Sexual and Reproductive Health Project

Concept Note

Rationale

In collaboration with the Integra Foundation, KOPIN has launched a new Sexual and Reproductive Health Project supported by the Julia Taft Refugee Fund and the US Embassy in Malta. The Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) project was developed in response to the steady influx of refugees reaching Malta since 2002. According to UNHCR, more than 14,500 refugees have arrived in Malta by boat between the years 2002-2011, mainly hailing from Sub Saharan countries, with 13% of total arrivals being women (UNHCR, 2012). The majority of arrivals are between the ages of 18-30 years, that is, at the peak of their reproductive years. In 1994, at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), reproductive rights were clarified and endorsed internationally and became recognised as a basic human right of all men and women, including children and adolescents, throughout life. Shortly after, in 2000, there was the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) to be reached by 2015 and more than half of these goals focus directly or indirectly on Sexual and Reproductive Health. Hence, this is a primary concern for Malta as well as refugee women and their families who reside in Malta.

The project aims to address the area of pre/post natal care and to build on a number of initiatives that have been implemented in Malta to date, including inter alia KOPIN’s European Refugee Fund (ERF) financed Project: Empowerment and Self-Reliance of Women Refugee in Malta (2011-2013); the 2013 seminar Exploring Cultural Competency of public staff working in the area of Midwifery and Obstetrics; and the Senperforto Sensitization Kit.

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1 For the purpose of this project the term refugee will refer to all asylum seekers and refugees regardless of status.

2 At the ICPD, 179 countries adopted a 20-year Programme of Action (PoA) also known as the Cairo Consensus, which recognised reproductive health and rights, as well as women's empowerment and gender equality, as cornerstones of population and development programmes.

3 The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – which range from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education, all by the target date of 2015 – form a blueprint agreed to by all the world’s countries and all the world’s leading development institutions. They have galvanized unprecedented efforts to meet the needs of the world’s poorest.

4 Social networks; relationships; sexual and reproductive health and sexual harassment; sexual harassment; sexual exploitation; sexual abuse and rape; partner violence; violence against children, assistance to victims; honour related violence; assistance to perpetrators; judicial aid after violence.
Aims and Objectives

This project aims to improve and develop the provision of sexual and reproductive health services for refugee women and their families residing in Malta. More specifically, the project aims to:

- Provide a holistic service that facilitates communication and strengthen relationships between refugee women and Mater Dei Hospital (MDH) staff in Malta
- Contribute to the learning needs of MDH staff with regard to the sexual and reproductive needs of refugee women
- Contribute to the sexual and reproductive health learning needs of refugee women.

Methodology

The Sexual and Reproductive Health Project adopts and promotes a participatory and collaborative approach that not only privileges the knowledge base of refugee women and their families, but also provides for their learning needs in a meaningful way that promotes dignity and well being. In this way, female refugees and their families are engaged in the learning process as active agents: knowledge producers rather than knowledge consumers. At the same time, the project aims to facilitate a dialogical and democratic relationship with health care providers, more specifically public sector nursing staff working in the area of Midwifery and Obstetric in order to provide a more sensitive, engaged, competent and holistic practice.

Project Activities

To reach the aims of this project, the project process will include the following activities:

- Phase 1. Research: An exploratory, qualitative study will explore the learning and healthcare needs of refugee women and the learning needs of health care providers (Mater Dei Hospital staff), identifying existing gaps in pre/post natal care, and best practices from Malta and abroad. The research tools for data collection will include participant observation, four interviews and two focus groups with refugee women and service providers. The data collected will contribute to, and inform, phase 2 of the research process.

- Phase 2. The development of content for a multi-lingual DVD and a leaflet that specifically addresses the area of pre/post natal care including information on service provision and sexual and reproductive health care. The DVD will be piloted with a small group of refugee women and cultural mediators in order that the learning needs are addressed in a holistic and culturally sensitive way. To have maximum impact, the video applications making up the DVD and the leaflet will be uploaded online and made available free of charge. This will also ensure that refugee women will be able
to access the educational material in their own time, and in a safe space. The DVD will be used in the open centres and at the Parent Craft Unit of Mater Dei Hospital. The aim being to create a setting that refugee women and service providers can hold discussions within a safe and supportive environment, but also to have the opportunity to access mainstream programmes such as pre/post natal classes that they would have not been able to access otherwise.

- Phase 3: Training Workshops.

Capacity building workshops will be conducted with small groups of obstetrics, nursing staff and midwives. These discussions will also have a cultural competency component and be facilitated by different experts and stakeholders that will address the learning needs identified in phase 1. These discussions will aim to address the learning needs and challenges of the staff, to enhance overall knowledge and to identify ways to fill existing gaps. To enhance these discussions, training will include visits to the open centres in order to provide a more contextualised understanding of the lived realities of refugee women. Workshops will also be held with refugee women and family members. The educational package will include learning needs and themes identified in phase 1.

- Phase 4: A Series of multi stakeholder meetings will take place to enhance mutual learning, networking opportunities and create an evidence-based advocacy strategy that can help to further empower and engage refugee women as well as relevant staff and to further push for coherent policy.

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