



WOMEN'S CIRCLES

COMPAÑEROS EN SALUD

The rural communities in the Sierra Madre of Chiapas have limited mental health services that are culturally appropriate and that enable community cohesion from the sharing of local knowledge. In this area there is a high prevalence of violence against women, which is related to a higher number of women with depression and anxiety than men. Women are rarely considered in community decisions nor when external agents implement health interventions in their communities, despite them being the main beneficiaries of these programs. Although there are many women living similar situations of inequity and violence, there are not enough spaces for them to connect and share knowledge, as the spaces for socializing are reduced to religious or family events, where patriarchal structures are replicated. The absence of spaces to connect and understand others' situations frequently results in blaming gender-based violence survivors, instead of solidarity.

PROJECT

We co-created women's circles together with four Community Mental Health Workers, named by themselves "Cuidadoras". These circles consist of 8 sessions facilitated by the Cuidadoras and they use popular education methods to promote mental health with a feminist perspective.

EXPECTED RESULTS

- Strengthening of the mental health of women in a culturally appropriate way and with a gender perspective so they can face adversities.
- Debunking the myth of individuality when it comes to gender-based violence and inequity, generating critical thinking focused on social structures and therefore creating relationships of sisterhood.

CO-CREATION PROCESS

- 1 Co-analizamos los problemas comunes de salud mental de las mujeres, conectando desde las inequidades y violencia que nosotras habíamos vivido hasta lo que observamos que viven otras mujeres.
- 2 We created an interview that the Cuidadoras applied and then analyzed the results.
- 3 The Cuidadoras did a photovoice exercise as part of the needs assessment and we then analyzed the results.
- 4 We created a theory of change.
- 5 We created a draft handbook to facilitate the circles.
- 6 The Cuidadoras piloted the circles with approximately 40 Community Health Workers - both the participants and the Cuidadoras gave feedback on the sessions.
- 7 We created a final handbook.
- 8 The Cuidadoras facilitated the 8 sessions with the support of a community psychologist.

TOPICS OF THE SESSIONS

Self-esteem

Self-knowledge

Self-compassion

Assertivity

Social networks

Loss and grief

Alcohol abuse

Gender-based violence

Cognitive distortions

Stress management

BENEFICIARIOS

Women from four rural communities that are interested in improving their mental health or that want to acquire abilities to support other people. Most of these women are users of the mental health services that are already offered in the communities, both in the health clinic as in the evidence-based psychological interventions that the Cuidadoras facilitate.