

Story from the field:

A Reflection on Choice

Shawpna Aktar is 15 years old and a member of a Tipping Point group at Kukraporshi fun center. Kokraporshi is a village of Jamalganj Upazila under Sachna Bazar Union. It has one government primary school. 80% of its children are school going, but issues related to sexuality/ sexual health is not a subject of discussion in the schools. **Suraiya Sultana, Project Officer at CARE Bangladesh, shares Shawnpa's story:**



I thought my mother and I were great friends, until I got news from someone else. I was terribly disturbed to know that my mother was expecting another baby. I am 15 years old and in class 9 in Sachna Bazar high school. I have two younger brothers. My youngest brother is 7 years old. Being the only daughter of my parents, I know I was a pampered child. My mother is 35 years old and she is a homemaker, while my 40 year old father works as a mason. He also sells seasonal fruits sometimes and has a temporary shop at Sachna Bazar.

I was very close to my mother as I used to share everything with her. I shared every discussion at the [Tipping Point] fun center with her, especially the taboo issues of menstruation. I told her how important it is to practice personal hygiene during menstruation. I also shared things that normally would only be shared with friends my age, like which boy likes me and which one teases me! I felt free and comfortable to share those stories with her and I loved that she valued my choice and opinion.

How could she hide her pregnancy from me when I thought we were friends! That news made me embarrassed. People from our neighborhood had started stigmatizing me by saying that I am already old enough to be married off! Some ridiculed us to our faces saying that it seems mother and daughter would be pregnant at the same time. I felt ashamed and started misbehaving with my parents, especially with my mother. I stopped sharing my life with her. I felt threatened at school and kept looking for reasons to be absent.

Then one day, I shared my distress with Arifa apa (Field Facilitator, Tipping Point Initiative). She helped me recall a fun center session named “sexual and reproductive rights”. She did not tell me anything but just asked me questions about what makes me feel bad. We recollected from the session about every person’s right to take decision about their own life, such as when she or he will have baby. It is not a matter of shame, but rights lived by someone. Then I realized that I was mistaken. My mother did nothing wrong. My parent had their rights to take a decision about it. I felt guilty about my misbehavior with my mother. I promised myself

that I will take good care of my mother from that moment. Later on, I became friends again with mother. By that time my mother had become physically very weak. I started to help her in the household chores. I helped her cook and take care of my younger siblings. I felt confident and happier and soon, I again started attending school regularly. At this point my relationship with my mother was recreated. We stitched tiny kantha (a Bengali traditional quilt) together for the new baby.

Sadly, my mother had a miscarriage. She had to be admitted to a hospital for 10 days. Though she is discharged from the hospital she continues to be weak, physically and emotionally. I am her friend at home, and I am sure she will recover fast as I take care of her needs. Fun center sessions really helped me to reflect on my own behavior in conforming to the societal norms of discrimination. Without those sessions' learning I was not able to realize the situation and become a pillar of support to my mother.