

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH: EXPERIENCE REPORT OF A UNIVERSITY EXTENSION PROJECT

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES IN THE AREA OF WOMEN'S HEALTH - REPORT OF UNIVERSITY EXTENSION EXPERIENCE

ACCIONES EDUCATIVAS EN LA ÁREA DESALUD DE LA MUJER – RELATO DE EXPERIENCIA DE EXTENSIÓNUNIVERSITARIA

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to present the experience of undergraduate nursing students and graduate healthcare students during the development of educational activities related to women's health. **Description of experience:** a experience report regarding educational activities for women's health carried out in a university hospital, state secondary schools, senior care units and public spaces of a city in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais. **Report:** about 5,736 women benefited from the activities from January through December 2013. The subject matters dealt with were those considered as a priority by the Ministry of Health. **Conclusion:** extension activities promote health education and provide cultural, educational and scientific knowledge to the students involved in them.

Keywords: Women's Health, Health Education, Nursing.

RESUMO

Objetivos: apresentar a experiência vivida por acadêmicas de graduação em enfermagem e pós-graduação em atenção à saúde, no desenvolvimento de atividades educativas, no contexto da saúde da mulher. **Descrição da experiência:** trata-se de um relato de experiência baseado em atividades educativas realizadas no âmbito de um hospital de clínicas, de escolas públicas de ensino médio, de unidades de atenção ao idoso e espaços públicos de um município do interior de Minas Gerais, a respeito de questões de saúde da mulher. **Relato:** as atividades beneficiaram um grupo de aproximadamente 5736 mulheres entre os meses de janeiro a dezembro de 2013. Os temas abordados foram àqueles apontados pelo Ministério da Saúde como prioritários. **Considerações finais:** as atividades extensionistas promovem a educação em saúde.

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Em relação aos alunos envolvidos, a atividade extensionista proporciona um acréscimo cultural, educativo e científico.

Palavras-chave: Saúde da Mulher, Educação em Saúde, Enfermagem.

RESUMEN

Objetivos: presentar la experiencia vivida por académicas de graduación en enfermería y post-graduación en atención a la salud, en el desarrollo de actividades educativas, en el contexto de la salud de la mujer. **Descripción de la experiencia:** se trata de un relato de experiencia embazado en actividades educativas realizadas en el ámbito de un hospital de clínicas, de escuelas públicas de enseñanza media, de unidades de atención al mayor y espacios públicos de un municipio del interior de Minas Gerais, a respeto de cuestiones de salud de la mujer. **Relato:** las actividades beneficiaron un grupo de aproximadamente 5736 mujeres entre los meses de enero a diciembre de 2013. Los temas abordados fueron aquellos apuntados por el Ministerio de la Salud como prioritarios. **Consideraciones finales:** las actividades extensionistas promueven la educación en salud. En relación a los alumnos envueltos, la actividad extensionista proporciona un acréscimo cultural, educativo y científico.

Palabras clave: Salud de la Mujer, Educación en Salud, Enfermería.

INTRODUCTION

Nurses are responsible for taking care of patients and it is their duty to enable individuals to perform self-care in order to ensure they are able to manage their own health. Nurses working with women's health are responsible for qualifying and motivating women; promoting self-care by encouraging practices like proper care during pregnancy, puerperium, and breastfeeding; providing guidance for family planning, for the prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and for the prevention and management of gynaecological and breast cancer; as well as devoting attention to women during the climacteric.

The emphasis given here to women's health is justified due to the vulnerability of women in the context of healthcare. Historically, women's healthcare was reduced to the care provided during pregnancy and puerperium, but it is necessary to attend to women's health as a whole.¹ That means also qualifying women to perform self-care and be autonomous in managing their own health.

Regarding the promotion of women's health, it is observed limited participation in activities for the prevention and early detection of cervical and breast cancer, little involvement in self-care during pregnancy and puerperium, low incidence of exclusive breastfeeding, lack of knowledge about family planning, low

useo of methods for the prevention of sexually transmitted infections, amongst other gaps in the care system which indicate the actions for health prevention and promotion are insufficient to fulfil the objectives established by the competent bodies (World Health Organization/WHO, Pan American Health Organization/PAHO, Latin American Center for Perinatology/CLAP, United Nations Children's Fund/UNICEF, Ministry of Health/MS, Brazilian National Cancer Institute/INCA, among others).²

The biggest motivation for the development of this project was the belief - and the intention of making future nursing professionals believe - that every woman is capable of self-care as long as she is well informed and properly guided. From this perspective, it is believed that women become motivating agents who disseminate information and guidance.

The proposed project was carried out during the past ten years, and has benefited hundreds of women through its educational approach by making people aware of matter related to self-care, health promotion and the prevention of diseases. It has also benefited dozens of undergraduate and graduate students by developing their notion of citizenship and social responsibility towards health, and their technical and scientific education regarding women's health.

