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Community Based Support Intervention to Promote the Practice of Breastfeeding for Mothers in Guachupita

The main objective of this research project was to determine the feasibility and acceptability of intervention-breastfeeding support groups for mothers with a lactation consultant- to support mothers in this community who breastfeed their children. This investigation seeks to evaluate the duration and knowledge regarding breastfeeding between mothers in the comparison group and intervention group, provide a basis for further community based breastfeeding research and evidenced based programs, and understand what other factors need to be addressed to increase breastfeeding rates in the Dominican Republic.

This study is based on the results of research conducted last year on the factors associated with the practice of breastfeeding for mothers who attend the Robert Reid Cabral Children's Hospital in Santo Domingo. The research conducted last summer was funded through an ETW Fellowship. We found that factors most associated with lack of breastfeeding were mothers' work status, lack of accurate breastfeeding knowledge, and support. This study was created to address these challenges.

The research project included 20 mothers from Guachupita with a child under the age of one month. The mothers were equally divided into two groups, comparison and intervention, each meeting once per week for four weeks. The intervention group focused on the breastfeeding promotion and support. The comparison group focused on family nutrition and health topics other than breastfeeding. All aspects of the intervention and comparison group were the same

except for the curriculum. This project was done in collaboration with O&M Medical School in Santo Domingo, La Leche League –Dominican Republic and the Fundación Red de Jóvenes Unidos de Guachupita.

The accomplishments of this summer include presenting my research at the O&M Medical School in Santo Domingo. Additionally, I discussed the results of my previous project and current plans with key doctors and leaders promoting breastfeeding in the Dominican Republic from the Dominican Ministry of Health, La Leche League, PAHO/WHO, and UNICEF. I was very fortunate to consult them on many aspects of the project- from the project design to the curriculum specifics. Additionally, I learned a great deal about the process of conducting research in the Dominican Republic from getting the proposal approved to creating the curriculum to each matter of logistics. I was thankful to work with a group of incredible people who helped to make the project possible in a relatively short time frame. As I was in the Dominican Republic during International Breastfeeding Week I was also able to attend a number of events including over 200 mothers breastfeeding at the same time on the international day of breastfeeding.

Further, I learned a great deal about the living situation and social determinants of health in Guachupita. For example many households do not have running water; in fact, there is a “system” of hoses that are linked together with one hose going into a house throughout multiple parts of the neighborhood. Not only is the water not safe to drink, but many days water doesn’t even run through the hoses, leaving households without water for stretches of days or even weeks. Many do not even have this makeshift system and need to fetch water in buckets. Guachupita is one of the poorest communities in Santo Domingo. Among other wonderful organizations, OYMED and Fundación Red de Jóvenes Unidos de Guachupita are working on a

number of community projects in Guachupita. While there are a number of unsung heroes and great projects, there is still much work to be done.

Setting up the logistical aspects of the project was challenging. As this was my first time setting up a new intervention, I learned a great deal about the complexities and challenges of setting up and coordinating recruitment, baseline interviews, intervention, and follow up. Each step required a great deal of planning and coordination. The set-up process was longer than expected, however we were still able to successfully conduct the project.

This research was largely similar to the original proposal, except I chose one intervention and a comparison group instead of testing multiple interventions in order to make the project more feasible based on the length of stay and budget. Also, we found that the initial exclusion criteria was too limiting and would not allow for us to have a sufficient sample size, thus, we removed a few items from the exclusion criteria. The exit interviews still need to be conducted over phone so the findings of this study are not yet completely known, but will be reported in my IDS Capstone Project. I hope this research can provide a basis and additional insight for future studies on community-based breastfeeding initiatives. Hopefully, the investigation will be translated into a larger scale research project in the Dominican Republic using the lessons learned from this summer. Overall, I had an enriching experience and look forward to developing my research into the International Development Studies Capstone this fall.