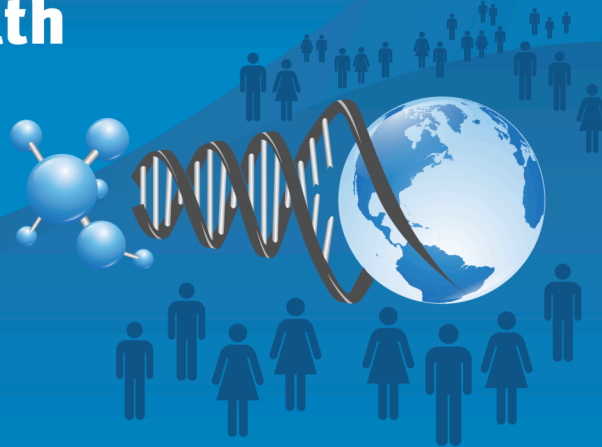


6. Public Health and Safety



RESEARCH TEAM: Improving public health and quality of life

Grand Challenge: Quality of Life and Community-based Programs

Key Terms:

Public health, quality of life, community empowerment, education

Student Leader/Data entered by: Tina Saladino

Student Members/Student Research Project Titles:

- Tina Saladino - Age-Related Muscular Degeneration: Patient Knowledge, Self-Management and Quality of Life
- Jonathan Perez - Integrating Refugee Youth through Grassroots Programs
- Allison Goldstein - The Impact of Planned Parenthood of San Diego and Riverside Counties on the Health of the Surrounding Communities
- Ariel Willingham - Public Health Concerns of Teen Drinking and Teen Violence in Unincorporated vs. Incorporated Areas
- Jessica Park - Housing the Homeless: A socioeconomic theory to alleviate the homeless epidemic

Mentor(s) Leader:

- Beth Jarozs
- David Cleveland

Research Team Narrative:

Public health includes the protection and improvement of the health of an entire population through community-wide action by both governmental and nongovernmental agencies. It includes addressing social, cultural, and economic issues of access,

education, and preventive health in order to improve quality of life. The following narrative will introduce five separate research projects conducted under the public health and safety umbrella. Each project presents a separate public health concern within the San Diego County region, analyzes current methods of addressing the problem, and suggests possible means of improvement. In the end, each project leads to an overwhelming sense that quality of life issues and the maintenance of public health is dependent on the education and involvement of the community of interest, whether through direct or indirect approaches.

The AjA Project: Fostering a Sense of Place for Refugee Youth

The AjA Project, a refugee youth outreach program in the City Heights area of San Diego, uses media arts and photography programs to empower refugee youth to develop skills and explore self identity. Using the AjA Project as a case study, this research project was able to measure whether or not the AjA project's methods helped integrate refugee kids into their new culture. Integration was gauged, specifically, by looking at whether or not the program was able to increase the children's social capital.

The project's findings revealed that the program increased the refugee children's social capital by linking these children in positive ways to fellow refugees of the program and their mentors. Observations conducted via participation in workshops at Crawford High School and the AjA office revealed that networks between refugees can help to facilitate integration. Older refugee children serve as guiding peers and give advice on not only program assignments, but life and U.S. culture in general. Another important finding was the importance of building community awareness of the refugee population. Many times the art which the refugee children produced went up in community exhibits which promoted awareness of the refugee populations and experiences they have faced. Knowledge of this refugee population made the community take into consideration the needs of the refugee community and mediate its resources to them.

Overall the AjA Project did help its refugee children integrate into U.S culture by providing them with the social capital and networks needed to adjust to U.S. life. Although the AjA Project is just one example, its success and the efficacy of its methods revealed that non-traditional outreach programs can be viable options in helping to integrate refugee youth.

Addressing the Homeless Epidemic in San Diego

Homelessness is one of the many challenges of public health and safety within the City of San Diego. The city's social services programs' budget currently allocates a large percentage of its funds to the temporary relief of this problem through avenues such as short-term housing and the distribution of emergency food supplies. These efforts may give the impression that the city is making great strides in solving the problem of homelessness, but these efforts are, in fact, simply treating the symptoms, rather than ensuring that homelessness does not come about in the first place. Previous studies regarding this topic have found that while these measures are beneficial in the short-term, the government's contribution could produce significantly greater results for the future if preventive tactics were more fully developed and utilized.

This project used data provided by the Regional Task Force on the Homeless in San Diego as well as analyses of San Diego's past social services budget allocations. The study suggests that there may be more cost-efficient ways to approach the issue of homelessness. Questionnaires answered by homeless populations in San Diego uncovered that high numbers of homeless individuals want and need job-related services. Unfortunately, current budget allocations do not emphasize job-related resources as much as they do emergency resources. Like the other projects in this group, this one has found that prevention and education are key elements to creating healthy, thriving communities.

