

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 – 2018

- Study - Breastfeeding experiences of African American Women in Springfield, Public outreach to promote breastfeeding and focus group discussions (3)
- Increased Breastfeeding among African American women Grant proposal and submission (1)
- Breastfeeding Community Action Coalition – Meetings of (10)
- Serve as an expert advisor and speaker for professional associations and advisory committees, and community groups (4)
- Service Learning: Nutrition Education (9)

Total educational contacts

	Youth Contacts	Adult Contacts
In Person	130	83
Indirect Contacts (Print, Web, etc...)		50

Narrative Summary and Impact

My integrated nutrition program continues to develop through several ongoing initiatives:

1. The establishment and development of a Springfield based coalition (BCAC) that is primarily focused on addressing systemic barriers to breastfeeding experienced by African American women. Through network connections, facilitated by members of the coalition, there have been substantive outreach activities to the community and institutions, to raise awareness around breastfeeding disparities and to work towards collaborations that can address identified barriers. The coalition is currently working on designing a group based prenatal program aimed at engaging women of color in early prenatal care. The goal is to leverage the prenatal program as bridge between institutional and community services that women of color can trust and where they can access high quality care throughout the perinatal process, and supported through to the postpartum period and parenting development.
2. My current research activity also includes projects that are aimed at prevention of childhood obesity. In this regard I am a co-investigator of R01 study examining peer and social networks of middle school students and their impact on weight related behaviors that include diet, physical activity and screen time. This longitudinal study is at its first year of data collection.
3. My integrative program is also focused on training senior level undergraduate students in delivering nutrition education in the surrounding area. Students learn to conduct needs assessment with community partners, and identify nutrition education needs; then to design/plan, implement and evaluate nutrition education activities that meet the needs of adverse audiences. These service learning focused nutrition education activities facilitate a critical opportunity for UMASS students to increase their awareness of civic engagement, serving diverse populations and engaging productively with surrounding communities in respectful and mutually beneficial ways.

Collaborating Organizations

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

