



Health education on sexually transmissible infections to Nursing college students

Educação em saúde sobre infecções sexualmente transmissíveis para universitários de Enfermagem

Educación en salud sobre enfermedades de transmisión sexual para universitarios de Enfermería

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To describe the experience of Nursing students in health education practices about sexually transmitted infections (STIs). **Data Synthesis:** The educational activities of an extension project were developed for first-year students at the Faculty of Nursing of the University of Pará (UFPA), located in the municipality of Belém, Pará, Brazil, from March to December 2019. The practice of health education was divided into three stages: STI: epidemiology, etiologic agent, symptoms and prevention; Good practices for the correct use of male and female condoms; and Sexual transmission mode of STIs / HIV and the importance of being health multipliers, which consisted of a dynamic and dialogue circle on the theme. **Conclusion:** The extension activity made it possible to discuss the promotion of students' sexual health aiming at the prevention and control of STI transmission. For extension workers, the experience favored the autonomy of health education activities and the understanding of the need to address the topic with young people entering the university and also to establish socialization with students to sensitize them to be health multipliers.

Descriptors: Health Education; Sex Education; Nursing; Sexually Transmitted Diseases.

RESUMO

Objetivo: Descrever a experiência vivenciada por acadêmicos de Enfermagem em prática de educação em saúde acerca de infecções sexualmente transmissíveis (IST). **Síntese dos dados:** As atividades educativas de um projeto de extensão foram desenvolvidas para estudantes do primeiro ano da Faculdade de Enfermagem da Universidade do Pará (UFPA), localizada no município de Belém, Pará, Brasil, no período de março a dezembro de 2019. A prática de educação em saúde foi dividida em três etapas: "IST: epidemiologia, agente etiológico, sintomas e prevenção"; "Boas práticas para o uso correto dos preservativos masculino e feminino" e "Modo de transmissão sexual das IST/HIV e importância de serem multiplicadores de saúde", que se constituiu de uma dinâmica e roda de conversa sobre a temática. **Conclusão:** A atividade extensionista possibilitou a discussão da promoção da saúde sexual dos estudantes visando à prevenção e ao controle da transmissão das IST. Para os extensionistas, a vivência favoreceu a autonomia das atividades de educação em saúde e a compreensão da necessidade de abordar a temática



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com jovens ingressantes na universidade e, também, a de estabelecer a socialização com os estudantes com a pretensão de sensibilizá-los a serem multiplicadores de saúde.

Descritores: Educação em Saúde; Educação Sexual; Enfermagem; Doenças Sexualmente Transmissíveis.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Describir la experiencia de académicos de Enfermería en práctica de educación en salud sobre las Enfermedades de Transmisión Sexual (ETS). **Síntesis de los datos:** Las actividades educativas de un proyecto de extensión han sido desarrolladas para estudiantes del primer año de la Facultad de Enfermería de la Universidad de Pará (UFPA) localizada en el municipio de Belém, Pará, Brasil en el periodo entre marzo y diciembre de 2019. La práctica de educación en salud ha sido dividida en tres etapas: "IST: epidemiología, agente etiológico, síntomas y prevención"; "Buenas prácticas para el uso correcto de los preservativos masculino y femenino" y "Modo de transmisión sexual de las ETS/VIH y la importancia de ser multiplicador de salud" como parte de una dinámica y rueda de conversa sobre la temática. **Conclusión:** La actividad de extensión ha posibilitado la discusión sobre la promoción de la salud sexual de estudiantes respecto la prevención y el control de transmisión de las ETS. Para los estudiantes, la experiencia ha favorecido la autonomía para las actividades de educación en salud y la comprensión de la necesidad de hablar sobre esa temática con los jóvenes que acaban de ingresar en la universidad y también de establecer la socialización con los estudiantes con el objetivo de sensibilizarlos para que sean multiplicadores de salud.

Descriptorios: Educación en Salud; Educación Sexual; Enfermería; Enfermedades de Transmisión Sexual.

INTRODUCTION

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) have multiple etiologies and symptomology⁽¹⁾, it is important to consider the complications arising from the non-treatment or inappropriate treatment, which can cause male and female infertility, pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), cancer, increased risk of HIV transmission, as well as complications during pregnancy and birth, such as abortions, stillbirths, prematurity in newborns, neonatal mortality and congenital infections⁽²⁾.

The acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) is caused by the infection of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which promotes the progressive and silent loss of the host's cellular immunity and, consequently, the development of opportunistic infections and rare cancers. Since its identification, in 1981, of worldwide spread, it has been considered a serious infectious disease and of an emerging nature in health, mainly in developing countries⁽³⁾.

Thus, STIs stand out as urgent public health issues due to their extension and the diversity of associated factors. Estimates of the global incidence of chlamydia, gonorrhea, trichomoniasis, and syphilis in women and men, aged 15 to 49 years, remain high, most in developing countries. In 2012, the global incidence of new curable STI infections was estimated at almost one million each day⁽⁴⁾. In Brazil, estimates of cases of sexual infections in 2014 reached: 937,000 syphilis, 1,541,800 gonorrhea, 1,967,200 chlamydia, 640,900 genital herpes infections and 685,400 human papillomavirus (HPV) cases⁽⁵⁾.

The increase in the prevalence of STIs in the northern region of Brazil, more specifically in Pará, has been causing great concern, whose additional factor is the increase in HIV infections among young people between 15 and 29 years old, with more than 68 thousand cases from 2007 to 2008⁽⁶⁾. Between 2006 and 2016, the HIV and AIDS detection rate tripled among men aged 15 to 24 years⁽⁷⁾.

In this scenario, a greater chance of exposing adolescents and young people to illness not only by HIV but also by other STIs should be considered, since these infections can increase the probability of acquiring and transmitting HIV infection⁽⁸⁾. These are factors identified as to increase the chance of HIV infection in young people: the early onset of sexual life⁽²⁾; the lack of access to secure information on forms of transmission and prevention; and the lack of discussion about sexuality in school and family environments⁽⁹⁾. It is also noteworthy the fact that the condom is considered only a contraceptive method and the stigma that its use reduces sexual pleasure^(10,11).

Thus, educational practices are fundamental for changes in young people risky behaviors, providing them with scientifically correct information and, thus, contributing to a healthy sex life and decreasing the incidence of STIs among them. Health education seeks not only to prevent diseases, but also to promote quality of life and self-care in a given population. Thus, its application must be continuous, through diversified teaching and learning strategies regardless of location^(11,12).

Health education for university students, from the moment they enter the university, contributes to the greater bond of students with information, as well as providing the performance of these students in promoting the health

of their communities⁽¹²⁾. For this, it is extremely important to qualify Nursing students so that they can be prepared to intervene and be able to carry out health promotion in the places where they will be inserted, through health education, initiatives in participation in prevention plans and programs and / or creating partnerships with other health professionals⁽¹³⁾.

According to theoretical and methodological references⁽¹⁴⁾, educational practice must be based on a relationship of dialogue and respect for the student, stimulating a continuous and active process of reflecting on reality, in order to provide the autonomy of individuals and their transformation. From this perspective, it is considered the importance of implementing a humanizing educational context, generating significant bases, so that the student can see their social, cultural and historical context as a focus of problematization and critical understanding of knowledge.

As established in the National Health Promotion Policy (*Política Nacional de Promoção da Saúde - PNPS*) of Brazil Unified Health System (*Sistema Único de Saúde - SUS*), health promotion requires a dialogue between popular, scientific and traditional knowledge, in addition to requiring the articulated integration of all social actors and sectors focused on the individual and collective good⁽¹⁵⁾. The university is one of the institutions that have local and regional development as one of its goals, with the duty to promote improvements in the quality of life of the population in which it is inserted. Thus, in the process of training their students, it is necessary to emphasize the role of these students as transforming agents.

The interest in the topic at hand was due to the participation of the authors in a university extension project that has an effective role, both in the lives of academics, who put into practice what they learn in the classroom and in the lives of people who benefit from this learning. The project in question is relevant, as it aims at health promotion, through dialogue between students, to jointly build strategies to minimize the transmissibility of HIV and other STIs.

Given this context, this study aimed to describe the experience of Nursing students in health education practices about sexually transmitted infections (STI).

