

Empowering Women Through Menstrual Health Education in Rural Guatemala

Michelle Cole, Carrie Eaton, Madeleine Willett, Emily Brochu

OBJECTIVE

To implement a quality improvement project educating women in Guatemala on menstrual health and reusable menstrual products (RMP), with a focus on sustainability and access in rural areas. '

METHODS

This project followed the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle for continuous quality improvement, with data collection through focus groups using Krueger and Casey's (2015) structured approach. Data was analyzed using Krippendorff's (2019) content analysis with clustering to identify key themes.

PARTICIPANTS

Women living in the Greater Panchoy Valley of Guatemala participated in one of three focus groups. Most participants were of reproductive age and represented varied experiences associated with menstrual health.

BACKGROUND

This initiative, funded by a UConn Dean's Award for Pilot Research, Innovation, and Scholarship Projects, focused on raising awareness of menstrual health and the accessibility of RMP's in rural Guatemala. It aimed to promote menstrual health equity and sustainability through community engagement.

SAMPLE

- **Focus Group 1** ($n = 23$; ages 20-67 years) : Revive, Sumpango
- **Focus Group 2** ($n = 22$; ages 19-26): Joyas de Cristo, San Antonio Aqua Calientes
- **Focus Group 3** ($n = 12$; ages 25-54): Ahava, Pastores

SIGNIFICANCE

Menstrual stigma in Guatemala arises from limited education, inadequate resources, and societal taboos. Providing menstrual health education and resources can help reduce this stigma, improve hygiene, and empower women.

PROCEDURE

- Collaboration with community leaders in Guatemala
- Interpreters familiar with the community provided cultural context
- Education on reproductive health and RMPs was delivered by two UConn nursing faculty and two undergraduate nursing students
- All participants received RMP kits
- Focus group members also received food bags as a token of appreciation



The RMP kits, provided by Days for Girls International, include reusable waterproof cloth shields and pads, a discreet storage bag, underwear, hygiene essentials, and educational materials to support sustainable menstrual health.



QR Code for Days for Girls International Website

RESULTS

Focus group transcripts were coded in ATLAS.ti Web, revealing five prevalent themes. While each theme is distinct, together they reflect a collective journey.

THEME 1. GUARDIANS OF THE FLOW:

"When I had my first menstruation, I also didn't know anything about it, and my sister was the one who told me, here, here's a pad, here's how you use it, because my mom was embarrassed to talk about."

THEME 2. BLEEDING TRUTHS – SHAME TO STRENGTH:

"My mom was not with us at the time, so an aunt took me and said, 'Let's go find your grandmother so we can figure out what's happening, because maybe your stomach has exploded'."

THEME 3. INVISIBLE RULES, VISIBLE IMPACT:

"When it's, you know, an unplanned or undesired pregnancy, and all of the blame is placed on the woman. But for the man, if they understand how it works and their part in it, maybe they will take responsibility for knowing what's happening and accept more responsibility in the process."

THEME 4. BREAKING THE SILENCE TO BLEED TOGETHER:

"Our moms, like from the generations past, they didn't really teach us or explain these kinds of things to us, and so I wanted to come and learn, because I have a daughter, and I want to be able to teach her in a more transparent way about these things."

THEME 5. LOST IN THE CYCLE:

"Because often they're starting their periods, and they don't realize that also means now you can get pregnant. And so then when they are pregnant, they have no idea, like, why did this happen? So just that ignorance and lack of information is difficult, and sometimes they don't have the words or the information to know how to talk about it."



Focus group questions and references via QR code