

The Effectiveness of Adolescent Development Program of Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) in Strengthening Awareness Regarding Social Issues among Rural Adolescent Girls in Bangladesh: An Empirical Study

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ABSTRACT The purpose of this study is to find out the effectiveness of Adolescent Development Program (ADP) of BRAC in elevating awareness regarding various social issues among poor rural girls in Bangladesh. The study focuses on rural adolescents, who are now able to change their outlook regarding various social phenomena of rural societies in Bangladesh. Through primary and secondary data it is identified that this program plays a very important role in awareness elevation among rural adolescents regarding various social issues that allow them to think differently about their life as a whole.

1. INTRODUCTION

The approach of Non- Government Organization, BRAC is regarded as the pioneer of target group strategy and participation of the poorest of the poor in programs directed towards their own development (Chowdhury 1996: 67). BRAC works with people whose lives are dominated by extreme poverty, illiteracy, diseases and other handicaps. BRAC firmly believes and is actively involved in promoting human rights, dignity and gender equity through poor people's social, economic, political and human capacity building. Although the emphasis of BRAC's work is at the individual level, sustaining the work of the organization depends on an environment that permits the poor to break out of the cycle of poverty and hopelessness (The Bangladesh Observer 30.05.06).

The Adolescent Development Program (ADP) trains adolescent BRAC school graduates, both girls and boys various social issues, vocational skills, health awareness including reproductive health, leadership, and culture and so on. ADP was launched in 1993 under education program. The issues of adolescence have recently emerged as a distinct phenomenon in the development discourse. However, it is a time when individuals learn to be socially responsible for themselves and for their actions (Bnacroft and Reinisch 1990

cited in Khan et al. 2003: 1). This study analyses the impact of Adolescent Development Program on rural adolescent girls in awareness elevation regarding social issues.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The core objective of this study is to identify the effectiveness of Adolescent Development Program of BRAC in strengthening awareness regarding social issues among rural adolescent girls in Bangladesh.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is based on quantitative data. This study is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative data. The combination of survey and case study methods has been used in this study. The author followed case study method in order to ensure validity of field data. Aminuzzaman (1991: 10) considers validity as the most important consideration for research. Validity is a descriptive term used as a measure that accurately reflects the concept that is intended to be measured. Validity is concerned with soundness of data and effectiveness of measuring instruments. Here the researcher can collect cross sectional data for intensive analysis of a person, a family or an institution emphasizing personal and social

factors in socialization. Abedin (1996: 53) viewed survey method is a technique of gathering information or data for making induction about the characteristics of a population/universe by observing only representative portion of them. In this study the researcher took survey method also.

3.1 Data Collection

The study was conducted on the basis of primary as well as secondary data. To collect primary data the author had to go to field. The three villages (Shampur Nogar, Nowdapara and Mahendra) have been chosen for fieldwork. The data were collected afresh, for the first time and are original in character. Chowdhury (2004: 21) views that the researcher may have methods by which data about other peoples' experiences and interpretations are collected.

3.2 Primary and Secondary Data

The author obtained obtain primary data through direct communication with the adolescent girls, which includes questionnaire, interviews, and observation as data collection techniques. Secondary sources for my research basically includes Different books written by scholars, Research reports, Journals, thesis and relevant publications, report of BRAC, Daily newspapers and relevant websites.

4. KEY CONCEPTS

4.1 BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee)

BRAC is an organization that has rapidly evolved over the last two decades. Its aim has been to empower the poor to alleviate their poverty. Started in 1972 to assist the settlement of returning refugees in sullah, sylhet, the focus of BRAC's program has continued to be the rural poor and those who hold the lowest position in the social system. . It has been claimed that by September 1994 BRAC covered more than 50 percent of the total villages (68,000) in Bangladesh by different programmes. (Rahman, 1995)

BRAC has expanded its services in micro finance, health, education, income generation, and small enterprise development. The program takes the best practices of BRAC in Bangladesh

and tailors its initiatives according to the needs of the Afghan people. At the end of 2004, BRAC Afghanistan had 2184 staff, of which 2033 were Afghans. In 2005 BRAC was registered in Sri Lanka to help the country back on its feet after it was hit by the recent, devastating Tsunami (www.brac.net)

