



Exploring the Links between Developmental Assets and Sexual and Reproductive Health among Very Young Adolescents: The Case of Northern Uganda

THE CHALLENGE

Very young adolescents (aged 10-14) make up about half of all adolescents world-wide. In the context of HIV and other sexual and reproductive health (SRH) risks, such as early pregnancy, and STIs, there is growing recognition of the need to support the positive development of adolescents as they transition into adulthood. Few interventions, however, are focused on the needs of very young adolescents.¹ Only a limited number of studies explore very young adolescents' knowledge and awareness of their physical changes during puberty, their rights or responsibilities. Even fewer consider their resilience, self-efficacy, and other developmental assets, or the relationship of those assets with young people's sexual and reproductive health (SRH). This brief describes results of a school-based survey designed to assess the links between developmental assets among girls and boys aged 10 to 14, and SRH indicators.

OUR RESPONSE

Georgetown University's Institute for Reproductive Health (IRH) in collaboration with Search Institute conducted survey research to test whether positive relationships, opportunities, values, skills and self-perceptions (developmental assets), measured by Search Institute's Developmental Assets Profile (DAP) survey, are significantly associated with SRH outcomes. IRH developed SRH indicators to add to the original 58-item DAP survey to create the "DAP+". SRH indicators included measures such as SRH knowledge, ability to access SRH services, and availability of adult and peer resources for discussing SRH matters. Differences between boys and girls in both the prevalence of SRH indicators and the association between developmental assets and those SRH measures were also examined.

Photo Credit: Rebecca Lundgren, IRH



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8 CATEGORIES OF DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS MEASURED IN THE DAP

EXTERNAL ASSETS



SUPPORT

Young people need to be surrounded by people who love, care for, appreciate, and accept them.



EMPOWERMENT

Young people need to feel valued and valuable. This happens when youth feel safe and respected.



BOUNDARIES AND EXPECTATIONS

Young people need clear rules, consistent consequences for breaking rules, and encouragement to do their best.



CONSTRUCTIVE USE OF TIME

Young people need opportunities — outside of school—to learn and develop new skills and interests with other youth and adults.

INTERNAL ASSETS



COMMITMENT TO LEARNING

Young people need a sense of the lasting importance of learning and a belief in their own abilities.



POSITIVE VALUES

Young people need to develop strong guiding values or principles to help them make healthy life choices, including responsibility, empathy, and self-control.



SOCIAL COMPETENCIES

Young people need the skills to interact effectively with others, to make difficult decisions, and to cope with new situations.



POSITIVE IDENTITY

Young people need to believe in their own self-worth and to feel that they have control over the things that happen to them.

WHAT ARE DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS?

Developmental assets are the relationships, opportunities, values, skills, and self-perceptions that research shows are strongly related to children's and youths' well-being.² Eight broad categories of assets are measured by the DAP survey and divided into external assets provided by people in the young person's family, community, school, or peer network (e.g. supports relationships and opportunities; and internal assets within a young person (e.g. beliefs, attitudes, skills).

External and internal assets also can be understood in terms of the ecological contexts in which they are built or developed, which are measured in the DAP by simply re-grouping the survey items. Conceptualization of youth development in terms of external contexts and supports, and internal youth strengths allows for a holistic understanding of child and youth well-being.

“...relationships, opportunities, values, skills, and self-perceptions that research shows are strongly related to children's and youths' well-being”

5 ASSET-BUILDING CONTEXTS MEASURED IN THE DAP

CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION
PERSONAL ASSETS	Internal strengths that shape the character of young people, including their self-concept, values, attitudes and capabilities.
SOCIAL ASSETS	Assets experienced through personal relationships with others, particularly friends.
FAMILY ASSETS	Assets experienced in the family.
SCHOOL ASSETS	Assets experienced in school.
COMMUNITY ASSETS	Assets experienced in community settings other than school.

STUDY DESIGN

This study used a cross-sectional survey in randomly selected schools in Gulu, north central Uganda, to measure the relation of developmental assets to adolescent health. Survey data were collected among randomly selected girls and boys, aged 10-14, in each school.

Three main questions guided this research:

1. What is the level of developmental assets among girls and boys?
2. Are positive relationships, opportunities, values, skills and self-perceptions (developmental assets) significantly associated with SRH, including measures such as SRH knowledge, ability to access SRH services, and availability of adult and peer resources for discussing SRH matters?
3. Are there differences between girls and boys in both the prevalence of SRH indicators and the association between developmental assets and those SRH measures?

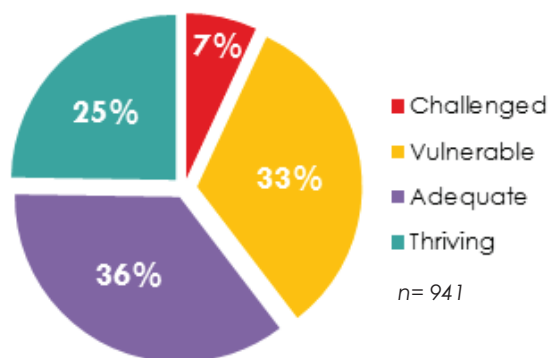
Scale measures were validated in a sample of 128 youth aged 10 to 14.* Schools similar to, but not included in, the study were selected for the pilot. A total of 941 youth in that age range completed the final survey in June 2014. For final data collection, primary and secondary schools were randomly selected from a list of schools in Gulu district. In each school, age eligible students were systematically selected from enrollment lists.

