

# Knowledge, perception and behavior of adolescents on food and nutrition in Udayapur District, Nepal

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SABAL: SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR RESILIENCE & FOOD SECURITY

## Background

- The problem of underweight (body mass index [BMI] <18.5 kg/m<sup>2</sup>) as well as anemia is high among the adolescent girls in Nepal - 30.3 % and 43.6% respectively (NDHS 2016)
- Compared to their male counterparts, adolescent girls have an increased need for iron to support their growth and to compensate the losses due to menstruation.
- Higher prevalence of malnutrition and anemia among this adolescent girls not only affects their own health, it may contribute to an intergenerational cycle of poor health and nutritional status.

## Aim

- To conduct qualitative research to explore the knowledge, behaviors and practices regarding food, nutrition, health among adolescent girls in Udayapur district of Nepal.
- Generate qualitative evidence to inform the formulation or revision of policies and guidelines on adolescent health and nutrition.

## Ethics

- Informed written Consent was taken from all participants.
- In case of subjects < 18 years, additional informed consent was taken from father/mother.
- The research received ethical approval from Nepal Health Research Council.

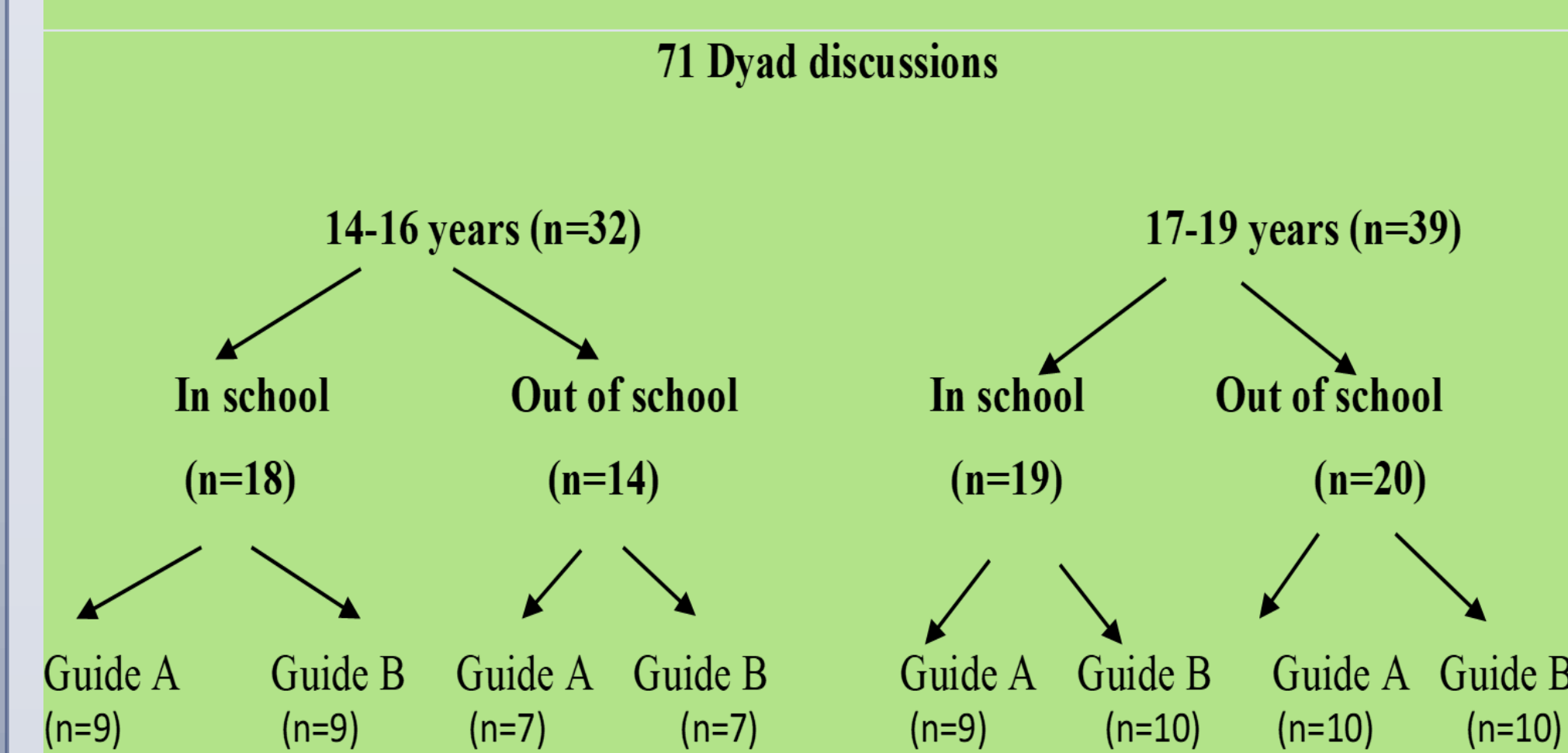


FGD respondents reviewed consent form prior FGD

## Methods

- Research using qualitative methods conducted in three VDCs of Udayapur district.
- Listing of VDCs in Udayapur district with at least two schools: one secondary and one higher secondary.
- Three VDCs from this list were randomly selected.
- Data were collected through:
  - Dyad discussion with the adolescent girls** ages 14-16 years and 17-19 years old girls, both in-school and out-of-school.
  - In-depth interviews (IDIs)** with fathers of adolescents girls participating in dyad discussion.
  - Focus group discussions (FGD)** with teachers from the selected schools
  - Key informant interviews (KII)** with head teacher of the selected school and with FCHVs and health workers in the selected ward and VDCs.

### Flowchart showing selection of the Dyad participants



### Dyad discussion process:

- Peer researchers from local communities were trained to conduct dyad discussion.
- 18-20 year-old girls from the secondary schools interviewed the adolescents ages 14-16 years,
- 20-21 year-old girls from higher secondary levels interviewed the adolescent girls ages 17-19 years
- The first in-school participant was randomly selected from the school attendance register. The selected participant was asked to select her companion for dyad discussion.
- Similar process was followed for out-school dyad discussion. FCHV, school teachers and father of in-school girls were consulted to make a list of potential participants.

## Selected Results and Discussion

### Perception about the most nutritious food:

- Dyad participants cited dark green leafy vegetables as the most nutritious and healthy food, followed by meat, legumes and staples. Milk was not considered very nutritious.

