

# Early Sexual Behaviours and Academic Performance of In-school Adolescent Girls in Kathmandu Valley

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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of the current study is to analyze the association between early sexual behaviour and academic achievement of adolescent girl students. Girl students as well as the health education teachers of higher secondary schools from three districts of Kathmandu valley and the stakeholders from respective areas were selected purposively covering the public as well as private schools. Data were collected through questionnaire, focus group discussions and key informant interview. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS while the qualitative data were transcribed and translated into English and thematically analyzed. It is revealed that almost all girls wanted to make friends from both sex, preferably from same sex. More than half of the girls had a boyfriend or boyfriends. Among the total who had boyfriends four out of ten had dated but only a small proportion (2%) had spent their time with their boyfriends. It was revealed that having a boyfriend is one of the main factors for initiating sexual activity due to pressure from their boyfriends. Around 28% were involved in different forms of sexual behaviour like kissing, hugging, body rubbing and touching sexual organs. However, very fewer (only 6 out of 400 girls) were involved in sexual activity and only half of those involved in sexual activity used condoms. Interviews also revealed that girls became shy when the matter of sex was taught in the classroom. They even could not talk freely about menstruation with teachers. The findings show that no statistical difference exists between sexual behaviour and academic performance of adolescent girl students of Kathmandu valley.*

**Keywords:** academic performance, adolescent girls, premarital sexual behaviour, pornography, sexual development

## Introduction

According to WHO (2016), adolescence is the period in human growth and development that occurs after childhood and before adulthood; and this period is applicable to boys and girls aged 10–19 years. It is the period of physical, psychological, social and mental maturity from childhood to adulthood. It represents one of the critical transitions in the life span. Besides, physical and sexual development, this period moves toward independence, identity, acquisition of skills and the capacity for Abstract reasoning and decision. While adolescence is a time of tremendous growth and potential, it is also a time of considerable risk during which social contexts exert powerful influences.

Due to the sensitivity of premarital sexuality, inadequate sex education and guidance and adolescent friendly reproductive health services, the adolescent girls face pregnancy at early age which affects their reproductive health, academic performance as well as their career development. In Nepal, 52% of women in the age of 15–49 years

are married by 18 years, as compared with 19% men. About 4% adolescent girls in the age of 15–19 get married by age of 15 years. Similarly, the median age at first sexual intercourse is 17.9 years among women and 20.5 years among men in the age group of 25–49. On average, women initiate sexual intercourse almost 3 years earlier than men, mainly because women marry earlier than men (NDHS, 2016).

Nowadays, sex related media, internet, magazine, dating, glamorous and porn films are being watched by adolescents which may lead to initiate early sexual activities (Regmi et al., 2010). Although a few studies on early sexual behaviour do exist, study on the impact of early sexual behaviour on academic performance has not yet been undertaken in Nepal as far as our knowledge. It is assumed that early sexual activities impact on academic performance of students. Hence, the main objective of this study was to analyze the association between early sexual behaviour and academic performance of adolescent girls in Kathmandu Valley. The results discussed in this paper can help sexual and reproductive

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health programme planners, policy makers and curriculum planners to understand the situation of early sexual behaviour and its impacts on academic performance of students. From this understanding, they can implement sexual and reproductive health education programmes that increase awareness on early initiation of sexual behaviour and its impact on academic performance and delay the initiation of sexual behaviour.

### Study methods

This study used a cross-sectional, descriptive and analytical approach emphasizing quantitative and qualitative aspects. Girl students of higher secondary schools from Kathmandu valley covering Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur districts as well as the health education teachers from these schools were the population of the study. In total, 400 adolescent girls as well as teachers were sampled from the study schools. Four focus group discussions were conducted with the adolescent girls in grades 11 and 12. Half of the FGDs were conducted in private and next half in community/public schools.

Questionnaire, focus group discussion guidelines and key informant interviews were employed

for data collection. The tools were finalized after piloting and validation. After finalization of tools the researcher collected data from sample students and key informants from each selected school following the ethical considerations. Prior to collecting the data, consent was gained from the Head Teacher. Girls were assured to maintain confidentiality about their view and shared information. Collected quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 16 while the qualitative data collected from focus group discussions and interviews were transcribed manually in Nepali and translated into English. Similarly, quantitative data were analyzed statistically, and qualitative data were analyzed thematically.