4.2 Adolescent Development Program (A Part Of Education Program)

It is noteworthy to discuss details about Education Program, since Adolescent Development Program is one of the main parts of Education Program initiated by BRAC. Adolescent Development Program has been emerged in 1993 to make poor adolescent s aware regarding social, economic and cultural issues. BRAC also introduced a unique program named APON (Adolescent Peers Organized Network) to make Adolescent Development Program more comprehensive. The BRAC schools teach the same competencies as the government schools; however, they enroll and retain a higher proportion of hard-to-reach children, such as girls, who make up 65% of the student body. In 2002 BRAC opened its first international office, in Kabul, and is currently operating more than 90 schools for adolescent girls in rural Afghanistan. (<http://www.brac.net/education.htm>). The Adolescent Development Program trains adolescent BRAC school graduates, in vocational skills, social issues, health awareness including reproductive health and leadership (The Bangladesh Observer 30.05.06).

4.3 APON (Adolescent Peer Organized Network)

This is basically a five months course for the members of the Reading Centers. However, other interested persons including married adolescents are also welcomed. The course contains life skill issues that would teach the adolescents the facts about Issues that are taboos in traditional Bangladeshi society. The contents taught in the APON Program can be classified in four broad categories. These are Health, Environment, Legal and Social issues. This programme is running in 26 regions, and 3,260 courses have been completed so far. (Khan et al. 2003: 3). The main objectives of this course are to create awareness among adolescents' girls regarding Social issues,

Table 1: APON course

Main concept	Sub concepts under core concept
Social deviation and laws	• Trafficking • Sexual violence • Early marriage • Marriage registration and divorce • Dowry
Reproductive Health	• HIV/AIDs and sexual diseases • Knowledge about pregnancy • Family planning
Gender Rights	
Law	Different family laws

Law, Reproductive health, Sexual disease, Gender, Family law and to create opportunities in case of leadership and mental illumination (BRAC Education Report 2006)

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

Rashid (2000) wrote an article on “providing Sex Education to adolescents in rural Bangladesh: experiences from BRAC”. The author conducted his research on Adolescent Reproductive Health Education (ARHE) program (1995) which was taken by BRAC in order to provide information about reproductive health to adolescents in rural areas. Khan and Karim (2002) had a study on “Effects of Family life education in improving adolescents’ knowledge and attitude on reproductive health”. The main objectives of this research were to identify knowledge and behavior of adolescents about menstruation, marriage, HIV/AIDS, pregnancy, family planning etc and to specify different important matters like their functional behavior, if their health problem arise where they usually go, discussion about sexual matters with anyone, their willingness to know about reproductive health. Islam et al. (1993) made a study on “Effect of education on health, nutrition and overall development: A case of BRAC’s Nonformal Primary education (NFPE) in women’s health and development program

Table 2: Knowledge about social issues (Before and After)

Social issues	Total respondent	Before	%	After	%
HIV/AIDS	40	0	0%	40	100%
Early marriage	40	2	5%	38	95%
Dowry	40	1	2.5%	39	97.5%
Sexual violence	40	5	12.5%	35	87.5%
Drug addiction	40	0	0%	40	100.0%

Source: Field Survey by Author

(WHDP)”The main purpose of the study was to determine the effect of NFPE on adolescent girls in terms of health, nutrition etc. All of them found a very positive result of BRAC’s activities Most of the studies seem to test knowledge but not action, the other component of awareness. The above studies conducted by different researchers discussed mainly on health awareness than the other component of awareness. So, the author thinks the present study is highly rational.

6. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The author questioned adolescent girls regarding AIDS and most of them gave the right answers of my questions. The married adolescents are now very much aware about AIDS during sex. They do not allow their husband without condoms. 40(100%) adolescent girls told that they had much Knowledge about AIDS, HIV virus, adverse effect of AIDS, reasons of its spread ness, and the present condition of AIDS in Bangladesh and in the world after being participants of ADP. Two (5%) of them had their prior knowledge about the negative sides of early marriage and 38(95%) got their knowledge about it after their involvement this program. Only one of them had prior knowledge about different negative sides of dowry. And 39(97.5%) got their knowledge about it after joining this program. Only 5 of them had their prior knowledge about sexual violence and 35(87.5%) 40 have known after being a part of ADP. 40(100%) adolescent girls have known about different reasons and impact about drug addiction after being a member of ADP. Before their involvement very small number of adolescent girls knew about different social issues.

