



ASHIRBAD

(Adolescent Sexual Health in Rural Bangladesh)

Meaning: Blessing (Bengali)

In 2015 LHCF applied for and received a grant from DFID (the UK Government's Dept for International Development) for LAMB to work in the area of Badarganj (population 250,000) to try and decrease child marriage.

It is the law of Bangladesh that marriage should not take place until 18, but without birth certificates, this has been unenforceable

LAMB already has some experience with this kind of work, using group discussions to encourage adolescents to delay their marriage, but had previously found that it was really important to include their parents and the community leaders (e.g. marriage registrars and the religious leaders), to support their young people and to understand the reasons for this proposed change. It comes at a time when it is easier for girls to attend school, and the traditional need for a huge dowry (to allow the boy's parents to look after and feed a new bride) is decreasing.



An Adolescent Facilitator teaching a group of boys

Girls group, meeting on a veranda, with an Adolescent Facilitator



Advantages of later marriage / increased age at the first pregnancy include;

- adolescent girls are able to continue at school for longer
- domestic violence in the home is less likely
- there are less risks for mother and child in pregnancy and delivery
- their children are less likely to be malnourished



*Silas—
Project
Manager in
Badarganj*

The project will run for 3 years (it started in August 2015), and although this is a very short time to effect culture change, a lot has already been done.

There are now 1200 groups of an average of 20 teenagers (age 11-14 or 15-18), meeting monthly and working through 16 modules all about the different aspects of being a teenager. 20 Adolescent Facilitators (AFs) have been trained up to lead these groups. The AFs also go into schools and assist whole day sessions put on in every area for parents, leaders of the mosques, local government officials, etc. Dramas are held in each area acting out what happens when a girl is married when she is too young. Local health care staff are being trained and encouraged to talk with adolescents about problems, and if they are already married, about contraception, and good care when they become pregnant.

Because of devaluation of sterling against the Bangladesh taka, LHCF will be sending money towards the shortfall; if you would like to contribute please use our address and/or bank details at the bottom of this letter and mark your donation with your name and 'ASHIRBAD'



The 16 modules being taught including changes in puberty, relationships to parents, family planning etc



At LAMB hospital – a 15 year old mother with a premature baby



An Adolescent Counsellor with a client

With the help of village health volunteers we are recording the age of any young children or mothers that die during deliveries, the number of pregnancies in teenagers, and the use by teenagers of health facilities. We are hoping to see improvements in all these areas. *(Rosemary Croft, LHCF Chair)*



One of the modules being taught at a boys school

The adolescents in the groups often present dramas to their villages, drawing huge crowds

