Barriers to Accessing Sexual Assault Services in Rural Bolivia

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Centro Medico Humberto Parra Palacios, Bolivia

Rural primary care clinic 2 hours north of Santa Cruz, serving 13 villages in surrounding area
Project Overview

• Goal: identify barriers to accessing sexual assault services for women served by the Centro Medico Humberto Parra

• Part 1: Identify availability of services

• Part 2: Interview women about barriers to accessing those services in terms of accessibility (knowledge, cost, transport, childcare) and acceptability (perceived risks and benefits of utilizing services)
Study Population

- 29 rural Bolivian women, age 24-76, average 48yrs
- Single(7), dating(1), cohabiting (9), married(6), divorced/separated(3), widow(3)
- Education: none(1), primary(16), secondary(7), university(5)
- Average 4.7 children
- Average 5.1 persons/household
- 14 employed, average household income 62B/day or $9/day
## Availability of Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Availability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment injuries</td>
<td>Hospital, clinics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STD test/treatment</td>
<td>Hospital, clinics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnancy testing</td>
<td>Hospital, clinics, pharmacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerg contraception</td>
<td>Hospital, clinics, pharmacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion</td>
<td>Hospital, clinics, pharmacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forensic exam</td>
<td>Hospitals in larger cities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling Services</td>
<td>Defensoria, medical centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal advocacy</td>
<td>Defensoria, UV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Knowledge Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment injuries</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STD test/treat</td>
<td>Test 75%, treat 68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnancy test</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerg contraception</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forensic exam</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling Services</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal advocacy</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelter</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Accessibility Services

“Justicia es para los que tienen plata”
Acceptability: Medical Services

- 92% believed medical professionals were appropriate place to ask for help following a sexual assault
- Benefits: STD, pregnancy, emotional support, linkage to other services
- Risks: lack of confidentiality, cost
Acceptability: Police

- 75% believed that police were an appropriate place to ask for help following a sexual assault
- Benefits: potential to apprehend perpetrator, prevent further attacks on victim or other women, get justice
- Risks: necessity for bribing, apathy and inaction, publicizing case, assault from police
Acceptability: Defensoria

- 91% believed that the defensoria was an appropriate place to seek help following a sexual assault
- Benefits: emotional support, legal advocacy, more effective at seeking justice than police, linkage to services
- Risks: lack of confidentiality, inaction due to lack of resources
Acceptability: Church

• 92% believed that the church was an appropriate place to seek help following a sexual assault
• Benefits: emotional support, spiritual guidance, linkage to services, helps everyone regardless of resources, confidential
• Risks: none
Lack of Confidentiality

• Most commonly cited risk of seeking help from formal services
• Opens the door to many negative social consequences of rape, which are in reality the most powerful barriers to seeking help

“To ask for help from the police makes it public. Once public, now she is marked. She is rejected by society… She is seen poorly. She has been raped, and now no one, not even the men, will approach her in the same way… Before helping her, they will reject her.”
Vergüenza, Shame

• Shame was the most commonly cited reason why women in general do not seek help following a sexual assault

• What prevents women from seeking help? “Por vergüenza. Eso no más.”

• “This girl, now she is not a virgin, she is an anybody, this is the first that is said. She is of lower morals. She doesn’t have her virginity.”
Social Consequence of Vergüenza

• In small towns there are no secrets, and women and girls that are publicly known to have been raped suffer enormous social consequences
• They are seen as less desirable romantic partners, and may be abandoned by their partners or unable to marry
• They are viewed as being of lower moral standing, and are discriminated against
• Many are forced to leave town, while the perpetrator is allowed to stay
Culpa, Blame

![Bar chart showing responsibility for rape by gender.](chart.png)
Blame: Rape Myth

What do people say about a woman that has been raped?
“They make fun of her, for being drunk, for being in the street, for having an irresponsible mother, for going out. They say she is ignorant”

What do people say about a man that has raped a woman?
“They say that she was to blame. Even a mother will say that her daughter was to blame, that she went out and looked for it”
Blame: Rape Myth

“If it is an older person, 15, 18 years, they themselves provoke the men. Both are to blame then, because they are flirting, laughing with the men, and here is where the rapes happen.”

“Young women are to blame, for their way of life, for how they dress, for all of it.”

“Depends, sometimes we look favorably, sometimes not. Sometimes women behave badly, they look for it. Why wasn’t she in her house?”
It’s Mom’s Fault

[Rape results from] “Neglect from the parents. Many mothers work, and then neglect their children, and here is where it happens. When the mother works, the father stays with the children, and the father rapes the daughter. Or the mother leaves the children with the stepfather… The girls don’t say anything, because they are afraid of their mother”
Rape Reality

“I have been raped. I have lived this, suffered this. And my parents never supported me. Do you know who raped me? My own brother raped me, abused me. We were harvesting rice, and there he raped me... If there are resources near, one should go. But in my case, there was nothing, we lived in the country.”
• Many women believed that threats of violence against victims were used to maintain silence
• These threats are especially potent in the setting of ineffective law enforcement and small communities with no opportunity to escape
• Reporting may therefore be very dangerous to the victim’s safety
Opportunity for Change

• Programs aimed at prevention
• Availability: women’s shelters, counseling services, NGO offering confidential services
• Accessibility: education about services, assistance with cost of transportation, police
• Acceptability: improve confidentiality, education to decreasing shame/blame for victims, ensure victim safety
• Train local health educators about sex and sexual rights, particularly for youth
• Train local volunteer advocates