IMPROVING FEMALE RECRUITMENT, PARTICIPATION, AND RETENTION AMONG PEER EDUCATORS IN MOZAMBIQUE

Since 1999, Pathfinder International has supported "Geração Biz," (GB) a multi-sectoral program involving government ministries, UNFPA, and civil society. GB provides integrated youth-friendly clinical services (YFS) and adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH) information and services to in and out-of-school youth in seven provinces in Mozambique, including the capital city of Maputo. The program encourages behavior change through peer education and innovative media campaigns, and offers information, counseling, life skills, and YFS through clinic-based, school-based, and community-based interventions.

OPERATIONS RESEARCH

In 2003, Pathfinder began conducting operations research (OR) in collaboration with the Inter-Agency Gender Working Group (IGWG) to test new strategies for improving female peer educator recruitment, participation, and retention in the GB program. Although the program aimed to recruit young women and men equally to its peer educator ranks and to engage each at the same level, a gender difference had become apparent to staff: young women were under-represented as recruits, participated less actively, and held fewer leadership roles as continuing peer educators. Using qualitative and quantitative methods, the OR aimed to better understand the factors associated with female peer educator participation and retention, and to propose and test an intervention model that would address these issues. Three of four phases of the OR have been completed, including a literature review, a situational analysis, and the development of new protocols for peer educators, managers, and trainers. The final phase, testing of the new protocols, is underway.

Peer education is recognized as a successful component of ASRH programs, with benefits for both the peer educators themselves and their target audiences. Gender is a significant factor among peer educators, as young women generally prefer to solicit and receive ASRH information from female peer educators. In Mozambique, young women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS is compounded by traditional gender norms. Female peer educators can play an important role by providing socially legitimate ways for young women to discuss HIV/AIDS and safe sex.

RECRUITMENT, PARTICIPATION, AND RETENTION RATES

Results of the situational analysis confirm the staff's observation that young women were recruited in smaller numbers and left the program in proportionally greater numbers than their male counterparts. Overall, the number of female peer educators recruited and trained was 17% less than male peer educators, with female trainee numbers at 27% less than males in the community-based sites.

The total dropout rate for females was 31%, compared to 25% for males. Compared to the school-based programs, community-based peer educators had higher general dropout rates and among these a greater

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gender differential (41% of dropouts were female; 31% were male). Broken down by age, the older cohort of female peer educators (20-24 years) dropped out less frequently, at 35%, than younger cohorts (10-14 and 15-19 years) who left at a rate of 50% and 63%, respectively.

Table 1. Distribution of Peer Educator Recruitment and Participation in GBP by Sex, 1999-2003.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site and Gender</th>
<th>Qualified Activists</th>
<th>Activists currently in GBP</th>
<th>% Loss of Activists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>M 540</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F 484</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>M 382</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F 281</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>M 922</td>
<td>692</td>
<td>24.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F 765</td>
<td>532</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Leadership roles with the peer educator programs were more sharply divided: 62% of all peer coordinators were males. Peer coordinators are responsible for planning and managing activities, coordinating logistics and materials, and liaising with technical advisors and the governmental team. Among 15-19 year olds, 70% peer coordinators were male, and among 20-24 year olds, 57% were male. Focus groups with peer educators and interviews with supervisors and peer leaders revealed a range of issues concerning female peer educator recruitment, involvement and retention.

**Social recognition**
While peer educators of both sexes seek social recognition for their work, female peer educators often see their opportunities to achieve it "stolen" or pre-empted by males. Female peers often have fewer chances to receive recognition, and in some cases boys are disproportionately chosen for prominent roles by technical staff. Peer educators who received social recognition stayed in the program longer. One peer educator said of her father: "when his friends say that they saw me on TV, he feels proud." Female peer educators need more opportunities to receive public recognition and compensation for their work.

**Interpersonal skills**
Female peer educators often perceive their roles differently than male peers, stressing the need to initiate dialogue with peers and "listen to [people's] problems," rather than "spreading a message" or "preaching." This more interactive approach conforms to stated program goals, but in practice has not been as valued by program staff, ultimately inhibiting the promotion and recognition of female peer educators. Training and supervision need to stress the value of interacting with others and engaging them in dialogue, and these educators need more encouragement and positive feedback on their work.