From this point of view, this project aims to carry out educational actions related to: the prevention and management of cervical and breast cancer, self-care during pregnancy, breastfeeding, family planning, safe sex practices, the prevention of sexually transmitted infections and teenage pregnancy, and the importance of having a healthy lifestyle.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Secretaria de Estado de Políticas para as Mulheres, which is the state bureau of policies for women, and the Office on Women's Health of the Brazilian Ministry of Health encourage actions to promote women integrally, individually and collectively in all areas of society.² The promotion of women will only materialise once they are protagonists in the activities intended for their benefit.

In this context, the educational activities are aimed to offer means for behavioural changes to take place exponentially in order for women to have high levels of quality of life. In women's health, educational activities are intended to promote health in a holistic and integral way, taking into consideration that women must receive information and guidance regarding self-care in order to be able to manage and solve their health issues in a

conscious and autonomous way.

In order for women to be protagonists in the promotion of activities for their own health, it is necessary to create opportunities for them to get together and debate relevant themes which influence their quality of life.¹ These opportunities are materialised in this project through the educational activities which were carried out in public places regularly attended by women of different ages and social classes, who have different jobs/occupations, and who are in different health conditions. Despite the differences between these women, all of them need to be constantly informed about the activities for health promotion being carried out by the Brazilian Unified Health System.

These notions are the foundation for our extension activities for the promotion of women's health and for our working methods which are characterised by the approaching of women in waiting rooms of public health facilities, young women attending state secondary schools in the city, elderly women registered in the city's senior care unit, and women attending public places such as squares and street markets. On these opportunities, with active participation from the undergraduate and graduate students partaking in the project, debates are carried out with the women with the aid of educational material elaborated by the students themselves. This

material, although easily made, is rich with information that is presented in an understandable way and according to the guidelines established by the Brazilian Ministry of Health.³⁻⁸

The intention with this case report is to present the experience of undergraduate nursing students and graduate healthcare students during the development of educational activities related to women's health.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology followed in this project consisted in the informal presentation, in public spaces attended by women, of relevant themes (the ones listed beforehand) related to women's health following an strategy of group approach in which information and guidance were offered, making use of previously elaborated material, in order to instigate debate and clarify doubts. The strategies for the activities were based on the methodology proposed by Paulo Freire⁹, so the starting point was the common knowledge of the theme and the intention was to generate life changing knowledge together with the women.

This project went on from January through December 2013, with a total of 468 hours of activities carried out directly

with the women. Additional hours were necessary for the elaboration of activities and material, as well as for the 42 weekly meetings for discussion and evaluation with the coordinators of the project.

The proposition for this project was previously presented to the Office of the Vice-Dean of Extension Courses of the Universidade Federal do Triângulo Mineiro (UFTM), and was approved to be carried on under the registration number PROEX 003/2013. Afterwards it was submitted to be analysed by the Ministry of Education and received funds from the PROEXT 2012 (the ProExt is an extension program linked to the Ministry of Education created to support state higher education institutions extension programs or projects which contribute to public policies). The funds from the PROEXT were used to offer 20 scholarships as incentive for undergraduate students to partake in the project, and to acquire material for the preparation of activities.

DESCRIPTION OF EXPERIENCE AND DISCUSSION

Thirty-four people from UFTM took part in this project: 24 undergraduate students, 6 graduate students (4 master and 2 doctoral students), 3 professors of the undergraduate nursing program and 1

nurse. The community benefited from the project through 5,736 women, amongst them there were users of the obstetric and gynaecological service of Ambulatório Maria da Glória (AMG), an outpatient department of Hospital de Clínicas (HC), which is the university hospital of UFTM; pregnant adolescents and women with infectious diseases, who are users of Ambulatório de Pré Natal e de Moléstias Infectocontagiosas em Ginecologia e Obstetrícia (AMIGO-GEST), an outpatient department of AMG; women in the postpartum period who were staying on the hospital ward of HC; secondary students enrolled in state schools of the city of Uberaba; women who attended the Unidade de Atenção Integral ao Idoso (UAI), a senior care unit in the city of Uberaba; and women attending public places such as squares and street markets.

Some of the educational activities carried out focused on the importance of doing routine Pap smear screenings and self breast exams for early detection of cancer in patients of the obstetric and gynaecological service of AMG. The theme was presented through lectures with manikins, pamphlets and posters.⁶

The group of pregnant women (made up of teenagers and women with sexually transmitted infections) and the nurse and social assistant of the outpatient clinic were questioned in order to gather

information on themes of interest considering their particular needs. The themes selected were: immunization for babies and pregnant women; baby care; fetal development; family planning; physiological changes during pregnancy; most common pregnancy complaints; baby feeding, breastfeeding and complementary feeding; and childbirth. The weekly meetings were carried out in AMIGO-GEST. Group dynamics, lectures and other activities related to the aforementioned themes were carried out. Prints, posters, pamphlets and booklets were also used to inform about the themes.⁵

