

Voices from Peru



“INPPARES is a health centre that provides help and support. A safe place. An organization with a diversity approach. A place for learning.”
Project beneficiary

Instituto Peruano de Paternidad Responsable (INPPARES): Equally Different

This case study is one of a series of qualitative reviews called “IPPF Changing lives” which capture the stories of IPPF’s beneficiaries and clients from around the world. A rapid PEER (participatory ethnographic evaluation and research) approach was used to train project beneficiaries to interview people in their social network. These voices provide us with powerful testimonies on lives changed - in some cases, lives saved - and illustrate how IPPF is making a difference.

Through its Equally Different project, Instituto Peruano de Paternidad Responsable (INPPARES) is providing essential services to a highly stigmatized sector of the population. INPPARES is creating accessible services to meet the needs of sexually diverse groups in Peru, which has facilitated improvements to their emotional, relational and physical wellbeing.

The project seeks to generate a friendly environment in the Association’s clinics when providing health services which cater for the

needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) people, especially youth. The project has focused on training and awareness raising among staff and volunteers, networking in support of LGBTQ causes, and the development of an institutional policy on sexual diversity. The most recent phase of the project has focused on strengthening INPPARES’ institutional response to sexually diverse populations’ needs and increasing sexually diverse populations’ access to SRHR services.

INPPARES works closely with local governments and community organizations in its advocacy campaigns. This is an important achievement in a country where conservatism prevails, where Catholic-led opposition to SRHR has permeated executive and legislative bodies, and where one staff member described dominant attitudes as being anti-family planning, discriminatory and homophobic. In particular, adolescents and young people (including sexually diverse youth) continue to have limited access to public health services for STI and HIV and AIDS prevention and treatment.

¹ www.options.co.uk/peer



“[Working on sexual diversity] leads you to develop broader criteria, and to grow as a human being and as a professional.”
INPPARES staff member



Achievements

Emotional health has improved through the project's explicit support for sexual diversity, its emphasis on freedom of expression, and improved family communication about sexual diversity. Increased access to appropriate and sensitive SRH services has led to improvements in physical health. Additional, and key, impacts of the project have been acquisition of knowledge on SRHR and sexual diversity, and raising the political profile of LGBTQ issues.

Strongly traditional and predominantly conservative views on sexuality in Peru mean that there are very limited opportunities for sexually diverse groups to engage in open discussions on sexuality, either within their families or in wider society. People have tended to remain silent about their sexuality, and discussions on sexuality are often equated with conflict and discrimination. The project has provided a safe, facilitative and informed environment for sexually diverse groups to engage in discussions with staff, service providers and other beneficiaries. By providing a refuge within which beneficiaries feel free to be themselves, the project has also enabled them to be more open in communicating on issues of sexual diversity outside the immediate environment of the project. As a result, beneficiaries reported feeling able to express their views, to correct intolerant and hurtful comments, and to be more assertive within their families and with acquaintances.

This increased visibility and openness has been matched by the organization's agenda to raise institutional and political awareness of sexual diversity. This has occurred internally within INPPARES, with significant impact on staff awareness at all levels of the organization. An activist, who also uses INPPARES services, said, "Diversity has become internalized within the institution – in health issues – without fear of prejudice." Becoming more radical has also changed the way staff approach their work, making them more politically aware and increasingly

analytical of their own perceptions and practice.

The sexual diversity project has enabled staff to feel more 'open' and comfortable in dealing with clients, which has led to improved relations with service users and to increased job satisfaction. The project has also generated greater sensitivity regarding sexual diversity issues in clinic activities for HIV and AIDS prevention, testing and treatment. One staff member explained, "He said: 'now they (staff) greet us. A smile, in a friendly way. Before, they were more formal. The relations are lighter now'."

The LGBTQ-friendly health services have made a positive difference to the lives of the sexually diverse people using them. Many had initially approached the services with mistrust, but they were generally impressed by staff openness, the quality of care and the youth-friendly attitude (for adolescent service users). This experience was often compared to encounters with public health service providers, whose approach was judged as inadequate. The project has also increased access to services for new users who are referred through LGBTQ networks.

