A Survey of Teenagers in Nepal

Executive Summary

Background

This Knowledge, Attitude, Practice and Skills Survey forms the basis for a UNICEF communication initiative for young people in Nepal. The findings provide rich insight into their inner world and daily issues for two creative edutainment programmes being produced for nationwide broadcast: "Chatting with My Best Friend," a year-long radio chat show and "Catmandu," a television drama series that sets role models to inspire teenagers with positive action. Media outreach is accompanied by a Life Skills Facilitator's Guide to induce discussions, possibly through a national network of youth clubs.

Purpose / Objective

This survey was conducted with the aim of constructing a profile of Nepalese teenagers between ages 12-18, for the development of their life skills. The survey attempts to determine teenagers' ability to cope with issues and changes that arise in adolescence. The ultimate goal is for UNICEF and its partners to devise effective programmes to raise teenagers' capacity for long-term prevention of HIV/AIDS.

Methodology

A total of 1,400 teenagers randomly selected from across Nepal's five development regions were interviewed and their answers analyzed. The sample had an equal number of girls and boys, 723 were from urban centers and 677 from rural areas.
Key Findings and Conclusions

In terms of life skills, the study reveals a high degree of self-awareness among Nepalese teenagers. An overwhelming majority of teenagers (92%) had a clear goal for their future. Further, those with a lower level of education were realistic about their goal setting and knew what was achievable.

Seventy percent of girls had encountered discrimination at home. However, more educated girls were less likely to feel powerless when encountering discrimination and more likely to think critically about their rights. Girls of Indo-Aryan groups had experienced a higher degree of gender discrimination than those from other groups. This is likely to stem from religious and caste social customs, which give priority to boys. It is clear that gender discrimination is far more entrenched in rural than in urban society.

Interpersonal skills were poorly developed amongst teenagers interviewed. Nearly half of the respondents had not communicated their worst fear with others. Many teenagers kept their fear to themselves and were unable to articulate it. Although most teenagers trusted their mother, few had confided in her.

Most teenagers lacked sufficient skills to stand up to bullies. There is a direct correlation between the level of education and the ability to stand up for yourself in a conflict situation. Many teenagers gave up in conflicts with parents, peers or bullies without making an attempt to defend their own opinions. The findings show that education makes a difference in bringing out a proactive attitude among teenagers in resolving conflicts with parents.

There is a gap between educated and illiterate teenagers in their capacity to communicate and make responsible decisions. It is evident that education empowers young people to think critically and positively, and increases their confidence to communicate with others and in taking action to solve their problems.

The findings show that most teenagers are able to recognize the problems in their own lives and
Despite this, there is a clear need to strengthen their communication skills and decision-making and problem-solving abilities. While there is a sense of powerlessness and lack of confidence among teenagers in solving social problems, they do demonstrate a positive spirit in solving smaller, personal problems.

Although 53% felt that they would have to obey their parents' decision on marriage, this figure shows a considerable shift in the thinking of Nepalese society. The fact that 47% felt that they could make a choice, albeit mainly more educated and urban teenagers, indicates that there is a growing sense of freedom in the choice of marriage partner. More girls (63%) than boys (42%) felt that parents had the final say on their future partner. This shows that girls have less freedom in making decisions about their own lives. However, boys felt greater pressure than girls in keeping with the Nepal tradition that a boy is worth educating whereas a girl will marry and belong to her husband's family.

Although few teenagers consumed alcohol on a regular basis, more than one in ten teenagers (13%) admitted that they had taken drugs. However, half of them had inhaled drugs (56.1%). Overall, only 5.4% injected drugs but, regionally, there is an injecting drug problem in Sunsari as well as the urban centers of Kaski (Pokhara) and the Kathmandu valley.

The findings show that Nepalese teenagers are highly aware of HIV risk, but this awareness does not guarantee safe-sex behavior. Although an overwhelming majority (92%) of teenagers have heard of HIV/AIDS, only 74% of teenagers knew that they should use condoms when having sex, and only two-thirds (69%) could say that they should not have sex with commercial sex workers.

The study shows that almost 20% of teenagers considered premarital sex as proper. One in five boys and nearly one in ten girls interviewed had had a sexual experience. Sixty-five percent of boys said that they had used condoms while 74% of girls said that their partners used a condom during sexual intercourse. Unprotected sex led to a 14% pregnancy rate and a 22% sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) infection rate in boys and 13%
rate in girls.

Most teenagers said they were interested in learning more about sex and sexual health. They wanted more information about STDs/HIV/AIDS and safe sex. Radio and television were the best sources of information on HIV/AIDS. Clubs, too, were good places to learn about sex and HIV/AIDS. These are all methods of learning without parental knowledge.

**Recommendations**

None

NOTE: Please contact Lourdes San Agustin at lsanagustin@unicef.org if you would like to see the full report. It is too large to attach.