

A Review of Social and Behavior Change Programs Addressing Early Childbearing Among Very Young Adolescents in Bangladesh

Situation

High rates of adolescent childbearing contribute to poor economic, social, and health outcomes. Very young adolescent (VYA) mothers, aged 10–14 in particular, face higher-risk pregnancy complications, maternal mortality, and infant mortality. Although the Government of Bangladesh aspires for young people to delay childbearing to at least the age of 20, those aged 10–19 years old continue to experience pregnancy and childbearing.

What We Did

USAID's Agency for All Project synthesized learning on VYA social and behavior change (SBC) programming that contributes to reducing adolescent childbearing in Bangladesh. We identified gaps and developed actionable recommendations for strengthening programming. Our approach included:

- **A review** of evidence and program documentation relevant to VYA SBC and adolescent childbearing and its drivers in Bangladesh published between 2016 and 2022
- **Key informant interviews with experts** on VYAs to identify drivers of adolescent childbearing and programmatic responses in Bangladesh
- **Organizational mapping of organizations** that work with VYAs in Bangladesh to prevent early childbearing or address related drivers
- **Community consultations** with adults and VYA boys and girls to elicit insights on factors that drive early childbearing and recommended SBC strategies
- **Four solutions workshops** with representatives from youth-led organizations, civil society, local and international NGOs, and the Government of Bangladesh to engage participants in interpreting the findings and developing recommendations for SBC programming

What We Learned

- Very few SBC interventions in Bangladesh use tailored strategies to reach VYAs, especially for age 10–12.
- SBC programs do not consistently work across all levels of the socio-ecological model or address the normative determinants of adolescent childbearing.
- SBC programs that address adolescent childbearing are not intervening in the areas of greatest need and are not evolving to meet changing conditions, such as climate change and urbanization.
- The lack of evidence on VYA SBC programming in Bangladesh constrains the development and scale-up of programs and policies to reduce adolescent childbearing.

Impact

There is a need for increased investment in programs addressing early marriage—the primary driver of childbearing in VYAs—and helping young couples delay their first pregnancy. VYA SBC programs must be designed and implemented across the socio-ecological system to meet the greatest needs, adapt to changing conditions, and leverage opportunities in Bangladesh. We recommend more robust, systematic data collection with VYAs to better understand their needs alongside implementation research and evaluations, with the goal of scaling and institutionalizing programs in Bangladesh.

Snapshot

Location: Bangladesh

Duration: 2022–2023

Consortium Partners: Save the Children, Sambodhi

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