Promoting sexual and reproductive health through the development of a strategic campaign to reduce abortion-related stigma and advance the rights of women in Mexico

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Project Background

• In 2007, the legislative assembly of Mexico City approved a penal code reform allowing for legal termination of pregnancy upon request up to 12 weeks gestation.
• While this reform has greatly improved access to services and information within Mexico City, it provoked a backlash of constitutional reform within the other states, with 17 of the 31 states (to date) amending their constitutions to protect life from the moment of conception.
• In summer 2010, Mexico’s National Pro-Choice Alliance invited a multidisciplinary team of students from Emory University to research public awareness and opinion about abortion and the recent reforms. Based on their findings, this inaugural team proposed an advocacy framework with the goal to de-stigmatize abortion.
• To build on this framework, the Alliance welcomed this second team of students in 2011 to further develop and pilot test specific advocacy messages.

Project Goals

• Design and pilot an evidence-based set of messages aimed at reducing stigma increasing access to safe abortion in Mexico City and at generating a base of support for expanded abortion rights in Oaxaca State.
• Define dissemination strategies specific to different target settings and populations.
• Identify directions for future campaigns based on community and expert recommendations.

Methodology

• We recruited focus group participants through the Alliance’s community networks in the two cities and interview participants from among the Alliance’s professional contacts and through chain referrals.
• In total, we piloted the messages in 27 interviews (17 in Mexico City and 10 in Oaxaca de Juárez) and 6 focus groups (4 in Mexico City and 2 in Oaxaca de Juárez).
• Each team member verified and supplemented fieldwork notes based on audio recordings from the sessions and independently analyzed the data.
• Based on this analysis, we developed final message proposals collaboratively.
• Upon completion of the project, we presented these proposals, along with recommendations for future advocacy work, to representatives from each of the four Alliance partners.

Key Findings

• Regarding the content of messages, participants identified a significant need for more accurate, practical, and complete information about unplanned pregnancy and abortion, including what the options are, what the procedure entails, and where to go for help.
• For messages targeting the public, testimonies and histories (as in messages 4 and 7 below) were considered more effective than statistics.
• The images, language, and content of messages need to be tailored for specific target populations such as adolescents, adults, and indigenous groups.
• Participants felt that presenting abortion as a “responsible” decision is an important message but one that requires care, given that the theme of responsibility has negative connotations of culpability and blame in the context of unplanned pregnancy (see messages 1 and 6).
• For messages that present the reasons one might need an abortion, participants expressed little sympathy for women in the case of pregnancy due to contraceptive failure, whereas there was near universal sympathy and support in the case of pregnancy due to rape (see message 4).
• Many participants suggested including men in the messages or developing separate messages for men in order to recognize their role in the decision and communicate the importance of their support and respect for their partners (as in message 1).

Dissemination Strategies

• All messages currently exist in poster format. Participants suggested displaying them in or on public transportation, at health centers, near schools, and on billboards.
• Other recommended means of dissemination include the internet, by modifying messages to populate a website that discusses legal abortion in Mexico and integrating the website with social media such as Facebook and Twitter; radio, after adapting messages for radio use; or alternative media such as stickers, pens and postcards that communicate key messages or advertise links.

Next Steps

• Alliance members plan to develop selected messages for future campaigns in Mexico City and Oaxaca de Juárez. This will include redesigning the messages to feature original images, conducting a second round of pilot testing with a larger, more representative sample from the target audience(s), and monitoring and evaluating effectiveness and reach of the messages.

Project Partners

• Mexico’s National Pro-Choice Alliance (La Alianza Nacional por el Derecho a Decidir, ANDAR):
• Population Council
• Gender Equity: Citizenship, Work, and Family (Equidad de Género: Ciudadanía, Trabajo y Familia)
• Catholics for the Right to Decide (Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir, COD)
• Information Group in Reproductive Choice (Grupo de Información en Reproducción Elegida, GIRE)
• Roger Rochat, Academic Advisor
• Emory Global Health Institute, Funding organization

“EN MI EMBARAZO... Yo sabía que no lo podía tener. No estaba preparada para ser una madre, pero tampoco sabía qué hacer. Mi hermana me llevó a la clínica para hablar sobre mis opciones. Ella me quedó a mi lado todo el tiempo.”

- Mónica, 19 años

Peleaste con tus papás
No te aceptaron en la universidad
Te violaron y ahora estás embarazada
Tienes opciones
En Oaxaca, el aborto por causa de violación es legal

Soy parte de mi comunidad y en mi cuerpo yo decido

Si estoy embarazada

Yo tengo derecho a decidir de manera libre, responsable e informada continuarlo o no antes de las 13 semanas

En un momento difícil, siempre hay alguien que te puede apoyar
Para información sobre tus opciones, visita www.andar.org.mx