

Peer Educators As Frontliners In Sexual Reproductive Health Response During Covid 19 Pandemic In Rural And Remote Areas Of The Philippines

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Background/Purpose:

In August 2019, the Philippine government declared teenage pregnancy as national social emergency. Initial efforts were started, however in 2020, COVID 19 pandemic challenged the health systems. From 2020 to 2023, Philippines reported 4,083,678 COVID 19 cases resulting in 66,420 deaths.

Quarantines and mobility restrictions were imposed, and sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services were deprioritized. The unavailability of SRH services negatively affected supply of family planning (FP) commodities, antenatal check-ups, facility-based delivery and increased GBV cases.

Approach:

Oxfam Canada and Oxfam Philippines are implementing the Sexual Health and Empowerment (SHE) project in remote, conflict areas of the Philippines, supporting access to SRHR information and services. In partnership with local government units, rural health units, civil society organizations, SHE trained and mobilized peer educators (PEs) who during the pandemic organized health caravans providing FP information, services and commodities on site. GBV referral pathways for management and reporting were also promoted and explained.

In addition, PEs supported the distribution of dignity kits containing essential items and information packets on COVID-19 and SRHR messages.

Outcomes/Impact:

During the pandemic, the PEs increased SRHR awareness especially among women and adolescent girls, thus promoting bodily autonomy, sexual agency, consent and decision-making. They also bridged the gap between health services and communities, particularly adolescents. This led to increased uptake of SRHR as part of human rights, and adolescent's empowerment to claim them, reduction of teenage pregnancy, and policy advocacy on unhampered delivery of SRHR services.

PEs activities addressed stock-outs of FP commodities and enhanced access of GBV survivors to services required.

Innovation and Significance:

The PEs is an initiative led by women and youth led organizations. They have participated in different decision-making spaces ensuring access to SRHR/GBV services. The PEs utilized radio and social media platforms to provide information, social norms transformation and referrals.