

**| AWARENESS |**

Despite resistance from general society, SRHR- Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights- is being introduced into classrooms across the nation. Many organisations and NGOs are attempting to improve adolescent lives from the lower-income group in the country by informing them about sexual health and rights, and psychosocial counselling.

"There are many government and non-government initiatives being taken for awareness building, but there are gaps to be bridged," says Dr Shuchi Karim, Gender and SRHR Specialist, Institute of Educational Development, BRAC. The importance of SRHR increases when an adolescent child reaches standard 6 at school at the age of 12. "Many Bangla Medium schools touch on the topic as a part of other subjects like Life Skills or Home Economics, and while the effort is commendable, there is still a lot left to be explored," she says. There are



Dr Shuchi Karim

organisations working on introducing SRHR into mainstream schools and institutions, but their main problem lies in convincing the adults. "Despite all that, most teachers are not trained or are unwilling and uncomfortable to discuss sex with children." Another obstacle are the parents, to whom, in most cases, the word 'sex' itself is unspeakable in front of children. "We need the parents to look at this as more of a subject of importance than a taboo," says Shuchi.

"Adolescents need counselling", stresses Dr Shuchi Karim. According to a conference she and her team held with adolescents from all walks of life and backgrounds, the children actually require a person who is non-judgemental. They want a confidante with whom they can discuss their sexual and bodily problems. "With that knowledge in mind, we introduced a 'shomaj shongi' (a social counsellor) into our school, Scope, where there is an after-school session of counselling for the children," says Karim.

The issue still persists in mainstream schools where in many cases, the parents have opposed to such a subject being

# SRHR FOR THE GOOD OF THE YOUTH

NAZIBA BASHER

DESPITE ALL THAT, MOST TEACHERS ARE NOT TRAINED OR ARE UNWILLING AND UNCOMFORTABLE TO DISCUSS SEX WITH CHILDREN.

introduced. "We need the parents to know that during adolescence the children need someone to talk to, more than anything," adds Karim. "The parents need to focus less on grades and more on their child's welfare, because a mentally depressed child can never attain the best of grades, no matter how much they study."

According to Karim's research, in countries like the Netherlands and the United States, SRHR has made a huge difference. "The Netherlands now has the lowest rate of teen pregnancy and teen STD cases," she says. "Their average age to

indulge in sex is also much higher than other countries because the state is helping the youth learn about the benefits and consequences through SRHR."

Dr Shuchi Karim also says that SRHR can teach children to respect themselves and their bodies. "SRHR can help them protect themselves, recognise sexual abuse and make better choices in life. While we are helping the youth with SRHR psychosocial counselling, we still need a stronger stance on the matter. The only piece of the puzzle left is counselling the parents." ■



PHOTOS: TOUSIF FARHAD

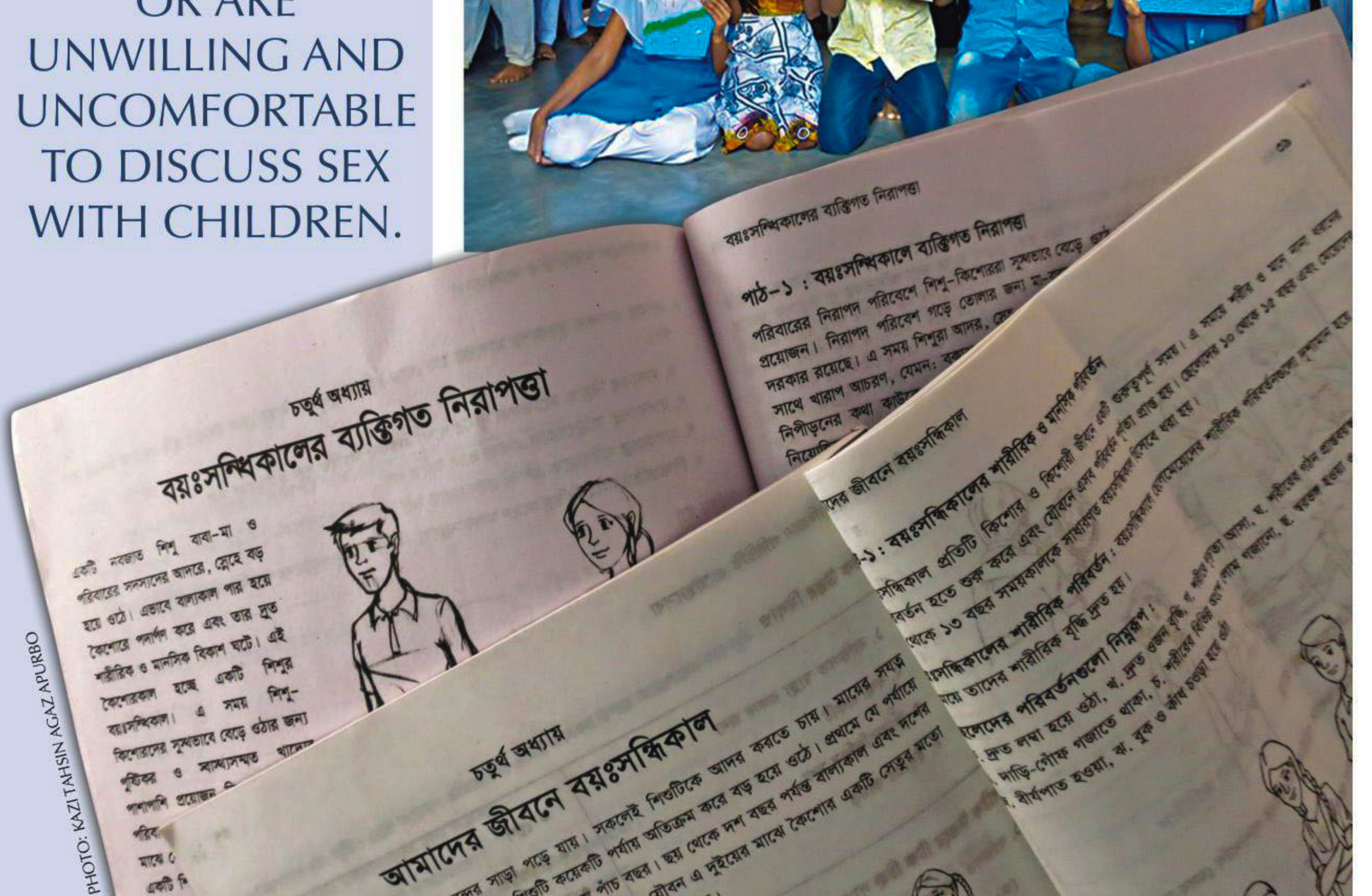


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