Most of the girls have a good knowledge about HIV but only 21 (52.5%) girl teach other married girls in the village about different aspects

Table 3: Question to test their willingness to share their knowledge with others about HIV, early marriage, dowry, and drug addiction.

Social issues	Total respondent	Yes	%	No	%
HIV/AIDS	40	21	52.5%	29	47.5%
Early marriage	40	35	87.5%	5	12.5%
Dowry	40	1	2.5%	39	97.5%
Sexual violence	40	2	5%	38	95%
Drug addiction	40	40	100%	0	0%

Source: Field Survey by Author

of AIDS and they also said that they must follow the measures of preventing AIDS after their marriage but only 19(47.5%) told that they don't teach or share with anyone though they have good level of knowledge. In case of early marriage the author found high level of awareness. In these case 40 girls got very good level of knowledge [received from prior data analysis] Among them 35 girls were very much aware about the drawbacks and negative impact of early marriage. One of them already protested against early marriage. Again they also know that a girl violate marriage law if she got marry before 18. Only 5 of them were not aware about it though they knew it has very adverse impact on body and mind of the young girl but they told that *"We are village girl and its our tradition to get marry early"* They again said that *"We are burden for our family"*. They were very eager to get marry though they were not 18. As most of them were aware so we can say that they have high awareness about early marriage.

About dowry the author has got a very interesting finding. All of them knew that dowry is a social deviation but only one of them told that she wouldn't give dowry. But 39(97.5%) girls thought that it is not a crime at all. One of them said *"rich people used to give gift in marriage but the word 'gift' turns into 'dowry' for the poor."* Most of them had a very good knowledge about sexual violence but only 2 of them protested against violence and advice others to be careful about it and they try to be very careful on the way whereas 38(95%) had no interest and courage to protest, they allow different comments on the way. Moreover they said that when a girl walks on the way it is very normal and common case. At last 40(100%) hated drug addiction and make other people aware about the negative impact of drug addiction.

So it can be clearly said that though the poor adolescent girls have high level of knowledge but they don't have their willingness to act according to their knowledge level.

The major findings regarding social issues are described below

- The adolescent girls got high level of awareness but their willingness to act level is not so strong.
- They have a good knowledge about social issues like HIV/AIDs, early marriage, dowry, sexual violence, and drug addiction etc. being participants of the program.

- The author has got a very interesting finding in case of dowry. Most of them got a high level of knowledge about bad impact of dowry but almost all of them told that it is not a crime at all. It is a very common incident in our society and they told that they would certainly give dowry in their marriage.
- After conducting a comprehensive research on Adolescent Development Program, it is obvious that this program has been able to create a positive impact on rural adolescents of Bangladesh in terms of their awareness rising regarding social issues.
- It is obvious that the adolescents are now much aware about the social issues after involve themselves in ADP. From exclusive interview with various adolescents it is proved that they have their own voice right now not only in their families, but also within their communities.
- Formerly these girls had no knowledge about AIDS. ADP made them aware about AIDS and they came to know the exact causes and consequences of AIDS after joining this program.
- The author has got good response about their awareness regarding early marriage. They have a very good knowledge and great willingness to protect them from curse of early marriage.

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

BRAC is considered to be one of the biggest and most diversified NGOs in the world. BRAC covers a vast array of functions around the country and it also spreads its function to overseas. The issues addressed by BRAC are most important in adolescent period. BRAC initiated Adolescent Development Program to address these issues and to make rural adolescents aware of it. BRAC officials also evaluate the performances of adolescent girls after completing "APON" course and give certificate to them on the basis of their performance. This study analyzes the awareness level of Adolescent girls regarding social issues. The study shows some limitations of Adolescent Development program. The author identifies some recommendations to mitigate those problems. Firstly BRAC officials should launch political awareness creating initiatives in Adolescent Development Program. As adolescents are the citizens of Bangladesh, voting is their national right. Rural adolescent

girls must have knowledge about central Government, Local Government, our political Parties and their culture. They must be informed about the benefit of election and democracy, as they are the future leader of our nation. Secondly BRAC need to launch more training programmes for adolescent leaders in order to develop punctuality, discipline, confidence and self-consciousness among them. They can also arrange different kinds of training programs for adolescent girls too. Thirdly as they have good knowledge level their willingness to act is too little. So, research should be conducted in this field to increase their awareness level. To conclude Adolescent Development Program should be seriously appreciated as it deals with adolescent girls who are truly sensitive part of our society.

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