Institutionalizing fertility management/human sexuality training in Colombian nursing schools

L. GAFFIKIN (1), E. PRADA (2), A. SANTAMARIA (2), J. McGRATH (1) and S. DE CASTRO BUFFINGTON (1)

(1) JHPIEGO, Research and Evaluation Office, Brown's Wharf, Suite 200, 1615 Thames Street, Baltimore, MD 21231, USA
(2) ACEP, Colombia

Abstract

While there is no universally applied definition of the terms, 'institutionalization', 'capacity', 'capability' and 'commitment' have been suggested as sub-indicators of a self-sustained program. This paper describes efforts to measure these terms in the context of a fertility management/human sexuality (FM/HS) education program for student nurses in Colombia. Interviews with 19 school deans formed the basis of measuring progress towards institutionalization. All the deans supported the idea of having FM/HS instruction, although resource commitment to effectively carry out the instruction varied. Focus groups with professors from participating schools provided insights into the effect of the project on both the students and course teachers. Professors found that students who had taken the course were more effective FM/HS counselors in later practical courses. Responses from interviews with a random sample of students who had or had not attended the course were compared to assess the effect of the course on the nursing students. Although attitudes between the two groups did not differ significantly, knowledge levels about FM/HS were significantly higher among nursing students who had attended the course. In general, the results indicate that the participatory educational approach used in teaching the FM/HS topics was effective in sensitizing both students and teachers to this subject area.

Introduction

Dropout due to unplanned pregnancy from nursing schools and other educational institutions has been identified as a problem of concern in Colombia (Santamaria A (1992), personal communication). In an attempt to address this, an educational
project was designed with the goal of reducing pregnancy rates among female nursing students. The project was organized as a collaborative effort between JHPIEGO, a Johns Hopkins University-affiliated training organization, and ACEP, the Asociación Colombiana para el Estudio de la Población.

Between 1987 and 1992, the two organizations worked to institutionalize fertility management/human sexuality (FM/HS) education in all nursing schools throughout the country. The strategy involved the development of a standardized, user-oriented FM/HS course that focused on the student as a potential family planning (FP) user as well as a future reproductive health provider. Various topics were covered in an extracurricular non-credit course offered in 19 out of 21 existing nursing schools throughout the five-year project period. In 1992, JHPIEGO worked with ACEP to evaluate the extent to which FM/HS instruction had been institutionalized as part of pre-service education among nurses in Colombia. The specific objectives of the evaluation were three-fold:

1. To develop an operational definition of ‘institutionalization’ in the context of FM/HS education in Colombian nursing schools,

2. To explore the concepts of ‘capacity’, ‘capability’ and ‘commitment’ as they relate to the broader term, ‘institutionalization’, and

3. To investigate how the introduction of FM/HS instruction had affected nursing school students, professors and administrators in participating institutions.

The terms capacity and capability were considered by the investigators to be subindicators of institutionalization. For the purposes of this study, capacity was defined as the volume and types of training conducted, and capability was defined as the ability of an organization to plan, implement, maintain, and evaluate effective training programs [1-3]. That is, capacity represented the material resources needed to effectively educate or train, and capability represented the human resources needed. Many suggest that the term commitment, although difficult to measure, is also a key element of institutionalization. Within the context of this evaluation, commitment was defined as the extent to which individuals (or groups), who/which can effect long-term change, are dedicated to making this happen.

Methods

Four quantitative and qualitative data collection methods were used in this evaluation to measure the above terms. First, a desk audit of project documentation was conducted. Second, an in-depth structured interview with the deans (head administrators) of each university was conducted to obtain expert opinion on the level of institutionalization of FM/HS instruction in that school. The deans of the 19 participating universities were interviewed by a trained team and the questionnaire included both administrative and attitudinal questions. In measuring commitment,