Exploring the experiences of reproductive health and quality of life of adolescents living in the slums of Dhaka during the COVID-19 pandemic situation

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Background: COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the challenges for vulnerable adolescents, who, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, had reproductive health problems. There are limited studies on the reproductive health and quality of life of female adolescents living in slums during the COVID-19 pandemic. A cross-sectional study utilizing a mixed-method approach was done to explore this vulnerability.

Methodology: We investigated this study through a mixed-method approach on female adolescents aged 15-19 years and service providers residing in the Bauniabadh and the Ta block Jhil Par slums. The quantitative method included a household survey of adolescents (n=144) through a semi-structured pre-tested questionnaire. The qualitative approach included interviews with service providers (n=10) and adolescents (n=9).

Result: The study revealed changes in length, duration, and flow of menstruation, substandard menstrual hygiene practices, and impediments to adolescents' uptake of reproductive health (RH) information during the pandemic. Married pregnant adolescents were inclined to take their antenatal checkups (ANC) only during the last trimester and preferred delivery at home during the pandemic. There was also an increase in marriage among these adolescents, and service providers had difficulty providing door-to-door RH services. As most of our female adolescents were married off during the pandemic; they lost connection with their friends, making them feel lonely and secluded. They did not receive the support of their friends as before the pandemic.

Conclusion: The study will enable the adolescent health expert to focus on the sexual and reproductive health (SRH) of vulnerable adolescents living in impoverished conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, adolescents, slum, reproductive health, vulnerable, Bangladesh.

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