










# Health education initiatives with pregnant women in Primary Care: an experience report

## Ações de educação em saúde com gestantes na Atenção Primária: um relato de experiência



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### Abstract

This study aimed to describe the experience of medical students participating in conversation circles with pregnant women receiving prenatal care at a Basic Health Unit (BHU), as a space for the collective knowledge construction and learning. The study used a critical reflective approach, presented as an experience report of a theoretical-practical activity conducted in 2023 at BHU in Olinda, Pernambuco. Using health education initiatives and a welcoming approach, the need to establish conversation circles with healthcare professionals and students was identified, aiming to facilitate listening to pregnant women, expand access to knowledge among underserved populations, and contribute to the training of future healthcare professionals.

**Keywords:** Women's health; Health education; Prenatal care; Primary Health Care.

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## Resumo

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Objetivou-se descrever sobre a vivência de acadêmicos do curso de Medicina em grupos de diálogo com gestantes acompanhadas no pré-natal, em uma Unidade Básica de Saúde (UBS), como espaço de construção coletiva de conhecimento e aprendizado. Trata-se de um estudo descritivo de abordagem crítico-reflexiva, do tipo relato de experiência, de uma atividade teórico-prática realizada em 2023, em uma UBS no município de Olinda, Pernambuco. Por meio de ações de educação em saúde, através de um olhar acolhedor, identificou-se a necessidade de promover esse momento com profissionais e acadêmicos, com o intuito de facilitar a escuta das gestantes, ampliar o acesso ao conhecimento para parcelas da população e contribuir de forma significativa na formação dos futuros profissionais de saúde.

**Palavras-chave:** Saúde da mulher; Educação em saúde; Cuidado pré-natal; Atenção Primária à Saúde.

## INTRODUÇÃO

Pregnancy is an important transitional period for women marked by physiological and psychological adaptations and closely tied to a dynamic range of emotions, sensations, and expectations about future changes, all related to the capacity of the body to nurture a new life. Therefore, multidisciplinary support using proper and high-quality prenatal care is essential throughout the entire pregnancy to reduce the risk of complications before, during, and after childbirth<sup>1,2</sup>.

According to the World Health Organization, all pregnant women have the right to receive individualized care, in which they are addressed by name and are fully informed about the healthcare professionals assisting them. These women are entitled to adequate nutrition, the presence of a companion, the freedom to choose their position and clothing during labor, and unrestricted access to breastfeeding their newborn<sup>3</sup>. A lack of knowledge during pregnancy often reflects poor communication between healthcare professionals and patients, which can significantly impact maternal and fetal health. This issue may lead to exposure to risks and potentially avoidable outcomes, such as delays in diagnosis and referral to high-risk care when needed<sup>4</sup>.

To ensure effective prenatal care, primary healthcare teams employ several strategies to support pregnant women, including health education initiatives. Most of these initiatives involve the participation of healthcare students, such as organizing conversation circles that act as platforms for communication and social interaction<sup>5</sup>.

In addition to promoting active learning among students, conversation circles help identify possible needs or complications during the peripartum period. They provide a safe space for sharing questions, fears, and expectations, reducing anxiety and contributing to a healthier pregnancy through health education and increased awareness of the process and rights<sup>6</sup>.

In this context, this experience report aimed to describe the participation of medical students from an educational institution in Pernambuco and pregnant women receiving prenatal care at a basic health unit (BHU) in the municipality of Olinda (Pernambuco, Brazil) using conversation circles as a space for collective knowledge construction.

## METHODS

This experience report was based on theoretical and practical activities conducted at a BHU in Olinda, Pernambuco. The activities were coordinated and performed by healthcare professionals and medical students between April and November 2023. As part of a university extension project, the initiative aimed to develop strategies focused on health promotion and the empowerment of low-risk pregnant women and their companions.

The meetings were held weekly using conversation circles that lasted about 120 minutes, and involved pregnant women, their companions, medical students, and the nurse responsible for the BHU. A structured plan was developed to meet the proposed objectives, including the creation of posters with the meeting schedule, which were displayed throughout the BHU to promote participation.

The theoretical foundation for the topics discussed was analyzed and defined by the students and their advisors. These topics had been previously explored in teaching activities within the academic league and were extended to the extension project. Topics included: the pregnancy card, prenatal care, hypertensive syndromes, gestational diabetes, labor physiology, obstetric violence, and breastfeeding. Additionally, guidelines from the Ministry of Health, the World Health Organization, international organizations, and current scientific research were utilized. Sources were retrieved from MEDLINE/EBSCO, Cochrane Library, PubMed, SciELO, and Virtual Health Library databases, encompassing studies published between 2019 and 2023 in Portuguese and English.