**Parents and family ties**
The public and sensitive nature of a peer educator's job goes against behavior traditionally expected of a young woman, and many parents, particularly fathers, are opposed to their daughters' participation. Not only does it take young women away from their duties at home, it requires them to talk about issues on which, as unmarried women, they aren't supposed to exhibit any knowledge. One peer educator's parents told her that they didn't want her to speak of "these things." But parents' minds can change, and often the catalyst is seeing their daughters publicly recognized through BCC and media campaigns. Parents need to be more involved during the recruitment process and be invited to participate in training, where

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the social significance and impact of the work and the need to employ peer educators of both sexes should be stressed.

**Pregnancy as a compromising factor**

Pregnancy also appears to be a factor in the numbers of young women leaving the program. By becoming pregnant, some female peers feel the validity of their work is in question, thus leading to embarrassment. Other times it is because they are also asked to leave school and therefore lose their connection to school-based peer educator programs. A young man who makes a woman pregnant, however, hardly faces any consequences. Clear guidelines are needed within the program that support participants in the event of a pregnancy in order to address perceptions of guilt, retain peer educators in the program and encourage their continuing participation in school.

**Role of the peer group**

The peer group plays an important role for female peer educators by mutually supporting and reinforcing the formation of their new identities. Said one, “I didn’t have great difficulties; I had help from many friends. They were already activists [educators] and I would reveal doubts and they helped. So with their help it was easier.” Recruiting young women from existing peer groups may improve retention by ensuring that new peers already have some type of support system.

**Addressing gender in training**

Gender is not always comprehensively addressed in training sessions, often being reduced to biology and definitions of gender rather than to broader constructions relating to culture, society, and ultimately how that impacts the ability of female peers to communicate with other youth and actively participate in the program. Trainers did not initiate a deeper discussion about gender roles within the GB program, or address the challenges facing female peer educators due to Mozambican social values. As the first opportunity to empower girls with respect to the obstacles they face, training should address gender and include gender-specific approaches in teaching strategies, in the training methodology, and within the trainer’s discourse.

**New Program Protocol**

The first phases of the OR have identified a range of factors that affect female peer educator’s ability to fully participate and remain in the GB program. Many of these are rooted in women’s position in Mozambican culture. The new protocol, therefore, pays close attention to aspects of recruitment, training, and supervision that reinforce or assume the traditional cultural roles of young women. Building peers’ capacity to analyze, criticize, and propose changes should be an integral focus of the training and subsequent supervision. Changes in program protocol include:

**Recruitment**

- Improving parents’ understanding of the peers’ work
- Communicating clearer expectations to prospective peer educators
- Recruiting young women through friends and existing social and community groups

**Training**

- Deepening the discussion of gender and ensuring it is relevant to the educators’ roles
- Recognizing female peer educators’ achievements
- Including practical activities that young women can use to develop skills and confidence
- Encouraging the participation of parents or guardians in the training

**Technical team**

- Developing more refined selection criteria for GB staff and training personnel that includes a commitment to and understanding of gender equity
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- Conducting stronger and more frequent training of program staff that reinforce learning on gender issues and how to foster gender equity among peer educators
- Initiating closer supervision of trainers and staff

CONCLUSION
The findings of the situational analysis were used as the basis for revising strategies, practices, and procedures in the areas of recruitment, training, and support of female peer educators. The process of creating a new protocol also included input from several working groups and workshops. A case-control study is being used to assess the effectiveness of the new protocol, with intervention groups having received training by trainers updated in the new protocol, and control groups using the existing protocol. The groups are being followed and compared. Qualitative analysis will be conducted based on the assessment of the new protocol, as compared with the results from implementation using the old protocol. The analysis will be conducted according to a set of established variables (e.g., type of activities conducted, facilitating and hindering factors for successful implementation of activities.) Quantitative analysis will be carried out based on a statistical analysis of the differences among the groups according to select indicators such as recruitment and dropout rates of female peers and number of young women reached by peer activity.

Early results from the sites where the new protocol is in effect indicate that girls' involvement has increased. Peer leaders and supervisors report that girls are participating in more activities, particularly as they have more opportunities to be involved in debates, TV shows, and radio broadcasts. They also report that the involvement of parents in the training seminars is helping. All peer educators are encouraged to invite a parent to a special session, where the program is described in detail. This has improved the retention of young girls especially. Another change has been to clearly define the "rights and duties" of the peer educators during their training, so that they and their parents can know what to expect. The biggest change to date has been providing the level of supervision and support for peer educators that the research suggested was necessary. However, the program is devising creative ways to provide female-female support structures in spite of staffing limitations, such as by having female peer educators share their experiences with particular activities in organized discussions.

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