

Delivering Non-Violence: Peace building with Guatemalan Midwives

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Guatemala has recently emerged from a 36-year civil conflict and before that years of conquest and repression which have contributed to the current state of structural violence. The turmoil, poverty, lack of health care and education, malnutrition and machismo have created a social hierarchy, which places indigenous women at the lowest societal status. Many women and their families also suffer from interfamilial violence and are unable to extricate themselves from the situation because of their status and the reasons that contribute to it. Domestic violence impacts a large percentage of people in Guatemala and one effective step to help disseminate knowledge about ending the abuse is to teach local health professionals peace building skills.

Medicine and peace building have an inherent connection and sustainable programs can be initiated teaching conflict transformation to medical professionals, taking advantage of their status and capabilities. Since it is virtually impossible to reach each Guatemalan woman individually, making use of community members such as midwives is a practical method to disperse information. Utilizing an existing network of community midwives in La Democracia, Huehuetenango, Guatemala, a peace building workshop has been designed to build on the local midwives' skill set, increase their ability to understand conflict and violence and their own and communities' contribution to it, identify signs of domestic violence, and begin to eradicate it through legal means.