INPPARES, Peru

An Integrated Reproductive Health & Business Training Program for Youth

By Edgardo Segil and Angela Sebastiani

The Peruvian Institute of Responsible Parenting (INPPARES, Instituto Peruano de Paternidad Responsable) has always understood that quality of life includes physical, psychological and social aspects of well-being; therefore, we take the view that adolescent reproductive health cannot be improved without addressing other youth concerns. In Peru, as in other parts of the world, finding work is a major concern of young people. There is a lack of jobs, and the traditional education system is not helpful for those seeking work in business. As INPPARES worked with young people, we found them asking for assistance in developing job skills and finding work.

Two years ago, INPPARES formed an alliance with the Integrated Collective of Development, a non-governmental organization which provides business training, and started a project to provide reproductive health services along with professional training. The program reaches poor urban youth aged 17-28, the majority of whom have dropped out of school, in the zones of Lima, Huancayo and Cuzco. It supports the development of self-esteem, provides sexual and reproductive health services in accordance with young people’s needs and values, and promotes strategic skills development that allows young people to earn an income. The program holistically addresses the needs of youth, empowering young people within the context of respect and equity between the genders. Since 1997, over 30,000 youth have sought the program’s services.

With each group an assessment is done of their needs, and then courses are catered to develop or reinforce each groups’ abilities. The courses develop young people’s "self-efficacy” so that they understand their business potential and focus on skills-building and understanding the culture of business. Youth also receive assistance in executing their business ideas, such as a course on how to find financing for business proposals. Counseling is available, both to address young people's vocational needs as well as on their sexual and reproductive health. All courses have an underlying theme of quality of life, taking into account physical and mental health, family and personal relations, and sexuality.

The co-educational courses last an average of 20 hours each (4 hours daily), and if youth need further training, they are given personalized instruction. Since costs are covered by IPPF and UNICEF, the courses are provided at no cost to the participants, with the exception of the self-employment course, at a cost of US$18 per participant. Participants are given an opportunity to present their business proposals in an annual contest; the best ideas receive a small grant and assistance in implementation and evaluation. In order to attract more youth, the annual contest was most recently held at the national level, allowing the participation of all the youth of INPPARES’ branches.

Program Results

Increased knowledge and improved attitudes about reproductive health. After the first year of intervention, entrance and exit tests given to youth showed increased knowledge about health themes covered in the program, particularly sexual and reproductive health topics such as anatomy and physiology, socio-cultural factors that shape sexuality, and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS. Improved
attitudes related to sexuality were also documented through qualitative interviews. Youth said that the opportunity to talk about sexuality and reproductive health with adults was helpful since youth commonly do not discuss these issues with parents or teachers but rely on information from their friends. They reported that the program helped them acquire knowledge which supports the achievement of their life goals, whether individually or with a partner.

**Improved self-esteem.** An increase in the self-esteem of youth who participated in the courses was noted both during exercises on self-esteem, leadership and life projects, and during individual counseling. The majority of the youth sought counseling for problems with their interpersonal relations, for example, for problems with their partner or communicating with parents. Many problems were related to low self-esteem, and youth lacked the skills and resources to be able resolve conflicts. For example, many youth did not know how to tell their parents that they wanted to study a technical career when their parents hoped they would study a traditional one. The project found that giving young people the support and skills to resolve this type of situation improved their self-esteem.

**Increased recognition of vocational abilities and improved capacity to be economically productive.** Youth who participated in the program recognized their ability to develop in the economic system, and felt they developed skills to implement income-generating projects. Many youth were able to develop businesses based on productive activities such as making breads, sweets and cakes, making typical clothing and suits, and agricultural work (sowing and harvesting of root vegetables of the region). In some cases, a young person’s business became the principal source of income for his/her family.

**Lessons Learned**

- It is important to create informational materials to reinforce the key messages of the program. Youth suggested the need for a manual they could keep that included information related to adolescent sexuality; as a result, INPPARES designed the "Sexual and Reproductive Health" manual as part of the Quality of Life courses.

- Business training courses are theoretical and not always as attractive to youth; courses are more dynamic if they include practical issues such as decision-making, self-esteem, and the development of life goals.

- Youth often find it difficult to talk about issues related to their sexuality; however, discomfort is reduced when sex is addressed within the context of other youth concerns.

- Programs need to be understanding of their target group; we found that because many youth work, they either dropped out of the training or were not prepared for courses. Flexible scheduling and maintaining a realistic pace in the training can help address this.

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Images for this issue on this disk with noted captions:

**Inparlogo.tif**: Logo no caption needed

**Cfglogo.tif**: Logo no caption needed

**Inparwoman.tif**: A student demonstrates knowledge of male & female reproductive systems.

**Inparwkshp.tif**: Students drawing pictures of themselves as part of a self-esteem building exercise.

**Inparmen.tif**: Students attending a job training course.

Text for highlight box: "Youth often find it difficult to talk about issues related to their sexuality; however, discomfort is reduced when sex is addressed within the context of other youth concerns."