

Getting Beyond the Unspoken and the Invisible: Research on Sexual Rights in Bangladesh

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Primary objectives of research

- Map constructions of sexuality and rights among mainstream and sexually marginalized groups
- To produce a contextualized understanding of sexual rights
- NOT the same as a **culturally relative version; not along the axis of west versus rest** but taking into account intersectionalities – inequalities and power relations, local, national and international.

Findings

Visibility and sexuality -- “deviant” behavior allowed if hidden. Religion not a big issue one way or the other.

- **No straightforward relationship between sexual practices and social identity. The reality is very messy and inconsistent.**
- MSM vs. Gay: Class lines evident. Self-identified gay men tend to be from more affluent backgrounds, more contact with the ‘west’ especially through the internet and other technology.
- Shomopremee versus Lesbian

Findings

- Access to knowledge on HIV/AIDs, STDs limited to friends and online resources (class factor significant; hit and miss)
- Public health campaigns inadequate – all focus on prevention. No way to know what services are available. Testing facilities exist but have no mechanism for drawing people in.
- On line interactions very important for information and community building.

Lessons

- Major challenges to Coalition building when we indulge in the politics of Othering;
- **Sustainable Rights based work cannot depend on identity politics**
- Important to track links and interests beyond group based identity politics
- Rights work must be situated within the framework of intersectionality so that alliance building becomes possible.

Research process

- Did not set out to do Action Research
- through the process of finding and gaining the trust of LBBT individuals, something happened.
- Centre has become a meeting and mediating place. Discussions, film screenings, offers help with advocacy and planning eg. Discussions on Section 377