### Results and discussion

#### Perception of adolescent girls on psycho-social behaviour

Altogether 16 statements, comprising both affirmative and negative connotations regarding adolescents' psycho-social behaviours were given to the adolescent girls for their rating. A few adolescent girls skipped certain statements. Table 1 presents their responses.

Table 1. Response of adolescent girls on Likert type psycho-social behaviour scale

Statements	Perceptions	School type		Total %	P Valued f=2
		Community %	Private %		
Manage irrational thoughts (n=392)	Agree	62.8	70.9	66.1	P= 0.088
	Undecided	20.1	19.6	19.9	
	Disagree	17.1	9.5	14.0	
Setting the goals of life (n=392)	Agree	72.2	72.2	72.2	P = 0.054
	Undecided	16.7	22.8	19.1	
	Disagree	11.1	5.1	8.7	
Decision about life, future & marriage (n=392)	Agree	44.0	43.9	44.0	P = 0.152
	Undecided	24.4	32.3	27.5	
	Disagree	31.6	23.9	28.5	
Feeling safe at home (n=392)	Agree	94.5	98.7	96.2	P= 0.084
	Undecided	4.3	1.3	3.0	
	Disagree	1.3	0	0.8	
Feeling safe at college (n=392)	Agree	71.4	82.4	75.8	P= 0.037
	Undecided	15.0	10.7	13.2	
	Disagree	13.7	6.9	10.9	
Able to cope with psycho-social problems (n=392)	Agree	48.5	50.0	49.1	P= 0.031
	Undecided	26.8	35.4	30.3	
	Disagree	24.7	14.6	20.6	

Capable to understand problems (n=392)	Agree	79.9	77.8	79.1	P= 0.769
	Undecided	11.5	13.9	12.5	
	Disagree	8.5	8.2	8.4	
Return in normal condition when get the problem (n=392)	Agree	37.2	46.5	41.0	P= 0.166
	Undecided	25.6	31.0	23.2	
	Disagree	37.2	34.0	35.9	
Sexual desire is a biological need (n=392)	Agree	56.4	59.	57.5	P= 0.245
	Undecided	23.1	26.8	24.6	
	Disagree	20.5	14.0	17.9	
Sharing pornography encourages for early sexual activities (n=392)	Agree	44.4	36.5	41.3	P= 0.018
	Undecided	26.9	21.2	24.6	
	Disagree	28.6	42.3	34.	
Sexual activities are to be discouraged (n=392)	Agree	52.8	58.3	55.0%)	P= 0.50
	Undecided	19.7	19.2	19.5%)	
	Disagree	27.5	22.4	25.4%)	
Sexual activities adversely affect educational achievement (n=392)	Agree	74.7	78.2	76.1	P= 0.396
	Undecided	15.0	10.	13.1	
	Disagree	10.3	11.5	10.8	
Lack of care and guidance leads to early sexual activities (n=392)	Agree	57.9	67.	61.9	P= 0.089
	Undecided	23.2	20.9	22.3	
	Disagree	18.9	11.4	15.9	
Hugging & kissing with boyfriend in secret places are common (n=392)	Agree	12.8	23.7	17.1	P = 0.013
	Undecided	19.6	19.9	19.7	
	Disagree	67.7	56.4	63.2	
Wearing short and sexy dress attracts boys (n=389)	Agree	54.1	52.6	53.5	P= 0.906
	Undecided	20.2	21.8	20.8	
	Disagree	25.8	25.6	25.7	
Sexual desires can be fulfilled through safe sexual activities (n=389)	Agree	48.3	59.4	52.7	P= 0.025
	Undecided	28.2	27.7	28.0	
	Disagree	23.5	12.9	19.3	

Six out of 16 statements were statistically different in terms of responses between community and private schools. Response on goal setting in life was almost similar in girls from community and private schools. However, the difference was wider among those who agreed on the statement and who did not agree and remained undecided (P=0.054). Only three quarters (75.8%) of the girls felt being safe at college; more in private schools (82.4%) than in community schools (71.4%) (P=0.037). Less than half of the girls (49.1%), similar proportions from community and private colleges, reported that they were able to cope with the psychosocial problems that were faced (P=0.031). Four out of ten (41.3%) girls had a belief that sharing pornography encourages early sexual activities; little more from community schools (44.4% against 36.5% from private schools) (P=0.018). Only 17% adolescent girls agreed on the statement “Hugging

and kissing with boy friend in the secret places are common.” However, the proportion was almost double in private schools (23.7%) in comparison to community schools (12.8%) (P=0.013). Similarly, more than half (52.7%) of the adolescent girls agreed that sexual desires can be fulfilled through safe sexual behaviours (P=0.025). However, only 2% mentioned that they spent their time with boyfriends.

