

# Applying evidence-based adolescent sexual and reproductive health practices for youth and adolescents in real life: Opportunities, gaps, and challenges in Nepal

Sangita Khatri,<sup>1</sup> Shannon Pryor,<sup>2</sup> Gehanath Khanal,<sup>1</sup> Melanie Yahner<sup>2</sup>

## BACKGROUND

Improving health and development outcomes for adolescents and youth is a top priority for the Government of Nepal. However, despite a strong multi-sectoral policy framework, many adolescent family planning (FP) and reproductive health (RH) outcomes in Nepal have stagnated.

A common understanding of the challenges limiting progress in adolescent FP/ RH outcomes and identification of opportunities to strengthen future programs is needed as Nepal continues efforts to improve these outcomes.

## PROGRAM INTERVENTION

The USAID-funded Research for Scalable Solutions (R4S) project conducted a landscape analysis of adolescent and youth FP/ RH projects in Nepal to understand how these projects have applied evidence-based approaches and interventions. This activity intended to shed light on how projects might adjust program strategies using the evidence-base, to better address the current stagnation in adolescent outcomes and inform future efforts.

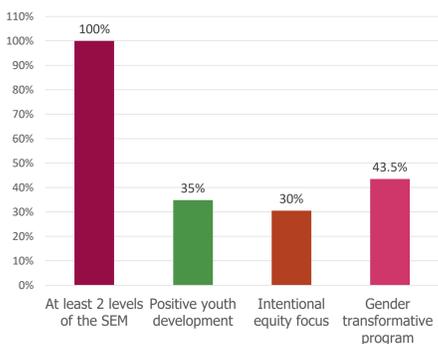
## KEY FINDINGS

### APPLICATION OF EVIDENCE-BASE IN NEPAL

Twenty-three projects met the inclusion criteria. All five evidence-based approaches were in use in Nepal to varying degrees.

A promising finding is that every project reviewed implemented interventions across at least two levels of the socio-ecological model. A third of the projects applied some elements of positive youth development, with a primary focus on skill-building, improving knowledge through curricula, and empowering young people.

**FIGURE 1. Application of evidence-based approaches by projects reviewed**



## PROGRAM IMPLICATIONS

While the application of evidence-based strategies in Nepal reveal strong foundations on which to build, there is room for improvement. Results point toward the need for a more tailored packaging and application of global ASRH evidence and coordination at the country level.

Dissemination of the evidence base can support adolescent health efforts in Nepal to be aligned with proven practices. Improving familiarity with evidence-based concepts will strengthen their use. ASRH and FP subcommittee meetings can be utilized to regularly disseminate evidence, reflect on progress and foster dialogue within the adolescent health community on emerging evidence, applying the evidence, and the theory/concepts behind some of the key adolescent health approaches so they are used more effectively.

The landscape analysis revealed an inconsistent investment in rigorous evaluations of adolescent FP/ RH efforts and underscores the need for more systematic prioritization of learning, research, and evaluation efforts in donor-funded projects. A recently developed national research and learning agenda... will contribute to achieving the objectives of the National Adolescent Health and Development strategy will aid this effort.

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## METHODOLOGY

The objectives of the assessment were to:

- 1) Assess the current landscape of FP/RH programs for adolescents and youth to understand alignment with evidence based approaches and interventions.
- 2) Understand perspectives of stakeholders regarding evidence gaps and needs, challenges, and successful approaches, for FP/RH for adolescents and youth
- 3) Identify gaps in the nat'l evidence base re: adolescent and youth FP/RH to guide future research priorities

Qualifying projects were implemented in Nepal between 2015 and 2020 and had at least one FP/RH objective targeting adolescents. We considered (1) health and non-health projects, and reviewed the annual report from each line ministry to identify projects related to adolescents and youth, (2) reviewed documents including program reports, briefs, or evaluations available online, or acquired through follow-up with the implementing organization, and (3) conducted key informant interviews (KIIs) with sixteen stakeholders, including adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH) experts, project managers, decision makers, donors, and youth activists.

in designing the FP/RH programs, and self-care in family planning.

**TABLE #1. Five evidence-based approaches reviewed**

No	Evidence based approaches
1.	Socio-ecological model
2.	Positive youth development
3.	Attention to equity
4.	Gender transformative approaches
5.	Multisectoral efforts

Five evidence-based approaches reviewed were (1) socio-ecological model, (2) positive youth development, (3) attention to equity, (4) gender transformative approaches, and (5) multisectoral efforts. A limitation of this activity is that there is no assessment or independent evaluation of the program outcomes.

**"Adolescents and youth are not properly engaged during designing, planning and implementation of ASRH FP programs. Majority of programs/ projects are designed by adults, so the needs of adolescents in such program are not matched."** – KII 12-A, highlighting a weakness in programming strategies for meaningful youth engagement.

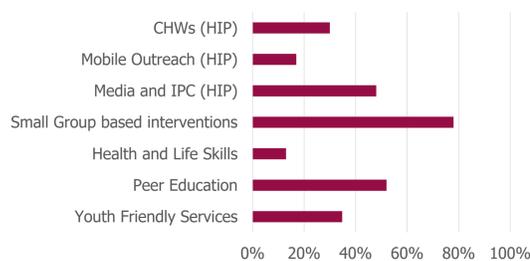
Seven of the projects included an intentional focus on equity (beyond age). Fewer than half of the projects applied a gender-transformative approach. Of those, 80% also used a gender-synchronized approach.

### INTERVENTIONS USED BY PROJECTS IN DESK REVIEW

The five evidence-based approaches used to frame this analysis each comprise multiple interventions. We analyzed which interventions were implemented, based on evidence of what is and is not effective.

In figure #2, application of different interventions (evidence-based and ineffective).

**FIGURE 2. Interventions used by the projects reviewed**



KII informants showed a strong understanding of the importance of multisectoral efforts to achieve ASRH outcomes, which aligns with the emphasis Nepal's *National Adolescent Health and Development Strategy (2018)* places on multisectoral engagement. Peer education is generally shown to be ineffective on FP/ RH outcomes among target adolescents, but was used in 52% of projects reviewed. Thirty-four percent of projects reviewed implemented youth-friendly health services (YFHS), in line with the government strategy. However, the strategy, while a promising approach to create safe space for adolescents, experience in multiple settings has shown that they are rarely sustainable without donor resources.

### AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

- <sup>1</sup> Save the Children International Nepal  
<sup>2</sup> Save the Children US

### CONTACT INFORMATION FOR LEAD AUTHOR (24 PTS.)

Sangita Khatri, Health Advisor,  
Sangita.Khatri@savethechildren.org

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20-year-old Bipana holds her 3-year-old son Sushant outside of their family home on Monday, May 7, 2018 in the Kapilvastu region of Nepal. Bipana was married at a young age to her husband Subash, as a result of an unintended pregnancy.

PHOTO CREDIT: Victoria Ziegler for Save the Children

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