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

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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Introduction, Consent forms, Pre-test</td>
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<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Powerful Female Leaders Throughout History</td>
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<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Healthy Lifestyle, Self-care, Mental health</td>
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<td>Healthy relationships and Consent</td>
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<td>Week 5</td>
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<td>Week 8</td>
<td>Conclusion, Post-test, Celebration</td>
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3. Changes in Knowledge Levels Across Four Areas

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.

4. Level of Education vs. Number of Children

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.

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