WHAT THE SURVEY SAYS

SUBSTANTIVE FINDINGS: DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS AND SRH OUTCOMES

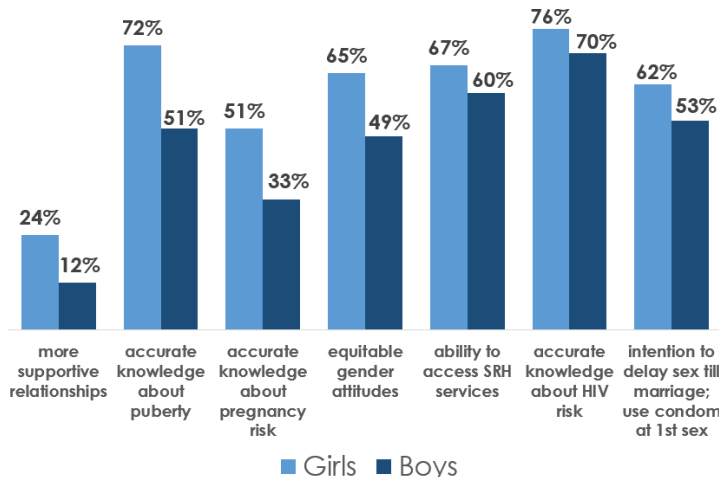
Most youth had Adequate levels of developmental assets. Although asset scores tended to be toward the positive, there was variation of responses across asset categories and context sub-scales.

% Northern Uganda 10-14 year olds by Total DAP Score Quartile



Of 8 SRH outcomes, most youth did not meet criteria for having 3 of them and only slightly more than half (55% - 65%) met criteria for 4 others.

Girls are more likely than boys to meet the criteria for most SRH outcomes. Boys are slightly more likely than girls to have accurate knowledge of and exposure to condoms (62% of girls versus 68% of boys).



Youth with Adequate and Thriving levels of assets had better odds than all other youth of having 3 of 5 SRH outcomes, which included more accurate HIV knowledge, better access to services and resources, and more intention to delay sex and use condoms.



71% more likely to have accurate HIV knowledge.



34% more likely to believe they could access SRH services.



98% more likely to intend to delay sex until marriage or use condoms.

Youth with Thriving levels of assets had better odds than all other youth of having 4 of 5 SRH outcomes.



57% more likely than all other youth to have accurate condom knowledge.



Girls **78%** more likely and boys **2x** as likely than all other youth to have supportive relationships.



87% more likely to have accurate HIV knowledge.

MOVING FORWARD

These findings have implications for future interventions including the need to develop multi-layered approaches that consider differential vulnerabilities of girls and boys.

Other program and future research implications include:

- Improve parents' ability to support and respect their children, and set and monitor appropriate boundaries
- Expand rights-based programming to engage communities and encourage youth involvement in community service and action
- Provide youth skill development opportunities
- Establish linkages with caring adults in schools, communities and other institutions to increase support for youth
- Test and refine SRH indicators, particularly those related to sexual behavior among this younger and under-studied age group
- Pilot interventions to better understand the effects of developmental assets on SRH outcomes in different contexts.

Moving forward, strengthening developmental assets can be an important strategy in improving the lives of very young adolescents.



Photo Credit: Dickens Ojamuge, Save the Children

ABOUT THE SCALES

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF DAP MEASURES

The reliabilities of the DAP scales and most sub-scales are at acceptable or promising levels.* The internal consistency reliabilities of the total DAP and most of the DAP subscales are either at acceptable or promising levels. Overall, the results show the DAP and most of its subscales are dependable measures of these constructs. Reliability for the Constructive Use of Time asset category scale is unacceptable (.57), and for the Empowerment scale, barely "promising" (.62). The significant correlation of asset scales with SRH outcomes as hypothesized supports the DAP's validity.

* *Reliability* is defined as the degree to which items in a scale "hang together" statistically. Reliability is calculated here using the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient with .70 or higher considered acceptable, and .60-.69 considered promising. *Validity* is the degree to which an item or a scale measures the concept it is supposed to be measuring, and if the item or scale correlates. *Response variability* is the degree to which youth choose reasonable numbers of each response option to a survey question.

¹ Blum, R., Bastos, F., Kabiru, C., Le, L. (2012). Adolescent Health in the 21st Century. *The Lancet* 379, 1567-1568. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(12)60407-3.

² Benson, P. L., Scales, P. C., & Syvertsen, A. K. (2011). The contribution of the developmental assets framework to positive youth development theory and practice. In R. M. Lerner, J. V. Lerner, & J. B. Benson (Eds.), *Advances in Child Development and Behavior: Positive youth Development Research and Applications for Promoting Thriving in Adolescence* (pp. 198-232). London, UK: Elsevier.