PEER EDUCATORS AS FRONTLINERS FOR SEXUAL HEALTH RESPONSE

During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Rural and Remote Areas in the Philippines

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BACKGROUND

In August 2019, the Philippines declared teenage pregnancy as a national social emergency.

Compared to other Member-States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), "the Philippines has 47 births annually per 1,000 women aged 15-19, higher than the average adolescent birth rates of 44 globally and 33.5 in the ASEAN region" (World Bank).

In 2021, Executive Order 141 signed by the President called for a 'whole-of-nation' approach to address the causes and impact of teenage pregnancy.

The Sexual Health and Empowerment (SHE) project of Oxfam Pilipinas, in partnership with Oxfam Canada and Global Affairs Canada together with Women's Rights Organizations (WROs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), is contributing to address this problem.
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The COVID 19 pandemic led to de- prioritization of sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services. Government Rural Health Units (RHUs) focused on contact tracing, management of cases and vaccination.

Travel restrictions and community quarantines negatively affected antenatal and post -natal care; children's immunization; supply of family planning (FP) commodities and facility-based delivery.

APPROACH

The Peer Educators (PEs) of SHE amplified the need to continue the provision of SRHR information and services in communities which are oftentimes far from RHUs, with poor transportation and restricted mobility due to strict quarantine measures mandated by the local government unit.

The PEs distributed dignity kits, information packets on COVID 19 with SRHR/GBV prevention messages and supported referrals from communities to the available SRH services.

PEs were trained by WROs and CSOs on SRHR and GBV following adapted curriculum.

PEs coordinated with RHUs to make mobile units available in remote areas with very limited access to health facilities.

Photo by: Erwin Mascarinas / Oxfam Pilipinas

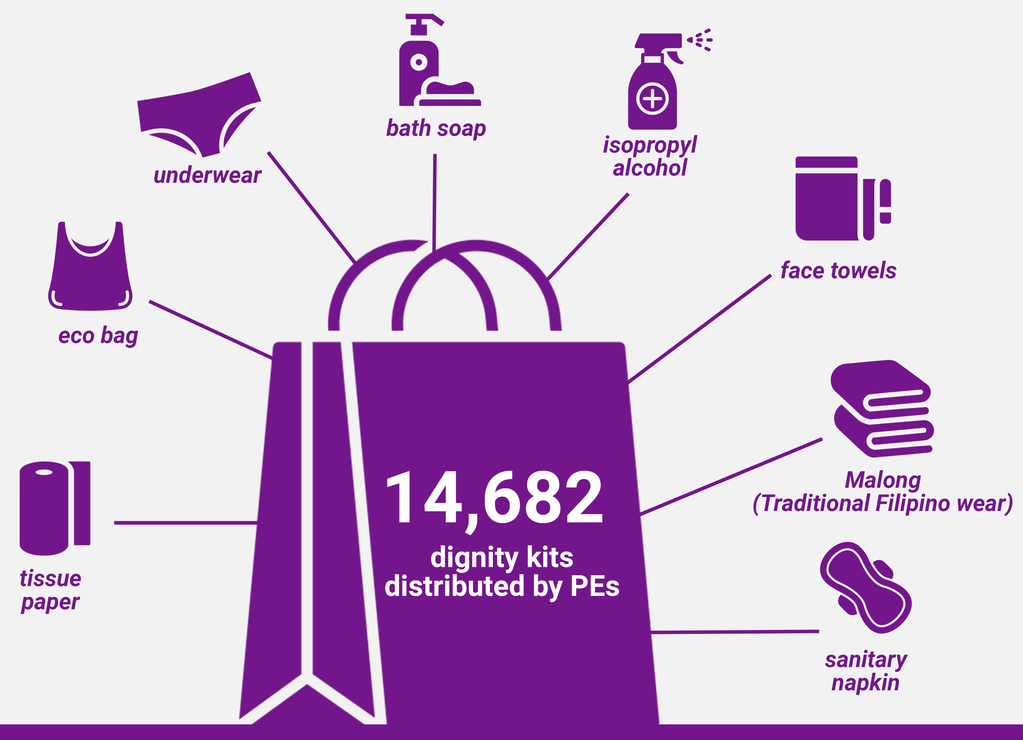
IMPACT & OUTCOMES

6,025 Peer Educators contributed in reaching

21,918 Women and girls

7,733 Men and boys

with SRHR and GBV information, promoting bodily autonomy, sexual agency and SRHR as part of human rights.



PEs' participation in mobile clinics enabled FP acceptors to receive continuing supply of FP commodities, thus addressing stock-out and increasing uptake of SRHR information and services by adolescent parents in remote communities.

PEs, as SRHR and GBV advocates, reassured adolescents confined at home that they can turn to someone for their issues and concerns. PEs also became advocates with the local government units to prioritize funding for SRH services during COVID 19.

PEs challenged traditional social and gender norms that have prevented adolescents and youth from accessing SRHR information and services by discussing SRHR as part of human rights.

INNOVATION & SIGNIFICANCE

- PEs helped ensure continuous access to quality SRHR and GBV information and services, especially during uncertain times such as the COVID 19 pandemic.
- PEs joined Health Caravans and distributed leaflets and booklets with information on SRHR, GBV, and COVID 19. GBV referral pathway was explained and hotline numbers for reporting of cases were promoted to ensure that they can reach proper authorities in times of need especially since they were stuck in their homes.
- The PE program proved to be an effective strategy to promote adolescents' engagement in decision making spaces; assume important roles within their communities.
- Through the PE program, adolescents and youth have become organized groups advocating for permanent and quality SRHR information and services in their communities.
- Peer education remains an effective strategy for demonstrating ownership, commitment and self-governance among adolescents.