#### Exposure to pornography

Fig.1 shows that 30.2% adolescent girls never watched pornography. The trend was slightly more in the girl students of private schools (36.1% against 26.2% in community schools). Most (77%) of the girls watched pornography sometimes and the majority of girls who have even watched did so alone (68.6%).

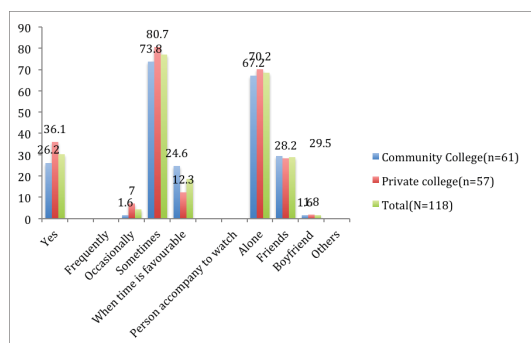


Figure 1. Adolescent girls' involvement in watching pornography

FGD analysis revealed that common group activities outside school performed by the respondents include occasionally going with friends to watch movie in cinema hall, picnic, park and market. Most of the girls usually go with their girl-classmates for recreation and outings. Only a few participants go to cinema, restaurants and other places with boyfriends.

*If you have a boyfriend, you can feel safe and amusing while going out with a boyfriend. I have a boy friend. I like to go for recreation and outing with my boyfriend. I feel safe and pleasure while going with boyfriend to cinema, restaurant and other places. Boyfriend also spends money on buying cinema ticket and snack, etc."*

Interview analysis also disclosed that use of mobile phone, providing extra money by the parents, media and watching film increased the incidence of watching porno, which is one of the key factors associated with participating in earlier sexual activity.

*Globalization, media, use of mobile phone, curiosity, negligence of parents, etc. are the causes of watching pornography and other sexual behaviour. (A KI of a community school)*

### Having a boyfriend

A total of 233 girls from community schools and 157 girls from private schools responded the question regarding whether they had boyfriends.

Table 2. Adolescent girls who self-reported having a boyfriend and experience of dating

Statements	Community schools (n=233)	Private schools (n=157)	Total (N=390)
Have boyfriends, yes %	54.1	53.5	53.9
Have done dating with boyfriends, yes %	38.4	43.2	40.3

Table 2 shows that more than half (53.9%) of the girls had boyfriends. The trend was almost same among girls attending both the community and private schools. Of those who reported having boyfriends further informed that 40.3% of them had already dated boyfriends.

The interviews unmasked that having a boyfriend is one of the vital factors for initiating early sexual activity due to the pressure from boyfriend. A teacher mentioned this is these words:

*Some students exchange pieces of papers writing short message. Likewise, sometimes they go to watch cinema with boyfriends. The students of junior secondary level are found with some sexual problems like writing letter to boys. (A male teacher aged 35 of community school)*

These problems are seen more at junior secondary level than higher secondary. Because of curiosity, and innocence, poor achievement in exams were reported among girls.

Table 3 shows that more than half of all adolescent girls had boyfriends. Among them 40.3 % went for dates with boyfriend as well as their teachers.

As reported, due to initiation and secretion of sex hormones, adolescents are likely to engage in different types of sexual activities. During the FGD sessions, it was expressed that girls wanted to watch film of love affair with bed scene/erotic scenes, pornographic film and chatting with friends on Facebook, kissing and hugging. Most FGD participants mentioned that they watched pornographic pictures and films with female classmates. Some had the experience of getting sexual pleasure through masturbation, however, most girls had no clear idea about masturbation.

*We are curious to sexual behaviours. We like to watch film that is full of sexually exciting love affair. Sometimes we watch pornographic film secretly with our best friends and make sexual jokes."*

Kissing, hugging and petting are not common for most of the students. Those who have boyfriends

may have been engaged in kissing, hugging and petting activities.

**Sexual behaviour**

The adolescent girls reported various behaviours related to their love relationships including sexual relationships.

