Global Health Experiential Learning: Adolescent Pregnancy in Ecuador

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Abstract

Ecuador is a nation with diverse geography, ethnicities, and culture. These diversities determine the healthcare system that resolve common diseases and trends affecting the mortality of the people. In the Child Health and Family International Internship (CFHI) “Urban/Rural Andean Health” of Ecuador Internship, we tackled these relationships.

One of the central parts of the internship was the concern about young women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights. Because of the country’s societal expectations, young women are prevented from receiving adequate education and support. They often engage in early sexual activity and are more susceptible to relationship violence. The most alarming consequences of adolescent pregnancy are the significant numbers on child and maternal mortality due to birth complications.

There were different policies implemented by the Ecuadorian government regarding this factor. Policies that affect the trends of adolescent pregnancy rates include the four main policies on reproductive and sexual health from 2007 to now. The abrupt changes caused confusion and debates between healthcare officials, political leaders, and religious leaders. With this information, I conducted more research regarding the policies and found that the trend of adolescent birth rates increased in line with the lack of policy in place. The ENPLA policy from 2011-2015 which was favored by many healthcare professionals was not an improvement from the years before. Knowing which policy was the most efficient is inconclusive because of the short timeline per policy and external factors like its dependency on the current government’s values.

CFHI Internship Experience

One-month long Internship “Urban/Rural Andean Health” in Ecuador through the Child and Family Health International organization (CFHI).

CFHI Conferences:
• Connecting students and medical professionals participating in programs from different countries
• Current news regarding healthcare in their perspective countries

Ecuadorian Culture and Traditions Course:
• Virtual tour experiences of Ecuador’s regions
• Current environmental concerns

Language Course:
• 3-4 days weekly of intense Spanish classes

Traditional Medicine and Modern Medicine Course:
• Indigenous practices in childbirth, herbal medicine and rituals by Curanderos.
• Common illnesses and tropical diseases like Chikungunya, Malaria and Dengue
• Healthcare system in Ecuador
• Issues in providing healthcare in the Amazonas and other remote areas
• Determinants of health affecting specific populations

Personal Reflection

From my experience, I learned about the complexity of factors that play in determining health and how care should be provided. These factors stem from values and traditions people share. For a short time, I gained knowledge on the Ecuadorian way of culture and healthcare; how indigenous traditional medicine is widely respected and practiced, the different sectors of medical establishments that serve certain populations, and the comprehensive national healthcare being practiced. Along with that, I was able to compare my knowledge from living in the US and Philippines to Ecuador, as well as many other countries that participated in the global conferences.

This ability of analyzing the complexity was the most important takeaway from the internship; analyzing why certain policies are there and analyzing the people that these policies serve in entirety. I will use this experience to effectively evaluate situations in my future career that will require the understanding of other people’s experiences affected by their values and beliefs.

History of Ecuador

Location: Western South America
Population: 17.1 million
Ethnic Groups: Indigenous groups (Tsimba, Chachi, Epara, Awa, Quechua, Shuar, Achuar, Shiwiar, Cofan, Siona, Secoya, Zaparo, Andoa and Wamari), Mestizos and Afro-Ecuadorians
Religion: Roman Catholic 74%, other 26%
Languages: Spanish 93%, Quechua 4.1%, other indigenous 0.7%, foreign 2.2%
Regions: Costa (Pacific Coast), Galápagos Islands, Sierra (Andes Mountain Ranges), and Oriente (Volcanos and Amazon Basin)
Economic Resources: Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and mineral resources
Main Exports: Crude Oil, shrimp, banana, coffee, cocoa, flowers, and hats
Government: President as chief of states and mayors as leaders at provinces
Judicial System: Provincial courts, higher or divisional courts, and a Supreme Court

Policies on Sexual Health and Reproductive Rights

2007 – 2011: Servicios para atención diferenciada de adolescentes (SADA)
• Improved health education knowledge gaps
• Consisted of health professionals with sensitization workshops and specialized medical training targeted for adolescents

2011: Modelo de Atención Integral del Sistema Nacional de Salud Familiar (MAIS-IFC)
• Emphasized on equal care throughout each stage of life equipped with medical info
• Led to regression in community health clinics’ quality of services

2013 – 2014: Estrategia Nacional Intersectorial de Planificación Familiar (ENPIFLA)
• Mitigated social and cultural dynamics related to adolescent pregnancy
• Offered STD testing, contraceptive services and teen-friendly clinics

2015 - current: Plan Familia
• Relies on education through family
• Focused on abstinence and delayed initiation of sexual activity
• Encouragement of contraceptives is prohibited

Works Cited


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