

Project: Community Health and Nutrition

Project Leader: Lindiwe Sibeko

Project Overview

Most Americans fall short of achieving national guidelines for achieving healthy dietary intakes, particularly of fruit and vegetable intake. This has contributed to unprecedented obesity rates in the US for both child and adult populations. Disparities in achieving national dietary guidelines are particularly evident in low income and some racial and ethnic minorities, population groups with high levels of food insecurity and poor health status. Additionally, the city of Springfield has an infant mortality rate (IMR) that is nearly double that of the state of Massachusetts (8.8 versus 4.7 deaths per 1000 live births, before the age of 1). Racial disparities are at the core of these distressing figures, with African American IMR being higher than the white counterparts (8.2 vs 3.2). The CDC estimates the infant mortality gap in the black population can be reduced by at least 50% through increased breastfeeding among African American women.

This work will address the nutritional health issues of low income and racial and ethnic minorities who are at high risk of food insecurity and poor health outcomes, including overweight and obesity. Training of undergraduates and graduate students will focus on delivery of nutrition education to underserved populations in the community. Both Extension education activities and research will be advanced by developing partnerships in the community to provide effective nutrition education and to motivate behavior changes that will increase dietary quality for target populations and strengthen collaboration with community organizations to increase availability and access to affordable and healthy food. Through a similar community collaborative approach this work is also focused on increasing breastfeeding rates among African American women to help reduce the unacceptably high rates of IMR in that population.

Activity Summary – 2017

- Breastfeeding Experiences of African American women in Springfield roundtables (3)
- Breastfeeding Community Action Coalition – Meetings of (5)
- Serve as an expert advisor and speaker for professional associations and advisory committees, and community groups (5)
- Train UMass students to deliver Community Nutritional Course (2)

Total educational contacts

	Adult Contacts
In Person	96
Indirect Contacts (Print, Web, etc...)	

Narrative Summary and Impact

BCAC: a partnership in narrowing breastfeeding disparities in Springfield

This has been an active year of solidifying community partnerships and collaborations. We have been working towards developing a system that bridges community and hospital services that provide lactation education, management and breastfeeding support, with particular attention at improving the engagement of African American women. Evidence indicates healthcare services have a poor track record of providing breastfeeding support to African American women, contributing to breastfeeding disparities that are evident across the nation. Through the focused attention brought by Breastfeeding Community Action Coalition (BCAC- which I established in May 2017), essential community organizations have recognized the institutional barriers that prevent successful breastfeeding among African Americans in Springfield. In response, these organizations have committed to address these barriers by participating in the BCAC. The community organizations include WIC and Mercy Medical Center. Collectively, within BCAC developing a continuum of care that will ensure that African American women are supported in their decision to breastfeed from the prenatal stage to postpartum. This 'bridging' plan will be piloted in 2018, and based on the outcomes of the pilot the system will be tested and evaluated to measure the impact on breastfeeding initiation and duration rates among African American women.

The BCAC has identified this work as an important pathway to increasing breastfeeding rates among African American women, an outcome that will have a positive impact on reducing the high infant mortality burden that is carried by this population and community.

Several community 'allies' have voiced their support of the BCAC initiative, including communities of faith, local midwives and family/parenting services. The support from our community allies is essential in attaining our objectives of narrowing breastfeeding disparities and impacting African American infant mortality in Springfield.

Nutrition Education Outreach

Through the service learning course I teach (Community Nutrition), I train nutrition students to conduct needs assessments and plan, implement and evaluate target population specific nutrition education lesson. Students work with partner organizations in the community, identifying nutrition education needs that would benefit the clientele the organization serves. Our current foci are schools. We provide nutrition education to elementary, middle schools and an alternative high school for adolescent mothers. These nutrition education lessons carried out by my students reach a diverse audience (racial/ethnic and economically diverse). Numerous resources are developed in the delivery of these educational events,

with teachers in our partner schools often requesting the resources to use in their teaching. These nutrition education outreach opportunities are valued by our community partners because they bring current, more focused and applicable nutrition knowledge to their students; and evaluations indicate that the knowledge reaches beyond the school, students often share the knowledge/information within their households (particularly recipes). The partnerships are a valuable learning ground for my nutrition students and promote the value of civic engagement.

Collaborating Organizations

- Mercy Medical Services
- Breastfeeding Community Action Coalition
- Women, Infants and Children Food and Nutrition Service (WIC)