Table 3: Sexual behaviours of the adolescent girls (Multiple responses)

Statements	Community college (N=241) %	Private college (N=159) %	Total % (N=400)
<b>1.Types of sexual behaviours</b>			
None	74.0	69.0	72.0
Kissing	7.9	8.8	8.3
Hugging	16.2	18.7	17.2
Body rubbing	1.2	1.8	1.4
Touching sexual organs	0.8	1.8	1.2
<b>2. Have sexual intercourse</b>	2.1	0.6	1.5
<b>3.Age at first sexual intercourse</b>	17-18 yrs	17 yrs	17-18

A little more than a quarter of the adolescent girls (28%) reported having engaged in some forms of sexual behaviour. Their proportion was 74% for community schools and 69% for private school. Other main behaviours included hugging (17.2%), kissing (8.3%), body rubbing (1.4%) and touching sexual organs (1.2%). Altogether six out of 400 adolescent girls (1.5%) reported they ever had sexual intercourse, which was higher in community school (2.1%) as compared to private school (0.6%). The age of first sexual intercourse was 17 years for two girls and 18 years for four girls.

Analysis of qualitative data obtained from FGDs also revealed that almost no girls had experiences of sexual intercourse with opposite sex.

*We know some girls have boyfriends and go for dating and outing. But we have not heard they have already initiated sexual intercourse. We are still quite away from sexual intercourse. So far we know our friends are not involved in sexual intercourse."*

*I have a boyfriend. Kissing and hugging with boyfriend usually happen in the lonely place. But I have never been engaged in sexual intercourse. My boyfriend motivates me for sexual intercourse. I am still avoiding it due to fear of the risk of pregnancy and other social issues."(A participant of FGD)*

**Reasons for involving in different sexual activities**

During FGD sessions, it was frequently expressed that watching love affair films with some romantic scenes and pornographic pictures/films further increase sexual curiosity that lead to sexual activity. Peer pressure and lack of parental guidance were also stated as reasons for engaging themselves in different types of sexual activity.

*Some of our friends who have boyfriends may have been involved in hugging, body rubbing and kissing. It may be due to influence of romantic film. Girls living away from parents or lacking parental care and control get chance for outing with boyfriends and are engaged in some forms of sexual activity. Peer influence and watching pornographic picture/ film lead girls to initiate some forms of sexual activity."*

**Condom Use:**

Six adolescent girls had ever had sexual intercourse, and only three of them used a condom. One third of the adolescent girls who had sexual intercourse with boyfriend had the feeling of regret. Two of the six adolescent girls who had sexual intercourse expressed that their sexual relationships had adverse effects in their study.



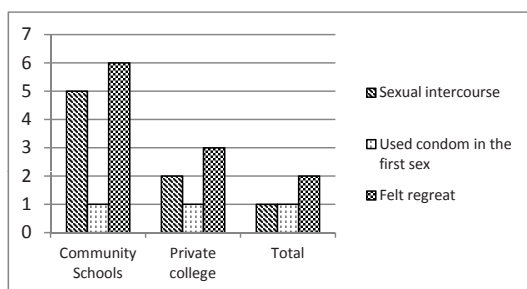


Figure 2. Sexual intercourse and condom use (in numbers)

There was discussion with FGD participants about the use of contraceptive devices. Girls were found aware of contraceptive devices including the contraceptive pill. But participants stated repeatedly that they had no experience about the contraceptive use because most girls were still virgin. Some of them said that their friends who have boyfriends may have used condoms and the pill in order to avoid unintended pregnancy. They said,

*We know condom can be used during sexual intercourse. But we don't have to use it because we don't have a partner for sexual relation. Girls having sexual relation with their boyfriend might have used condom or other contraceptive devices."*

Girls' FGDs reported that sexual intercourse without using condom leads to unintended pregnancy and transmission of STIs. One of the participants told that one adolescent girl living in her hometown became pregnant in the first sexual intercourse with her boyfriend. Family and neighbours were ashamed due to the pregnancy of this unmarried adolescent girl. They agreed that sexual relation should be avoided in adolescent stage and condom must be used in very first sexual intercourse in order to avoid pregnancy.