The Equally Different project is valued not only for providing information to volunteers, most of whom are LGBTQ, but for preparing them to pass on the knowledge they have acquired. This process has been empowering, and benefits have included a sense of being able to help others and bringing new users to the centre. INPPARES has also facilitated and encouraged project beneficiaries to become members of advocacy networks. Furthermore, sexually diverse youth and adolescents have been increasingly active in regional politics and projects, including as advisors and allies to regional governments.

Challenges

Overcoming stigma and discrimination has been an ongoing challenge of the project. From the start, beneficiaries have perceived resistance to awareness raising activities from some groups of staff. Despite the substantial advances made since 2005, some negative staff attitudes are still encountered among programme staff and service providers, and staff turnover makes it challenging in terms of training and sensitization. One volunteer said, "When I invited groups of doctors (to project activities), they said: "What, you? You too?" Many doctors were resistant to diversity."

While the Equally Different project has been particularly effective in increasing access to services for urban, educated and empowered groups, more vulnerable groups such as youth, transgender, peri-urban and provincial populations have found it difficult to access resources and services. The normal clinic fees at INPPARES are substantially more than those of government facilities, which reduces the ability of many low-income and young individuals to access INPPARES' services. The limited level of young people's access to SRH services may also be due to cultural constraints which make young people, particularly young LGBTQ people, reluctant to attend clinics due to shame and anxiety about the way staff will treat them.

The project's role in sexual diversity advocacy may be challenged due to its lack of a radical stance. While the project does engage in advocacy at district and national levels, beneficiaries perceive that current advocacy is too moderate and that a more outspoken and firmer line is needed to challenge discriminatory attitudes and practices. An activist said, "Sexual rights are eminently political. If the institution doesn't assume a position, they won't get anywhere."

Lessons

The LGBTQ population in Peru is subject to discrimination, stigma and, as a result, exclusion from SRH services. The combined advocacy and service provision approach of the project has been effective in redressing this disadvantage. In particular, INPPARES has promoted institutional involvement in sexual diversity activities, networked with advocacy allies in the LGBTQ field, and mainstreamed sexual diversity awareness in INPPARES' services and programmes. INPPARES' approach has resulted in the men's and the youth clinics, for example, becoming increasingly open to diversity and providing services to a wide range of clients.

Three particularly vulnerable sectors of the LGBTQ population have found it difficult to access services and resources and require special measures to promote inclusion: youth, transsexual and transgender people, and low-income populations. However, INPPARES has made some efforts in this direction. One example is the successful strategy of youth participation in the regional policy making process. There are also youth centres and projects linked to the institution. To benefit transsexual and transgender people, the approach combines interpersonal support (from counsellors and peer educators), promoting providers' awareness of sexual and gender diversity issues in health care, and anti-discrimination advocacy campaigns. INPPARES has become known as a key partner in the broader network of sexual diversity organizations in Peru, and its networking activities have extended into policy and legislation. Low-income LGBTQ populations should gradually acquire more access to information and services through improved openness in peri-urban and regional centres.

INPPARES has made significant progress over the last four years, and has achieved a nationally recognized reputation for promoting sexual diversity approaches in health service delivery. Given the challenging political environment within which the project operates, this in itself is a significant achievement.



"It isn't just a health service, but a place, a space, with opportunities to improve quality of life - especially of young people who are vulnerable, and on the street."
Project beneficiary



“Now he doesn’t have to go showing others how macho he is. He’s more secure about his sexuality.”
INPPARES volunteer

Peru	
Country context	
Population (millions), 2007 ¹	28.5
Adult illiteracy rate (% aged 15 and above), 1999-2007 ¹	10.4
Life expectancy at birth (years), 2007 ¹	73.0
Population living below the national poverty line (%), 2000-2006 ¹	53.1
Proportion of Peru’s population that is Roman Catholic (%), 2004 ²	80.0
Context for sexually diverse groups in Peru	
Estimated number of deaths as a result of hate crimes against sexual minorities, 2006 ³	91

¹ UNDP, ‘Human Development Report 2009’, (Website, accessed on 14-05-10).

² US Department of State (2004) ‘International Religious Freedom Report 2004’, (Website, accessed on 14-05-10).

³ Caceres, C, Aggleton, P and Galea, J (2008) ‘Sexual diversity, social inclusion and HIV/AIDS’, Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, Inc, (Website, accessed on 14-05-10).



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The International Planned Parenthood Federation is global service provider and a leading advocate of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all. We are a worldwide movement of national organizations working with and for communities and individuals.

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