowledge, associated practices, and behavior, as well as their needs and service availability for SRHR. This is critical because not only they represent 50% of the 30million people belonging to this age group in Bangladesh, but also their understanding of their SRH and subsequent behavior will have an impact on their health and wellbeing, as well as on the lives of their female counterparts.

**Objective 1 – Identify SRH needs:** To understand the knowledge, perceptions and practices about SRHR, and challenges in accessing SRHR services for male youth in Bangladesh

**Objective 2 – Mapping of existing SRH interventions:** Mapping the existing SRH interventions for male youth and identifying the gaps and challenges to improve SRHR interventions and/or services

**Objective 3 – Review existing SRH policies:** Review existing policies regarding SRHR for male youth and identify the barriers of implementation in programs and generate recommendations for policy advocacy

## Research Findings: Objective 1

### SRHR Knowledge



- Peer networks are the first source of information for knowledge of puberty for 60% respondents, followed by schools/teachers (52%)
- 54% respondents had not heard of STI/STDs
- 27% male youth had not heard the term “family planning”

**“No one discussed these issues (masturbation, wet dream) with us. That is why we discuss it with friends. We do not know where to get correct information. It would be better for us if we knew it.”** – Respondents of FGD 1, Satkhira

### SRHR Practice



- Overall, 75% males have watched pornography at least once during their lifetime
- Average age of watching pornography for the first-time found to be 14.8 years
- On average, married male youth have 1.3 sexual partners in the last three months, apart from wife
- Average age of first sexual experience – 16.5 years and 18% young unmarried males had sexual experience at least once
- Condom use during last sexual encounter – 30% for married, 55% for unmarried
- 11% used sexual stimulants (Viagra, Yaba, herbal etc.) during sexual activity at least once

**“After consuming alcohol or Yaba, the body becomes hot. Then it is more enjoyable to have physical relation for a longer period.”** – A 19 year old unmarried male, Chattogram

### SRHR Perception



- 29% young males think that condom reduces pleasure
- 3% respondents believe to be at risk of HIV/AIDS
- 30% young males think that a female smoker or drinker is easily available for sex
- 28% young males agree that sexually transmitted diseases are a result of weak faith/curses/evil eye compared to 50% who disagree

**“The Tabeez (amulet) tied to my waist is for strength, to increases my sexual power.”** – A 23 year old married male, Sunamganj

### SRHR Health seeking behavior



- Only 6% males ever consulted doctor/nurse/health professional at least once
- Informal health care providers are (Kobiraj/Homeopathy/local pharmacy) are the most reported first points of contact for SRH problems, such as erectile dysfunction, wet dreams, genital ulcers
- Shyness was highly reported as a barrier to seek any sort of healthcare despite experiencing erectile dysfunction, urethral discharge, testicular swelling, semen leakage

**“I never went to the doctor for my early ejaculation problems during sex due to shyness. Later my friend got my medicines from a pharmacy.”** – A 17 year old unmarried male, student of class 10, Satkhira

### Daily activities Use of Technology



- Most males spend time in “adda” (86%), on an average 1.5 hours per day
- Only 23% read newspaper/magazines/books on a daily basis
- Average time spent on Facebook or other social media (through any device) is 1.7 hours per day
- 53% males played outside in the last seven days
- 91% have mobile phone access, of which 64% have access to a smartphone

### Risk Taking Behavior



- 28% respondents are currently smokers and average age of first smoke is 15.2 years,
- 47% smokers are between 21-24 years old
- In the last 6 months roughly 1.3% respondents consumed Yaba and 3.8% consumed alcohol

**“It is necessary to become a man. We are not girls, okay? Jail, death penalty – these are made for us. If we don’t do this, then it would be a waste of life”** – A 19 year old unmarried boy, Chattogram

### Attitude towards women



- 58% males agreed, “A man using violence against his wife is a private matter that shouldn’t be discussed with others”
- 60% males agreed, “A woman who has sex before she marries does not deserve respect”
- 43% males agreed, “Only when a woman has a child, she is a real woman”

