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child
marriage**
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PROVIDING COUNSELLING AND AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Anwasha counsellors are a crucial point of contact between adolescents and the public health delivery system. They help adolescents to share their needs/issues and work collectively to resolve the same. Sumita Kumar Sen is an Anwasha counsellor working in Barabazar block of Purulia district since 2008. She spends four days a week taking sessions for target families and the remaining two days to visit schools, Anganwadi Centres and Village Health and Nutrition Days (VHND). Her field visits entail dialoguing with different stakeholders, identifying girl child populations and finding out if they are going to school, if they have recently dropped out or been married. Sumita receives regular training at the state and district level in improved interpersonal and community dialoguing techniques that make it easy to reach out to adolescents and facilitate behaviour change. Training has also helped her to realise the importance of her role within the community and how she can make an impact.

The efforts and dedication of counsellors like Sumita has strengthened the Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK) programme, improved functioning of adolescent friendly health clinics (AFHCs) and most importantly become a pillar of support for adolescent girls.

“ We have to build a relationship of trust and that can take time, sometimes months. Many girls are not just shy or uncomfortable talking to outsiders but also scared of being reprimanded or punished for betraying the confidence of parents or elders. Hence a good and empathetic counsellor who can look at each case independently is important. ”

*Sumita Kumar Sen
Anwasha counsellor, Barabazar block*

Sumita’s ultimate goal was to get adolescent girls and their families to attend meetings and share experiences about their personal circumstances which they may not be able to share with their own family including reproductive and sexual health, menstrual irregularities, pregnancy, contraceptive use, nutrition, anaemia, mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence, eve teasing and sexual harassment (within and outside the home).



Key elements

Counsellors ensure that sensitisation sessions are held with the local police and legal officers so that girls can have a positive experience when they approach them through the counsellors.

In the spirit of collaboration, the police works jointly with the Block Development Officer (BDO) to stop child marriage.

Special “Behaviour Change Community Groups” have also been formed where counsellors maintain list of girls who were subjected to child marriage and reach out to involve them in adolescent group meetings and community activities.

Interactions with schools and class teachers have led to more adolescents being referred for counselling in Barabazar block.