The actions carried out with the women in the postpartum period in the hospital ward of the HC-UFTM happened daily and involved a survey of the group's needs, especially in regards to the maintenance of exclusive breastfeeding. Educational activities about health were carried out in all wards through debates. The themes discussed were the ones the women stated they were interested in, such as postpartum maternal health care, breastfeeding, diets, workers' rights, family planning, and newborns. Breast and pelvis simulators, pediatric simulators, posters, and models of contraceptive methods were used as educational materials.³⁻⁵

Students of state secondary schools of Uberaba were benefitted by the project. The intention was to carry out educational

activities to provide adolescents and young adults with guidance and promote healthcare. The themes discussed were: transmission, signs and symptoms, and treatment of sexually transmitted infections; consequences and prevention of early pregnancy; safe sex practice; and guidance for maintaining a healthy lifestyle (including information about food, physical activity and leisure). The activities were carried out weekly, one school at a time, in a time previously scheduled with the school administrator. In this case, to participate in the activities, students were split into two groups, one of males and another of females. This strategy was used to give participants more freedom to express themselves.^{4,8}

Students of a state primary school were included in the project after a request by their guardians due to a recurrent issue at the school regarding sexuality. Students of a vocational centre for deaf-mutes were also included in the project since they expressed interest in the extension activities after hearing about it from the Delegacia Regional de Educação do Estado de Minas Gerais, the regional office of education of the state of Minas Gerais.

For the educational activities to provide guidance to the women who attend the Unidade de Atenção ao Idoso (UAI), a senior care unit in Uberaba, the themes chosen to be discussed were: how to

perform self breast exams and its importance to detect breast cancer; the importance of doing annual routine Pap smear screenings; information regarding the prevention of sexually transmitted infections; information for maintaining a healthy lifestyle (including information about food, physical activity and leisure); and psychological support and actions to promote women's self-esteem. The activities happened weekly at the UAI and included the use of educational videos, manual activities etc.^{4,6-8}

Educational activities to provide information and guidance to women were carried out in Uberaba on the following topics: how to do self breast exams and their importance to detect breast cancer; the importance of doing annual routine Pap smear screenings; information regarding the prevention of sexually transmitted infections; information for maintaining a healthy lifestyle (including information about food, physical activity and leisure); information about contraceptive methods and family planning; and psychological support and activities to promote women's self-esteem. The activities happened in public spaces of the city through gatherings of small groups in squares and street markets.^{4,6-8}

EVALUATION

The follow up and evaluation of the extension project was continuous and systematic through weekly meetings between the undergraduates and graduate students and coordinators. On these meetings aspects of the contributions and difficulties of changing the reality of the internal and external communities were discussed. The follow up process took into consideration the execution of each participant's tasks, the development of the proposed activities and adherence to the timetable established, the preparation of material and the announcement of activities in events and media concerned with the theme.

At the end of the project, a group evaluation took place as pre-established by the group itself and the following topics were evaluated: the link between teaching and research; the multidisciplinary approach to reality; the repercution to the student's formative process, creation and systematisation of knowledge; article publishing; methodology adequacy; adherence to the timetable established for the execution of the activities; infrastructure conditions; and human and financial resources.

The evaluation of the extension project by the people benefitted was done during the execution of the activities. Evaluation forms were randomly

distributed to participants. The forms presented questions regarding the importance of the activities and the theme, the quality of the content and material used, and the time spent. About 10% of participants evaluated the activities and 90% of respondents stated the excellence of the activities executed.

The coordinators evaluated the students who took part in the project and the students evaluated the project and those responsible for it. These evaluations pointed out there was an improvement in everyone's scientific and technical abilities and skills. It stands out that the main difficulty involved in the realisation of the project was the delay in the transference of the funds approved for the implementation of the activities, especially for the acquisition of the educational material required.

RELATION BETWEEN TEACHING, RESEARCH AND EXTENSION

Undergraduate and graduate students and the project coordinators participated in a scientific and technical preparation for the activities proposed, which was based in systematic studies on the subject, and elaborated the educational material under the coordinators supervision. The activities elaborated by the

undergraduate students were observed by the graduate students and discussed with the coordinators during the weekly meetings.

The coordinators provided systematic guidance for the observation of the reality experienced and the impact of the activities in that reality. The systematic description of the experiences lived and the creation of extension material that could be shared in scientific events of the field were also guided. Such systematic reviews of the activities carried out allowed the undergraduate and graduate students to resize the activities to better adjust them to reality.

CONCLUSION

Extension activities promote health education and allow for the exchange of knowledge and experience between participants. The students involved improve their cultural, educational and scientific knowledge and the activities result in an exchange of information between the public and researchers which, besides benefitting the population, also allow for the expansion of scientific knowledge since it requires preparation and studies.

It seems worth highlighting that this project is an isolated initiative not linked

to any institutional program of adult health promotion because its objective is to point out the peculiarities of the health needs in the field of women's health. Even though it would make sense for it to be connected to other programs, it is understood that these peculiarities end up diluted and the fragilities and advances lose visibility when mixed together with other projects and the intention here is to bring to light the health needs that are specific to women.

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