### Masculinity and Gender roles

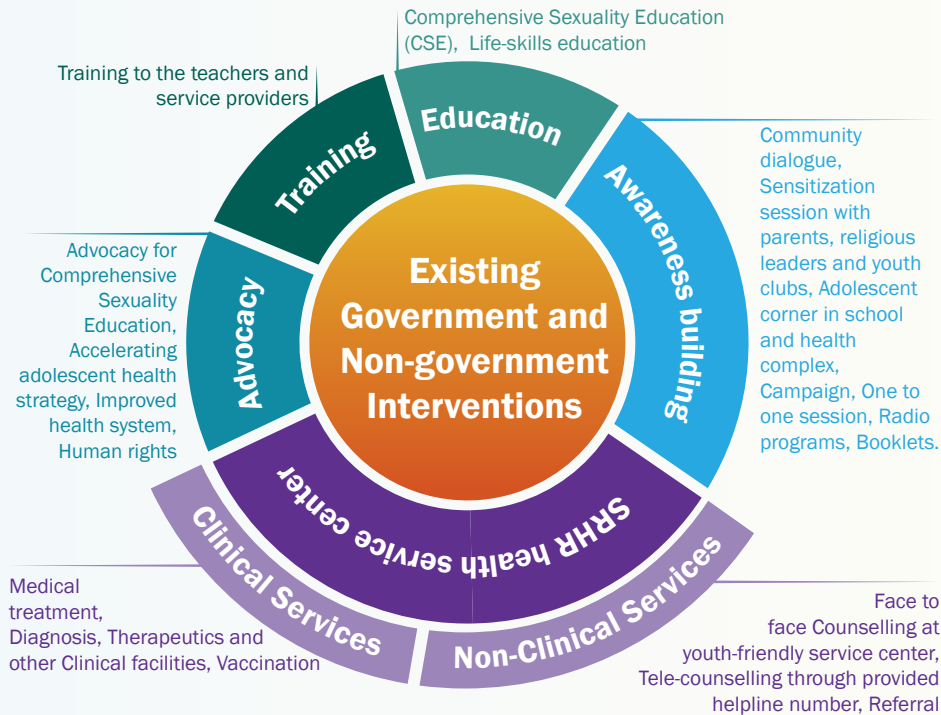


- 86% males agreed, “Being able to function sexually is important to me as a man”
- 54% males agreed, “A woman’s role is taking care of her home and family”
- 68% males agreed, “A woman should obey her husband in all things”

**“A person who is afraid to work, has no income, has no sexual energy, and so, is a KAPURUSH. He needs to be brave.”** – A 19 year old unmarried boy, Sunamganj

## Research Findings: Objective 2

### Existing SRHR intervention and Services



### Implementation Challenges

Demand Side	Supply Side
Community resistance against SRHR related discussions	Limited male focused interventions
Accessing SRH services by school going and employed male youth	Paucity of funds to ensure program sustainability
Male youths' reluctance towards accessing SRH services	Lack of skilled SRH service providers at health facilities
Inadequate knowledge and awareness regarding SRH among male youth	Absence of adequately skilled trainers and teachers at the field level and in schools

## Research Findings: Objective 3

### National Policies and Implementation

- 7<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan lacking adequate emphasis on SRHR indicators for men
- 4<sup>th</sup> HPNSP not including any specific guideline targeting young males
- Implementation strategy for the National Youth Policy 2017 lacks adequate focus on male SRHR issues
- Lack of coordination among implementing agencies

### SRHR Laws

- The age for male children not consistent (ranges from 14-18 years) across different acts and laws
- Males defined as only rape perpetrators by Section 375 (Penal Code)
- 16-18 years old male rape victims not addressed under Women and Children Repression Act 2000
- Forced sexual penetration on males denied by Section 377 (Penal Code)

### National Curriculum

- Male SRHR issues not equally and elaborately described in the textbooks compared to female SRHR issues
- Teachers not adequately sensitized to teaching SRHR issues
- SRHR sections of the textbooks mostly ignored in the classrooms and examinations
- While textbooks cover an array of topics on the subject, sexual abuse of male children remains completely ignored

## Recommendations