*"I think if we eat grains, green leafy vegetables and other vegetables proportionately, it would be beneficial for our health." Dyad-B, out- school, 17-19 yrs. Sundarpur*

### Food consumption pattern inside home:

- Consumption of meat, milk and fruits were relatively low compared to other foods. Most reported that the last meal they consumed consisted of staples, legumes, dark green leafy vegetables, and other vegetables.

### Decision-making on what to cook in household:

- Adolescent girls reported that mothers followed by themselves decide on what to cook for the family. Food at home was most frequently prepared by the adolescent girls followed by their mother.

*"Food is served equally. We are four in our family. We eat prepared food equally sitting together." IDI with father, Rauta VDC*



Principal Investigator observed peer researcher's group exercise

### Practices of eating out of home:

- Frequency:** Eating outside of the home was not a common practice among the adolescent girls. Only few of the dyad participants reported doing so occasionally with friends and relatives.
- Types of food consumed:** The preferred dishes when eating out were chatpate, panipuri, chaumin and noodles/thukpa which they do not prepare at home.
- Reasons for eating out:** No one to cook food at home, the item they wanted to have was not available at home, Desire for change (e.g. different taste and variety), To have fun with friends and family.



IDI conducted with Father of adolescents girl

**Perception on the quality of food outside:** Not healthy, Contain additives, Not fresh, Overcooked or undercooked, and Spicy.

*"The food available outside can be contaminated with dust and dirt, so I think the food we cook at home is much healthier." Dyad interview-B, in- school, 14-16 yrs. Khabu*

### Food practices for specific needs:

- Few subjects mentioned the importance of eating more healthy food during menstruation.
- Most subjects reported they did not change their eating practices during menstruation, though some reported avoiding spicy and sour foods.

### Parent's beliefs and perceptions:

- Fathers of the adolescents did not consider milk and eggs to be nutritious food.

### Willingness to learn and share knowledge with peers:

- The majority of in-school girls expressed willingness to share food and nutrition knowledge with out-of-school adolescent girls.
- Almost all out-of-school adolescent girls expressed willingness to learn from in-school adolescent girls.
- Most fathers expressed willingness to send their daughters to school or community places to learn about health and nutrition.

## Conclusion

- Adolescent girls have reasonable level of knowledge and awareness of nutritious food and food values.
- Fathers will allow their daughters to learn about health and nutrition.
- There is potential opportunity to mobilize school peers to reach out of school adolescent girls with health and nutrition messages.

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