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**BASELINE SURVEY ON
SEXUALITY AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH
AWARENESS, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICE OF
ADOLESCENTS/YOUTHS IN FIVE FPAN PROJECT
DISTRICTS**

Submitted to:

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Executive Summary

The main objective of the study was to obtain basic information regarding reproductive health knowledge, attitude, and practice of adolescents/youths of the FPAN working areas for ensuring improved reproductive health status of women, men, and adolescents/youths aged 10-24 years.

This study covered FPAN's five project districts namely, Kavre, Dang, Kailali, Achham and Kanchanpur. A total of 1,881 adolescents/youths from 914 households of 25 sampled VDCs were selected from these five districts. Similarly, 250 community members were also contacted. The data collection work was carried out during January-February, 2000.

Of the total adolescents/youths included in the study, 854 (45.4%) were males and the remaining 1,028 (54.6%) were females. Nearly 71% of the adolescents/youths were 10-18 years of age, and the remaining 29% were between 19 and 24 years of age. Overall 71% of the adolescents/youths were unmarried, and 29% were currently married. Approximately 23% of the adolescents and youths were reported as illiterate. More than half (54.9%) of the adolescents/youths were students, of them 67% were boys.

The majority of the total adolescents/youths, 63% of both sexes, were able to name the male and female sexual organs. Less than half of them regarded menstruation as a natural change in females. Generally, girls are kept in isolation at the time of their first menstruation. The majority of the adolescents and youths believed it was sinful to touch a male during menstruation.

The adolescents and youths defined puberty as a stage after the age of 13-14 years. The majority of adolescents from both sexes (84.1%) had some knowledge of the term "conception". *To conceive a baby in uterus* was mentioned by the large proportion as the definition of conception. Nearly three-quarters of the respondents of both sexes said that pregnancy occurred from union between males and females.

The majority (78.3%) of the adolescents/youths believed parents should decide when and with whom to get married. Over 70% of the adolescents/youths believed both husband and wife should decide jointly on the issues related to childbirth, choice and use of family planning methods, and selection of health facilities during childbirth.

The majority (88.8%) of the adolescents and youths believed it was the right of the parents to educate their children on sexuality, reproductive health, and family planning issues. Slightly less than half of them also mentioned the discrimination practices between boys and girls.

About half of the adolescents and youths believed 20 years as the best age of marriage for girls and about 22 years for boys. More than half of them thought early marriage was not good because girls would not be mature enough for marriage. The majority of them also preferred an arranged type of marriage.

The majority of the adolescents/youths thought the ages of 20-22 years as appropriate to have the first childbirth and a higher percentage of them thought 5 years as the ideal length of spacing between two births.

The majority of the community members (71.2%) believed teenage pregnancy as one of the frequently faced problems by adolescents/youths in their community. A very high percentage of

the community members also agreed that various forms of sexual abuses such as girls trafficking, sexual harassment, rape, and incest were prevalent in their community.

More than two-thirds (68.1%) of the adolescents/youths never had sexual intercourse. Among those having experienced sexual intercourse, the majority was between the ages 15 to 18 years. For the majority of them "spouse" was their first sexual partner. A large majority had their first child between the ages 16-20 years. More than half of them had not experienced any problems at the time of delivery of the first child.

Approximately 64% of the adolescents and youths reported to have heard about abortion and almost all of them mentioned "home" as the usual place for abortion to be performed. A very high percentage of community members (78.4%) agreed to the legal prohibition of abortion.

The vast majority of the adolescents and youths had knowledge about antenatal and postnatal care and were very positive about the use of the services.

A large proportion of the adolescent/youths and community members were found to be aware of family planning. Radio was the main source of information about family planning for the majority of the adolescents and youths as well as community leaders.

Over half of the adolescents and youths had heard about STDs. More than 95% of the adolescents/youths were found to be aware of at least one precautionary measures against STDs transmission. The majority of community leaders and the adolescents and youths also had heard of HIV/AIDS and its mode of transmission. Radio was reported to be the major source of information about STDs and HIV/AIDS.

• Less than half of the adolescents and youths had heard of sex education. The majority (80.8%) of them suggested *radio* as an appropriate media for providing sex education. Almost all (>99%) of the community members also agreed that adolescents/youths should be given education on sexuality, reproductive health, and family planning. School was suggested as the most appropriate medium for providing sex education to the adolescents/youths by the community members.

About 59% of the adolescents and youths respondents reported health post, 47% private clinic, 43% sub health post, and about 37% mentioned government hospital as the sources of SRH health services facilities.

Only a small proportion (6.0%) of the community members reported that some clubs working in the community focussed on adolescents/youths sexuality and reproductive health/family planning issues. One-third of the community members also reported that some NGOs/INGOs are focusing on adolescents/youths sexuality, reproductive health, and family planning issues in the community.

• About one third of the adolescents and youths (26.5% males and 46.6% females) said a change was necessary for the better provision of information and services to adolescents/youths. About two out of three suggested that participation of adolescents/youth in the program through increased motivation, while 49% of them were of the opinion that information and services should be provided individually through the community based health workers/volunteers.

The findings of the study put forwards the following recommendations:

- The program should focus on providing education to the adolescents/youths on basic concepts and mechanisms of SRH such as puberty, menstruation, and reproductive physiology. This education program should also address the issues of sexual discrimination and sexual abuse.
- In order to minimize the prevailing practices leading to the discrimination between sons and daughters, efforts should be made to educate the community, parents, and adolescents/youths regarding the negative effects of such practices in the society especially to the girls.
- The program should focus on educating teenagers as well as their parents about the social, economic, and health related implications of teenage pregnancy on adolescents, parents, and the community itself. More emphasis needs to be given for delaying the first birth through such educational programs.
- The study shows that most of the deliveries of the adolescents/youths took place at home, without the assistance from trained health personnel. Hence, efforts should be made by the program to motivate couples through proper counseling in receiving the services from the trained health personnel.
- The large proportion of the adolescents/youths were not aware of the components included in antenatal and postnatal services. Hence, the program personnel/volunteers should provide adequate knowledge about the type of these services, including benefits for the health of both mother and child.
- A sizeable proportion of the adolescents/youths were unaware of STDs and HIV/AIDS. Therefore, the program should encompass these issues in its IEC component focussed to the adolescents and youths.
- The study finding reveals that almost all the adolescents and youths (98.2%) expressed their interest in getting sex education from radio, school, home visits, group meeting and street drama. Therefore, the program personnel/volunteers should be actively mobilized to educate the adolescents and youths through door-to-door visit, organizing group meetings, and performing street drama at the community level.
- The study also indicates poor contribution and support from the side of parents and the community on SRH education to the adolescents and youths. Hence, the program should motivate parents and community on these issues mobilizing FPAN volunteers.
- The study showed that only a small proportion (19%) of the adolescents and youths had ever visited the health facilities to get SRH/FP services. This finding clearly shows the need of motivating adolescents/youths to use health facilities for receiving SRH/FP services.