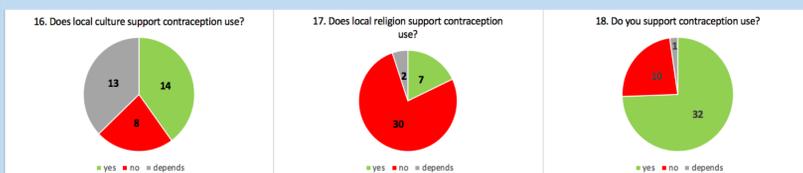


# An empowerment-centered approach to sexual health education in Guatemala

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## Sexual Health in Guatemala

A 2018 study found that, in Guatemala, over half of teen pregnancies are unplanned, and only 31% of sexually-active adults use a form of birth control. Social factors such as *machismo* (sexism), low socioeconomic status, institutionalized racism, and the conservative Catholic church have limited many Guatemalans' access to reproductive health services. However, in recent decades, a shift has occurred, creating more conversation around sexual health, women's empowerment, and family planning. The implementation of sexual health curriculum in schools has played a role in this shift, though actual implementation varies greatly by a school's location and available resources. In order to combat Guatemala's reproductive health crisis, more education is needed.



**Figure 1.** Answers to interview questions about whether the 1) local culture 2) church and 3) the participant support the methods shown in Figure 1.

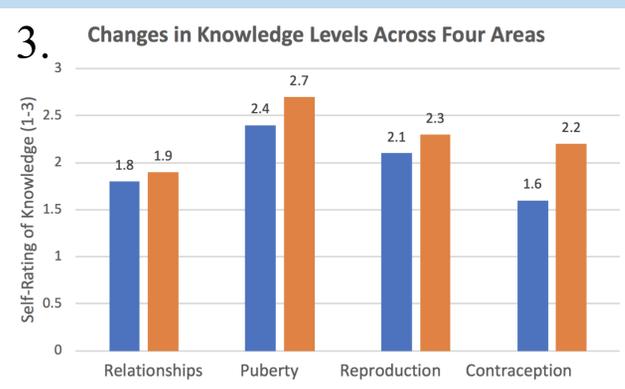
Our project: 8-week empowerment based education program called *Chicas Unidas* for 41 girls ages 10-17 in Escuela Kemna'Oj in Santa María de Jesús, Guatemala.

## Implementation of *Chicas Unidas* and Data Collection



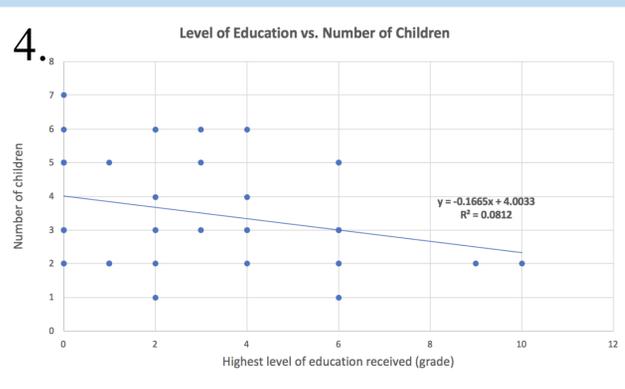
Week 1	Introduction, Consent forms, Pre-test
Week 2	Powerful Female Leaders Throughout History
Week 3	Healthy Lifestyle, Self-care, Mental health
Week 4	Healthy relationships and Consent
Week 5	Puberty & The Reproductive System
Week 6	Sexually-Transmitted Infections and Contraception
Week 7	Sexual Abuse, Drugs and Alcohol
Week 8	Conclusion, Post-test, Celebration

**Figure 2. a)** An example of a self-esteem and gratitude exercise done at Chicas Unidas, **b)** the eight-week curriculum and timeline for data collection.



### Implementation:

- With De Casas a Hogares 501(c)(3) nonprofit.
- Input from school principal, counselor, parents, and community members.
- Emphasized empowerment and relationship-building before discussing sensitive topics.
- Conducted 50 interviews with parents, pre- and post- tests and interviews with *Chicas Unidas* participants.



### Findings:

- Gender roles are rigid in division of labor but decision-making in the home is collaborative.
- Main reason for not supporting contraception is fear of health complications.
- Age and education are strong predictors of openness to family planning.
- Overwhelmingly positive responses from participants.

**Figure 3.** Participants reported their knowledge levels increased across all four topics taught.

**Figure 4.** Interviewed mothers had approximately one less child per six years of formal education.

## Future Directions



1. Education is an effective tool to increase openness to using and discussing family planning methods.



2. Continue the empowerment-based approach with youth.



3. Programs should be led by community members with as much involvement from parents and families as possible.



**Figure 5.** Common contraceptive methods.

### Thank you to the following for their support of this project:

Advisor: Dr. Hélène de Fays  
 Readers: Dr. Emil' Keme, Dr. Juan Carlos González Espitia  
 Community partners: Oscar Mejía, Señor Marielos, Señor Roxcy, Señor Blanca, De Casas a Hogares Nonprofit  
 Funding: SURF from UNC OUR; William C. Friday Award from IAH; Taylor Fellowship from Honors Carolina