Public Health Concerns of Teenage Drinking in Unincorporated Areas of San Diego

Underage drinking is a public health concern that afflicts students in a wide range of alcohol-related health, social, criminal justice, and academic problems. Little research has been conducted to date to determine how the lack of a central municipal government affects alcohol availability, alcohol youth related violence and enforcement of alcohol policies. The question asked in this research project was, in what ways are teen drinking and alcohol youth-related violence a public health issue in the unincorporated community of Spring Valley as compared to the incorporated city of Lemon Grove?

This research project provided a comparative view of these two case studies and sought to determine how the county level has addressed the lack of a central municipal government in the area and seeks to reason upon what, additionally, should be done in the community. Findings show that teens drink heavier in Spring Valley and have a higher incidence of alcohol youth related violence. The guiding theory behind this finding is that the lack of a central municipal government to enforce local alcohol policies leads to an increased rate of alcohol availability and alcohol consumption in teens in unincorporated versus incorporated areas. Further research should be conducted that determines if a higher amount of liquor licenses in the vicinity of schools accounts for a higher alcohol intake by students in unincorporated communities.

The Impact of Planned Parenthood of San Diego and Riverside Counties on the Health of Its Surrounding Communities

Planned Parenthood of San Diego and Riverside Counties (PPSDRC) is one of the leading women's health care providers, educators, and advocates, serving women, men, teens, and families. Planned Parenthood educates young men and women, parents, and families about how to protect their health and the health of their partners. When it comes to sexual health, Planned Parenthood has developed a variety of educational programs for the community that is comprehensive and age-appropriate to help adults and adolescents make responsible choices and increase preventative care.

This research project examined the impact of Planned Parenthood of San Diego and Riverside Counties on the health of its surrounding communities. This research has been based on primary documents produced for PSDRC as well as sexually transmitted infection and HIV year reports produced by the County of San Diego. Research performed for this project was designed on the assumption that lack of information can lead to poor decisions, and that there is a difference between what information and services are available and what people think is available. More specifically, the more

health education people receive, the more likely they will perform safe sex practices. If Planned Parenthood is fulfilling its goal of educating the community, then rates of sexually transmitted infections, HIV and AIDS, as well as teenage pregnancy should, in theory, decrease with the implementation of a Planned Parenthood clinic (along with its educational programs) in the area. This analysis examined Planned Parenthood's educational programs, rates of sexually transmitted infections, HIV, teenage pregnancy, and frequencies of health services used for the county of San Diego over the past fifteen years, and found that Planned Parenthood has had a positive impact on the health of its communities.

Age Related Macular Degeneration

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is a degenerative disorder of the retinal pigment epithelium and neurosensory retina of the eye. AMD is the leading cause of blindness in the United States, affecting more than 1.75 million Americans and more than 30,000 San Diegans. This study examined how patient knowledge influences self management practices and how the level of self-management affects not only the severity of the disease but also the degree of patient independence and contentment with their lives. This research project's objective was based on the assumption that information asymmetry leads to imperfect behavior, especially in the area of medical decision making. In a perfect world, all people would have full access to information and utilize this information to improve their well-being. Throughout the interview process, this project expected to find that when patients face challenges communicating with their physician or have limited access to community resources and outside information, that these patients are less proactive about their vision and develop more serious stages of macular degeneration. There was also the expectation that higher levels of vision loss translated to higher levels of depression. The study was conducted via formal patient interviews and medical examinations, as well as a review of past patient medical files at the Shiley Eye Center of La Jolla.

Findings indicate that challenges exist in the physician-patient communication dynamic and these challenges may render patients incapable of making knowledgeable decisions regarding their health and maintenance of vision. Patients' responses indicate that vision loss places limitations on both leisure and necessary activities ranging from transportation to the recognition of familiar faces. A large portion of patients interviewed were unaware of the local resources available to them in San Diego County. These results indicate that a public health campaign might be necessary to not only educate individuals about AMD, but also advertise the local resources available to them. Information can empower them to take control of their own vision loss and realize the opportunities they still have to contribute, even with limited vision.

Concluding Thoughts

Through the course of these projects, the authors have come to realize that quality of life issues and the impact of public health are dependent on the involvement and awareness of the community. Public health programs must have realistic goals in order to translate into positive outcomes, whether it is through the use of education or direct involvement of community members. Health concerns have no boundaries; they affect everyone. In this way, health and quality of life issues cannot be considered personal in scope, but must be addressed by the community at large.

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Links:

National Eye Institute Facts on Age-Related Macular Degeneration

Risk Factors of Teenage Drinking

San Diego County STD Fact Sheet

Journey - A Non- Traditional Approach to Integration Refugee Youth

YouTube Documentary on San Diego Homelessness