Institutionalizing fertility management/human sexuality training in Colombian nursing schools

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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 evalua-
tion to measure the above terms. First, a desk audit of project documentation was 
conducted. Second, an in-depth structured interview with the deans (head adminis-
trators) 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,