DATA SYNTHESIS

This is an experience report carried out by veteran students from the Nursing Faculty of the Federal University of Pará (*Universidade Federal do Pará - UFPA*), in the municipality of Belém, Pará, Brazil. This report was part of the planned activities of the extension project entitled "Health education at the university: mobilization of Nursing students as agents that transform the reality of HIV in the North region". Thus, university students from the first semester of undergraduate Nursing were identified as the target audience for educational actions.

The extension activities of the mentioned project took place from March to December 2019 and occurred in three stages: the first, "STI: epidemiology, etiologic agent, symptoms and prevention"; the second stage was called "Good practices for the correct use of male and female condoms"; and the third stage consisted of a dynamic and dialogue circle^(16,17), on the theme, entitled "Mode of sexual transmission of STIs / HIV and the importance of being health multipliers".

The dialogue circle strategy aims to provide the democratic participation of the social subjects involved to share the experiences, knowledge, opinions and concepts of each person, in addition to promoting reflection⁽¹⁶⁾.

Then, there was the planning of health education practice by the members of the project. In this perspective, educational methodologies and strategies were delimited that would be used at the time to promote knowledge in an accessible way to the understanding of the participants and to encourage them to engage.

The resources used in the action were: multimedia projector, notebook, male genital prosthesis, male and female condom, disposable cups, PET bottles, cabbage tea, vinegar, and water.

All educational strategies and methodologies used in educational actions took into account that, for health education to be effective, everyone should actively participate in the process, and should not use prescriptive and / or imposing methodologies, because there is a need to promote the exchange of knowledge among all participants, which will culminate in the construction of means for the improvement of individual and collective health⁽¹⁷⁾.

Thus, the practice of health education was divided into three moments: In the first, there was an educational action entitled "STI: epidemiology, etiologic agent, symptoms, and prevention", with a dialogical approach, seeking to hear what they knew and, using PowerPoint presentation, clarifying epidemiological data, infection-causing agents, forms of transmission, symptoms, prevention, types of treatment and representative images of STI signs and symptoms, focusing on HIV and AIDS.

In the second moment, an educational action called "Good practices for the correct use of male and female condoms was carried out", in which, with the aid of an anatomical piece of the male genital apparatus, the proper

technique for using the male condom was presented in a practical way⁽¹⁸⁾. The female condom was demonstrated with the aid of images⁽¹⁸⁾, and for both, guidelines were given on how to enhance the effectiveness of the barrier method.

In the first part of the educational activity, the objective was to raise awareness and insert the theme in the field of health. It was observed that there was little verbalization by the students, however, they remained attentive and interested in the theme. From the second part of the educational activity, there was greater socialization of the participants and initiatives to share the demonstration of the correct use of condoms, the moment when there was a discussion about the use of female and male condoms, in addition to preventive care applied at various levels (individual, relationships, community and social). It is noteworthy that not all students had this understanding, which is corroborated by authors⁽¹⁹⁾ who describe condom use as essential for the health of young people and who report that there is a lack of adherence and wisdom in handling this barrier method.

Then, the third moment consisted of a dynamic and dialogue circle, in which the theme "Mode of sexual transmission of STIs / HIV and the importance of health multipliers was discussed". The dynamics were carried out with the random distribution of plastic cups without identification containing water and vinegar. Each participant received a glass. The objective was for participants to believe that the liquids in all containers contained water. From that, everyone was encouraged to mix the contents of the glasses with those people they considered trustworthy among the group, not limiting the number of possible combinations and stipulating a one-minute time for liquid changes.

Then, the organizers held the discussion, creating a hypothetical situation of contagion/transmission. It was revealed that there were glasses with two types of liquids (water and vinegar), the vinegar being the representation of the infection, and the exchange of liquids, and unprotected sexual relationship. Red cabbage tea was used in all cups to observe the reaction (acid-base)⁽²⁰⁾, revealing liquids in different colors: the liquid that remained purple meant it only contained water, so, "Uncontaminated"; but if the liquid acquired a reddish color, it meant that there was "contamination" with the vinegar.

Only one of the participants had the clear liquid, while the others had the reddish liquid. By learning that only two glasses were initially contaminated, students understood the importance of personal protection. It was emphasized that, just like with the glass, people with HIV and other STIs do not always show signs of infection. Personal protection was also highlighted by the fact that the glasses were contaminated by colleagues they said they trusted.