The conversation circles were facilitated by students and the nurse, who provided guidance and supervision. After this moment, the students conducted a physical examination on the pregnant women, assisted by the nurse as needed. Refreshments were offered after each meeting to encourage interaction, bonding, and socializing among participants.

The methodology applied in the meetings was the participatory method, which fosters the exchange of experiences and promotes greater integration among participants. This method enables open communication, encourages questioning of the topics under discussion, and enhances engagement and learning retention<sup>7</sup>.

## RESULTS

Pregnancy is a period marked by numerous questions, expectations, and uncertainties.

Therefore, initiatives aimed at disseminating information to pregnant women are essential throughout the pregnancy and postpartum periods<sup>7</sup>. In this context, conversation circles help reduce fear and anxiety related to motherhood, while also serving as a space for comprehensive support.

A total of seven biweekly conversation circles were held. These meetings fostered an environment of learning and information exchange, in which participants were receptive, engaged in discussions, and willing to share their experiences and insights.

**Figure 1.** Medical student from the Academic League of Obstetrics during a conversation circle with pregnant women.



Source: personal archive. Image authorized.

The topics addressed included the importance of prenatal care, labor physiology, physiological changes during pregnancy, obstetric violence, rights of pregnant women, labor pain, non-pharmacological pain relief methods, and maternal mental health.

During the meetings, participants often raised questions about the pregnancy process, including physiological changes and methods to reduce symptoms. Since the information was presented clearly and accessibly, the pregnant women were able to resolve their questions and understand the topics effectively.

The methods used to ensure comfort and humanization during childbirth do not require sophisticated equipment. Most are highly accessible and supported by various studies, guidelines, and organizations that confirm their safety and effectiveness, particularly in pain relief<sup>4, 5, 8</sup>.

In discussions on topics, such as obstetric violence and the rights of pregnant women, a

lack of awareness regarding legal protections was observed. This finding underscores the importance of conversation circles as key moments for knowledge transmission, health promotion, empowerment, and the protection of rights.

In August, a special meeting was held in support of the global campaign “Golden August”, which aimed to encourage and highlight the benefits and nutritional importance of breastfeeding for pregnant women and their families. The meeting emphasized the recommendation for exclusive breastfeeding until six months of age and continued breastfeeding up to two years to support the gastrointestinal development of newborns.

Breast milk contains all the necessary nutrients to support the proper growth and development of the baby<sup>9,10</sup>. Promoting breastfeeding positively contributes to reducing and preventing infant mortality, allergies, complications, and infections in newborns, while also supporting healthy neuropsychomotor development. Additionally, the benefits extend to postpartum women by helping prevent postpartum hemorrhage and strengthening the emotional bond between mother and baby<sup>11</sup>.

These initiatives represent an important strategy and therapeutic tool for pregnant women in primary health care, providing a space for sharing experiences, promoting health education, offering emotional support, and fostering the development of support networks<sup>5</sup>.

## **CONCLUSION**

Health education is a low-cost, highly effective strategy that becomes valuable and therapeutic for pregnant women when implemented by a multidisciplinary team. This initiative promotes education, emotional support, and support networks within primary health care and should be integrated into routine healthcare delivery due to its numerous benefits. Thus, healthcare professionals with a welcoming and humanized approach, capable of listening to the fears and concerns of pregnant women, are needed. Furthermore, the involvement of healthcare students enhances access to knowledge and prepares them for a healthcare career. Therefore, conversation circles are important for the health education process during the pregnancy and postpartum periods. The outcomes of each meeting were positive, demonstrating effective knowledge dissemination and support for the prevention and promotion of the health of pregnant and postpartum women. Thus, the objectives of this study were fully achieved.

## **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

## **FUNDING**

Not applicable.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

**ASS:** Conceptualization, Development of research goals and objectives, Conducting the research and investigation - performing experiments or collecting data/evidence, Methodology. **ACCAS:** Conceptualization, Development of research goals and objectives, Conducting the research and investigation - performing experiments and collecting data/evidence, Responsible for managing and coordinating the planning and execution of the research activity. **EBC:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Writing - original draft, review and editing the introduction, Project administration. **JMAC:** Conceptualization, Conducting the research and investigation process - performing experiments or collecting data/evidence, Writing – original draft, Data visualization/presentation. **LQM:** Conceptualization, Conducting the research and investigation process, Writing – original draft, Data collection. **MAF:** Conceptualization, Development of research goals and objectives, Data collection, Writing – original draft, Data visualization. **MFOR:** Conducting the research and investigation process, specifically performing experiments and data collection/evidence; Methodology.

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