

Male-Youth-Related Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Interventions in Bangladesh: Challenges of Program Implementation

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Abstract : Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are currently an area of neglect for males (aged 15-24 years) in Bangladesh. The lack of focus on the male youth population has consequences not only for their own health and wellbeing, but the patriarchal structure of Bangladeshi society and socio-cultural norms mean that the male population's SRH behavior can severely impact the lives of their female counterparts. A majority of sexual and reproductive health and rights-related research and interventions in the country are female-centric. Although the Government of Bangladesh has taken many initiatives to improve the SRHR of the general population, the male youth segment has not been prioritized in most of these interventions. There is an urgent need for male-youth-focused SRHR interventions in Bangladesh, but due to a lack of evidence-based research on this issue, there exist data gaps on how such interventions could be better designed and implemented. Therefore, to ascertain strategies for better program design and smoother implementation of male-youth-focused sexual and reproductive health and rights interventions, we carried out 25 key informant interviews with experts as well as focal persons involved in more than 20 ongoing and recently-ended SRHR-related interventions of national and international non-government organizations in which male youth were targeted or engaged. The results show that program implementers face several challenges at the field, organizational and policy levels. Some of the most common field challenges include high sensitivity to SRHR topics due to cultural reasons, difficulties in acquiring access to boys and young men due to their high mobility and engagement in labor for commercial purposes, as well as accessing them in hard-to-reach areas due to transportation and communication issues. Common organizational-level challenges include a lack of skilled manpower. Policy-level challenges include the prohibition of SRH service provision to unmarried adolescents and youth and lack of readiness of local governments to implement existing action plans. Some ways in which male-youth-focused SRHR interventions can be made more effective are through sensitization of service providers, awareness-raising at the community level to engage parents, advocacy to increase donor interest, and generating data on SRHR of male youth.

Keywords : Bangladesh, intervention, male, SRHR

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