



কোভিড-১৯ লার্নিং, এভিডেন্স
অ্যান্ড রিসার্চ প্রোগ্রাম



Covid-19 Learning, Evidence
and Research Programme

Research Project Summary

Effective Digital Health Platform for Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) Services: a Mixed-methods Approach to Understanding User Experiences, Needs, and Rights in Bangladesh

Project leads

Prof. Farzana Misha, BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University

Key personnel

Syed Hassan Imtiaz, Professor Sabina Faiz Rashid, Professor Dr. Md Tanvir Hasan, BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University

Expected project outcome

A multifaceted understanding of the role of digital health services during the COVID-19 pandemic and at present on adolescent and young adult with a focus on SRHR.

Setting the scene

Bangladesh has observed an exponential growth of digitised healthcare services since the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic. Although digital platforms have the potential to disseminate health information among adolescents and young adults, a cohort that has the highest internet usage rates in the country, these platforms can be unsafe for sharing sensitive health information in the absence of safeguards. This holds truer with regards to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) as the discussion of such topics are still considered a taboo and the practices mostly clandestine. Moreover, the risks for the marginalized and persecuted such as women, HIV positive individuals and members of the LGBTQ community are even greater.

While there have been several efforts to disseminate SRHR information via digital platforms by government, non-government, and private organizations, the designs of the efforts have not been grounded in evidence and their efficacy remains unknown. Digital health information currently available through unverified websites, social media, is often inaccurate and propagates common myths and misconceptions, creating confusion, anxieties, and even adverse health consequences. Furthermore, the user-friendliness, experience, and efficacy are also questionable. In parallel, the regulatory framework needs to keep pace to ensure

sufficient end-users' protection. It is therefore important to gain a better understanding of emerging and generally uncharted digital health landscape of Bangladesh.

Against this backdrop, this project intends to explore the users' experiences, factors influencing the decision to seek care from digital health platforms and services for SRH and identify the challenges experienced by adolescents and young adults (18-35 years old).

Methodological approach

Considering the sensitive nature of the focus of the study, we have proposed a mixed methods approach.

Research activities

- digital ethnography to understand how social media and digital Apps function concerning SRHR services
- quantitative survey targeting 800 men and women (18 to 35 yrs)
- 8-10 Focus Group Discussions, 15-20 in-depth interviews
- Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach to validate the research findings and generate specific recommendations for sustainable digital health system

Stakeholder engagement activities

- Validation workshops
- Dissemination events

Policy advocacy activities will be geared towards national policymakers, using team member's and BRAC JPGSPH's existing working relationships with government and NGOs, such as ranking officials from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, and A2i. We will also engage with members of the civil society such as Bangladesh Health Watch (BHW), where BRAC JPGSPH serves as the Secretariat, to advocate and facilitate research recommendations to influence existing policies. We will liaise with the academia to promote knowledge exchange and global digital health care research capacity building.

Proposed outputs include:

- Half-year narrative report
- Infographic sharing key messages
- Policy Briefing
- Video documentary
- Peer reviewed journal article

Our communication plan will leverage social media, the communication networks of the JPGSPH, and civil society partners and well as mass media outreach to arrange interviews with research participants.

Primary CLEAR theme: Innovations

Secondary CLEAR themes: Service delivery, accountability and governance, Rights of marginalized population