

Young adolescents in India: The case for enhancing research and investment

Early adolescence (10 to 14 years of age) represents one of the most critical periods of the life course for human development. Yet, as the World Health Organisation observes, this phase has been neglected both in research and action.

India, with 127 million young adolescents aged 10-14 in 2019, is home to every fifth young adolescent globally, and every 10th person in India is a young adolescent. Studies focusing on multiple facets of the lives of young adolescents are, however, limited in India. Some insights are available from the national census (for example, on schooling, work participation, migration, marriage and childbearing) and the National Family Health Survey (for example, schooling and marriage). The WHO's 2007 Global School-based Student Health Survey which collected information from 13-17 year-old students is yet another source, but dated.

Moreover, current adolescent programmes largely focus on those aged 15 and above – given the profound changes taking place earlier, this may be too late.

Young adolescents in UDAYA

UDAYA responds to this underinvestment in research on young adolescents in India. In 2015-16, UDAYA provided state-representative evidence on the situation of young adolescents for the first time in two major states of India, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

Data were drawn from 3,737 younger boys and girls, along with 16,857 older boys and girls, from rural and urban areas across the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

The age-appropriate survey instrument and methodology used in UDAYA drew on several previous studies, wherein the Population Council pilot-tested a variety of approaches for eliciting information from young adolescents.

UDAYA collected information from young adolescents on:

- Agency and gender role attitudes
- Awareness of sexual and reproductive health matters and exposure to family life education
- Awareness of entitlements and their reach
- Dietary behaviours and nutritional status
- Education, literacy and numeracy skill,
- Employment and savings practices
- Exposure to traditional and new media and technology
- Interactions with parents
- Mental health
- Physical activity
- Road injury
- Substance use
- Violence

The 2015-16 round indicates that vulnerabilities (*please see UDAYA infographics, August 2019*) are manifested in early adolescence and, investments starting in early adolescence or even earlier are crucial for their development.

In 2018-19, the Council re-interviewed **86%** of this cohort of young adolescents to better understand their transitions into older adolescent roles such as school to work, getting skilled in vocational courses, exploring their sexuality, getting married, etc. The UDAYA newsletter in the coming months shall share findings from the follow-up survey.

Invest in Unlocking the Power of this Generation of Young Adolescents Today to Shape our Future!