Then, the dialogue circle was opened, led by the supervising professor and by the veteran students participating in the extension project. To provoke the expression of the target audience, trigger questions about the result of this experience were developed. The strategy used was relevant for the project participants, as it enabled them to understand the situations of vulnerability, transmission, contamination, and protection of STIs / HIV. There was greater proximity, ensuring dialogue and knowledge sharing among academics.

The third part promoted the formation of knowledge more lightly and attractively through educational technologies, to respond to the needs of this audience and allow the insertion of the future nurse in the current context of STIs / HIV that combined with the critical conscience of each student, transforms them into modifiers of the problem from the beginning of their education. The use of educational technologies aims to collaborate with the learning process, facilitating the realization of a job, as well as enabling the understanding of the public and the application of the action⁽²¹⁾.

In a survey⁽²²⁾, the activities carried out were looking for action around sexual education, in a dynamic and participatory way, making those involved integrate and talking about the daily life that covered the issue of sexuality.

The dialogue between students was instigated in the current description of experiences. The exercise of autonomy in educational practices is carried out in an active relationship with knowledge, which leads to daily invention and reinvention, allowing a set of deliberations that will be adopted throughout existence. Working in favor of autonomy is a category so that practices in the field of health promotion are configured as educational⁽²³⁾.

Thus, the moment was favorable, as the participants, when discussing the theme, understood the STIs according to the local social and epidemiological context and elucidated their deficiencies in knowledge, mainly on the transmission and prevention forms. The moment also contributed to the sharing of knowledge among academics and caused reflection for behavioral changes.

Besides, the activity made it possible for academics to break false paradigms and demystify negative concepts related to STIs, being able to adopt a more responsible professional practice when working in the community.

The development of educational actions contributes to health promotion, which is defined as a process that enables people to increase control over their health and possible improvements⁽²⁴⁾. Thus, for the extension students of the current work, the discussion of these issues with university students was promising, since they understood that the lack of guidance when seeking STI treatment is an existing gap among young people, according to a study carried out in Campinas⁽²⁵⁾ with women assisted in the basic health network and in a study carried out by the Ministry of Health⁽²⁶⁾.

It is reinforced that, for the people responsible for the action, the importance of the Nursing student in promoting and conducting discussion spaces on STI prevention was meaningful, giving them greater autonomy. For academics entering the University, the importance was given as a possibility to help them achieve autonomy in the health-disease process. Besides, in this project, the first-period students had their first contact with health education as a nurse's strategy in the search for social transformation, the moment when they could understand the role and potential of the professional nurse in the promotion of collective health.

It is suggested to set up a group that remains active in this extension project, to continue this theme each semester that begins, favoring the awakening of students to be health multipliers.

Furthermore, in the fight against HIV and AIDS among young people, besides other STIs, it is important to develop strategies for building these elements. It is essential to have an interaction between authorities, local and state, society, and universities in search of educational strategies in sexual health aimed at young people.

CONCLUSION

The experience made it possible to promote health education for the prevention and control of STI transmission among students in the first semester of Nursing at UFPA, as well as understanding their demands and their knowledge, highlighting the importance of the nurse educator as a promoter of knowledge multipliers even in academic training.

For extension students, the experience made it possible to understand the need for the theme to be addressed not only in the academic environment, but also with young people outside the university. The importance of establishing approximation with other students was evident, in order to facilitate the sharing of knowledge acquired during graduation. Additionally, the extension action increased the safety of veterans when dealing with the public and provided greater autonomy as health educators.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Bianca Alessandra Gomes do Carmo, Marcus Matheus Quadros Santos and Marília de Fátima Vieira de Oliveira contributed to the preparation and design of the study; data acquisition, analysis and interpretation; writing and / or revision of the manuscript. **Nayla Rayssa Pereira Quadros, Jennifer Karen Ferreira Macena and Eliã Pinheiro Botelho** contributed to the preparation and design of the study and the writing and / or revision of the manuscript. **Sandra Helena Isse Polaro** contributed to the writing and / or revision of the manuscript.

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