#### Sexual behaviours and academic performance

Adolescent girls were asked to rate their academic performance themselves. Almost half of them rated their educational performance good (46.9%) or moderate (38%). A small proportion (4.7%) judged them as having weak achievement. One in ten adolescent girls (10.4%) ranked their academic performance as excellent; the proportion of excellent rating was high in community schools

(11.4%) as compared to the private schools (9%). Lower academic performance was related to higher levels of anxiety and pessimism (El-Anzi, 2005).<sup>10</sup>

The interviews suggested that female students were better in academic performance in comparison to boys. It was also unmasked that comparatively girls were more laborious and usually became toppers in class. However, some were poor in educational performance because of poor economic status of their parents. Sometimes they had problems with management of menstruation; and they did not show any response. From a community school a teacher reacted that no any girl was found with genuine psycho-social problems.

*Girls are sincere and better in overall education while boys tend to be free and ruin their studies. Mostly girls topped in the Management Faculty (A male teacher of a private school). Comparatively girls are more laborious. In my subject, girls are usually topper in class. Girls secure position 1 to 5 in top ten. The students among top 10 got success in entrance test of Medical Science."(A male teacher from a private school)*

*Sexual behaviour affects in education of girls... When someone gives priority in sexual behaviour, naturally they cannot manage their time for study. Because of sexual fantasy they cannot understand what teacher teaches and what they read in book."*

One key informant stressed that love affairs and sexual behaviours have impact in educational performance. There was an incidence that a student who got top ten position in grade 7 was found degraded in further grades. Another interviewee suggested that early sexual behaviour affects in educational performance of students. However, few are having relationships but found excellent in academic performance in grade 11 and 12. Generally, the students who were weak in educational performance tended to be involved in love affairs. Those girls who were known to be involved in such relationships had achieved lower marks in exams.

*Girls are manipulated by boys particularly those who are involved in sexual activity. It is clearly seen that those girls who are involved in early sexual behaviours are poor in studies."*

One teacher shared that one of the girls married at an early age soon after her plus two examination. She married her classmate due to involvement in early sexual activity. From FGD discussion, informants were of the view that educational performance will be affected by sexual behaviour.

it was disclosed that due to love affairs, having boyfriend, outing for cinema or park and dating, their educational achievement has not been affected badly. However, higher proportion of key

Table 4. *Self-rated educational achievements of adolescent girls*

Statements	Community school	Private school	Total
<b>1. Status of educational performance</b>	n=228	n=156	N=384
<b>Excellent</b>	11.6	9.0	10.4
<b>Good</b>	43.9	51.3	46.9
<b>Moderate</b>	42.1	32.1	38.0
<b>Weak</b>	2.6	7.7	4.7
<b>2. Beliefs that involvement in sexual activities leads to adverse effects in educational achievement</b>	n=206	n=134	N=340
<b>Yes %</b>	81.1	65.7	75
<b>3. Perceived negative impact of sexual activities in study</b>	n=167	n=88	N=255
<b>Highly</b>	56.3	56.8	56.5
<b>Moderately</b>	35.9	42.0	38.0
<b>Rarely</b>	7.2	1.1	5.1
<b>Do not know</b>	0.6	0	0.4

In response to the query “Do you feel that sexual activities lead to negative impact in the study?”, three-quarters (75%) responded “Yes”. The proportion was relatively high in community schoolgirls (81.1%) as compared to girls from the private schools (65.7%). The adolescent girls who reported high impact and moderate impact were 56.5% and 38% respectively.

Data were cross-tabulated between girls having boy friend and their reported educational achievement. There is no statistical difference between having a boy friend and self-reported educational achievement (P=0.341).

Table 5. *Relationship between educational achievement and dating with boyfriends*

Educational Achievement		Excellent	Good	Average	Below average	Total
<b>Have a boyfriend (P=0.341)</b>	Yes	13 50%	61 53%	78 49.3%	12 46.1%	164 50.4%
	No	13 50 %	54 47%	80 50.7%	14 53.9%	161 49.6%
	Total	26	115	158	26	325
<b>Had dating with boyfriend (P=0.243)</b>	Yes	5 41.6%	28 45.9%	26 33.3%	3 27.2%	62 38.2%
	No	7 58.4%	33 54.1%	52 66.7%	8 72.8%	100 61.8%
	Total	12	61	78	11	162
<b>Watched pornography (P=0.057)</b>	Yes	6 23%	41 35.3%	36 22.7%	13 52%	96 29.5%
	No	20 77%	75 64.7%	122 77.3%	12 48%	229 70.5%
	Total	26	116	158	25	325

Similarly, cross-tabulation of data between educational achievement and dating with boy friend also does not show statistically significant difference ( $P=0.243$ ). Association between watching pornography and self-reported educational achievement in the last examination shows a statistically significant difference ( $P=0.057$ ). Moreover, of the six adolescent girls who reported having sexual relationships, four rated their educational achievement as good and remaining two judged their educational attainment as average.

