What's new for adolescent nutrition in the DHS Program

By Rukundo Benedict

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The Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) Program is a leading source of nutrition data in low- and middle-income countries. Through nationally-representative household surveys, the DHS Program collects nutrition information from children under five, women aged 15-49 years and, in some surveys, from men aged 15-49 years. With the increased global focus on adolescent nutrition, more data is needed to understand the unique nutrition challenges facing this population and to help to inform and guide policies and programmes worldwide.

The DHS Program has routinely collected several nutrition indicators for adolescents aged 15-19 years including anthropometric measurements, anaemia and iron-containing supplementation during pregnancy. Users can explore these indicators for adolescents across countries in the adolescent nutrition StoryMap , the related report and by using STATcompiler . Raw weight, height and date of birth data is available for 15-19 year olds and can be used to calculate population nutritional indicators such as stunting, underweight and overweight. While many previous DHS country reports have presented under- and overweight proportions based on adult body mass index (BMI) definitions, DHS will now use BMI-for-age z-scores for adolescent nutritional status.

In addition, the DHS Program standard Model Questionnaires are updated in each five-year phase of the DHS Program. In the DHS-8 update , several new nutrition-related indicators have been added. These new indicators include information on dietary diversity, unhealthy food consumption and maternal diet counselling during antenatal care. Stakeholders will be able to disaggregate the data by age to specifically explore the adolescent nutrition context.

Strengthening the capacity for data use among key stakeholders is an important goal of the DHS Program. To facilitate the use of DHS nutrition data, the DHS Program has developed an eLearning course entitled 'Nutrition Indicators in Demographic and Health Surveys'. The course is designed to orient programme managers, policymakers, government officials, representatives from civil society, multilateral agencies and others to the nutrition indicators reported in the DHS Program surveys. The course is organised into 12 modules covering nutritional status for children, adolescents and adults, anemia, infant and young child feeding, womens' dietary practices, coverage of nutrition interventions and more. The course will launch later this year on the DHS Program Learning Hub . It will be available for anyone to use free of charge.

For more information, please subscribe to the DHS Program nutrition newsletter at **www.dhsprogram.com/**

[1] https://www.dhsprogram.com/
[2] https://dhsprogram.com/storymap/adolescent-nutrition/?utm_source= Website&utm_medium=nutrition
[3] https://dhsprogram.com/publications/publication-cr47-comparative-reports.cfm
[4] https://www.statcompiler.com/en/#
[5] https://blog.dhsprogram.com/nutrition-data-in-dhs-8/

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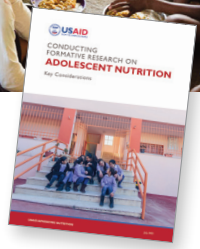
Indian schoolchildren gather together for a meal



Conducting formative research on adolescent nutrition: Key considerations

By Akriti Singh, Abby Conrad and Lauren Blum

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In September 2021, USAID Advancing Nutrition released guidance outlining the key considerations for designing and conducting formative research on nutrition (e.g., dietary practices, body image and influencing factors) with adolescents 10-19 years of age. The guidance provides background on adolescent nutrition and current research gaps. It also emphasises the role of formative research in designing and refining adolescent nutrition programmes which consider the unique determinants and drivers of nutrition behaviours during adolescence.

To develop the guidance, USAID Advancing Nutrition consulted 13 researchers and project implementers across Asia, Africa, the Middle East, North America and Australia. Their insights were supplemented with a desk review of approximately 20 formative research study reports and guidance documents.

The primary audience for this guidance is programme planners and implementers who aim to design and conduct formative nutrition research with adolescents in low- and middle-income countries. The key considerations are described under the following research steps: 1) determining formative research objectives; 2) designing and conducting formative research; 3) considering ethics and confidentiality; 4) analysing data; and 5) disseminating and using findings. The guidance also presents participatory nutrition data collection methods appropriate for gathering information from adolescents as well as pointing users to other available literature to support high quality research efforts. Finally, an example is provided on how pre-testing social and behaviour change materials can be utilised when a project may not have the time or resources to conduct formative research.

Common lessons and best practices gathered from the consultations and desk review included 1) focus on key adolescent behaviours and their determinants or drivers; 2) collect data using qualitative, participatory methods; 3) engage adolescents in formative research; 4) tailor data collection to local adolescent social and gender norms; 5) address additional adolescent-specific ethical considerations; 6) involve data collectors and adolescents in data analysis and interpretation; and 7) use creative and innovative approaches to share findings with adolescents, communities and stakeholders.

These learnings have been incorporated into the guidance which is available at: **https://www.advancingnutrition.org/resources/conducting-formative-research-adolescent-nutrition-key-considerations**