



Intervention: Couples Counseling & Couples Events

Inspiring Married Adolescent Girls to Imagine New Empowered Futures (IMAGINE)

ABOUT IMAGINE

With support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, CARE is **testing a package of interventions that hold promise for delaying the timing of first birth among married adolescents in Niger and Bangladesh**. IMAGINE takes a holistic approach to build married girls' capacity and agency to make decisions about their life courses, to address social and structural barriers that prevent delaying, and to present alternative economic opportunities for girls so that early motherhood is not their only option. We aim to **document and share learning** from this initiative to build the evidence base of adolescent childbearing globally.

Couples Counseling and Couples Events

A couple's need for accurate information, skills, and access to health services that allow them to delay first birth begins at the moment of their marriage. In order to address this need, in Bangladesh, **Couples Counseling** provides private, personalized counseling to newly married girls and their husbands. Trained facilitators deliver a nine-session, interactive curriculum in the couple's home over a three-month period. Sessions combine financial planning with sexual and reproductive health and rights topics, including social norms reflection, to empower couples with the ability to set a joint vision for their family. Some sessions also include extended family members, such as the mother-in-law, in order to reduce potential backlash and engage them in the couple's journey.

As part of counseling, frontline health workers periodically visit newlyweds in their home to provide additional information on family planning and strengthen the couple's link to the formal health system. In addition, couples also receive a **Newlywed Kit** that includes family planning information, condoms, and activities to support couples' communication and joint decision-making.

As the counselling sessions progress, couples are invited to participate in **Couples' Events**, community-based activities such as performances and cooking competitions to promote supportive social norms around gender equality and timing of first birth. Through these activities, the project aims to build community-level buy-in for delayed first birth as well as to build a social support system amongst couples considering delaying.

Key **couples counseling materials** in both English and Bangla include:

- Couples Counseling flipbook + Visioning board activity
- Prosperous futures game

Upon finalization, all project tools will be accessible at:

<https://www.care.org/our-work/health/adolescent-health/imagine/>



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Implementation timeframe: January 2019 – October 2020

Donors: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Participants: The project will reach married and unmarried adolescent girls ages 15-19, their husbands, families and communities, as well as health workers in Kurigram District, Bangladesh and Zinder Region, Niger.

Couples Counseling by the numbers:

- More than 344 couples will participate in couples counseling sessions
- 35 couples' events throughout the duration of the project

Key project Components:

- Girls' Collectives
- Health Worker Transformation
- Livelihoods Training
- Fada Groups (Niger only)
- Community Reflective Dialogues (Niger only)
- Couples Counseling and Couples Events (Bangladesh only)

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