Analysis of FGD data revealed that making boyfriend and initiation of some forms of sexual activity have negative impact on learning and educational achievement. Girls who are interested in making boy-friend spend more time on Facebook, chatting, and watching film. Participants of FGD frequently expressed that boys/male Facebook friends often send vulgar message, post naked photos, request for meeting somewhere else outside school, propose a girl and boyfriend relationship through Facebook. Most girls often ignore the proposal sent by boys. According to FGD participants, there would be mental tension and they could not concentrate their mind on study when a boy not liked by girls followed on the Facebook or on the way home/school. Girls having boyfriends have to give time on dating and outing, and make false statement about their activity. Sometimes, problems occur on their relationship and boyfriend ignores girlfriend and vice versa. Such situations negatively affect the educational performance and achievement of girls. Girls said:

*We feel stress when boys follow and harass us. Some boys propose to girls all of a sudden. Boys send irrelevant messages and post message or naked picture on Facebook if we ignore them. We cannot concentrate our mind on study due to annoying activities of such boys. Those girls having boy-friend have to spend time on chatting and dating. Sometimes girls have to avoid and ignore phone contact and dating due to family restriction. Such a situation may lead to misunderstanding between girl and boy friend. In our society, making boy-friend and initiating sexual activity negatively affect on study of our education. (A girl)*

The result of this study may not be generalized to all adolescents of other cities and villages of Nepal

since samples were selected only from the schools of Kathmandu valley. Likewise, heterogeneous samples were not considered. Similarly, girl students and key informants might not have shared real information because of shyness and fear of their privacy.

## Conclusions

Almost all girls wanted to make friends from both sex, preferably from same sex. More than half girls had boyfriend/s. Among those who had boyfriends 40.3% had dated but only 2% mentioned that they spent their times with their boyfriends. Majority of girls responded that they spent their times mostly with parents. From the interviews, it was suggested that having a boyfriend is one of the main factors for initiating sexual activity due to pressure from boyfriends. Hugging and kissing with boyfriend in the secret places is almost common among them. However, the proportion is higher among private school girls. Around 28% involved in different forms of sexual behaviour like kissing, hugging, body rubbing and touching sexual organs. More than half of the girls agreed that sexual desires can be fulfilled through safe sexual behaviours. Only 6 out of 400 girls were found involved in sexual activity and only half of them have used condoms. Key informant interviews also revealed that girls felt shyness when the matter of sex is taught in the classroom; they even could not talk freely about menstruation with teachers.

More than three quarter of girls used to watch pornography sometimes, and more than two third (68%) of them watched it alone. Use of mobile phone, curiosity and negligence of parents also had increased the incidence of pornography watching. FGD analysis revealed that going with friends for watching cinema, picnic, park and market occasionally were common group activities. Three quarters of girls reported that involvement in sexual activities and making boyfriends lead to negative impact in their study. The study suggests a statistical difference between watching pornography and self-reported educational achievement ( $p=0.05$ ). In contrast there is no statistical difference between having a boy friend and self-reported educational achievement.

Different researches show that there is a positive relationship between educational performance



and sexual activities of students, which is not supported by the result of present study. Even after having boyfriends only minimal number of girls are found having sexual intercourse with boyfriends. It can be argued that the students have gained knowledge from school curriculum about the consequences of early sexual activities, unsafe sexual behaviour and safe sexual behaviour which led to this result. On the basis of the study result, it is recommended that there should be guidance and counselling programme in school especially related to psychosexual behaviour. It is also recommended that parental guidance and adolescent friendly reproductive health service is essential. Moreover, group discussion, peer education approach, cooperative learning and student centred learning approaches are necessary to enhance their academic performance and career.

#### Acknowledgements

UNESCO Nepal deserves special thanks for providing the financial support to us for the study. Besides, thank goes to Dr. Kamal Gautam, Mr. Bhagwan Aryal, Mr. Yadu Ram Upreti, Ms. Kalpana Gyawali, Ms. Madhavi Gautam and Mr. Bishnu GC for their cooperation in data collection and data management during the study.

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