

Maternal and Child Health

The Family Health Research and Program Development Unit (FHR&PD), Office of Title V and Family Health Planning will provide administrative support and overall technical guidance for Fellowship activities. FHR&PD is the center of maternal and child health research in the Texas Department of State Health Services. FHR&PD includes subject matter experts in women's health, perinatal health, and child and adolescent health and researchers who collaborate to create synergy between research and practice by collecting, analyzing and interpreting state and national data to identify trends and problem areas and researching and promulgating best practices and evidence-based interventions that have applications to public health. FHR&PD conducts research to inform policy development and programmatic decision-making and supports several programs throughout the Division of Family and Community Health Services. These programs include Title V, Title X, Title XIX, Title XX, and WIC.

Daily activities will emphasize research priorities, but will include routine interaction with several MCH programs. The Fellow may contribute to routine data analysis or special epidemiological evaluations using data collected by these programs. The fellow will interact with leaders throughout the Division of Family and Community Health Services and have an opportunity to present his/her findings at staff meetings.

Possible Projects:

Investigation of Adolescent Pregnancy in Rural and Border Areas

The majority of research on adolescent pregnancy focuses on urban, African American girls. To gain a broader understanding of adolescent pregnancy in Texas, analyses are needed that explore differences in adolescent pregnancy by geography – rural, urban, and border. These analyses may include linking birth record datasets to follow cohorts of adolescent mothers for subsequent births. These analyses will inform program development and contribute to the adolescent pregnancy literature.

Investigation of Maternal Mortality

By matching birth and death records a dataset can be created to describe the prevalence and correlates of maternal mortality in Texas. This investigation will move beyond pregnancy-related complications that contribute to maternal mortality and explore other causes of death, for example, homicide. Improved understanding of maternal mortality will inform education initiatives that can be implemented through programmatic levers.

Age Patterns in Adolescent Pregnancy

A prevailing assumption in adolescent pregnancy prevention is that adolescents are believed to be impregnated by adolescents. However, limited studies exist that explore the role of adult paternity in adolescent pregnancy. Previous studies have not explored racial/ethnic disparities, geographic disparities, or acculturation. Using Texas birth records, analyses are needed that explore differences in age between mother and father among adolescents.

Access to High Risk Care

Analysis is needed to determine what proportion of high risk pregnant women, defined using birth certificate information, are delivering at high-risk facilities. Furthermore, analyses are needed that explain differences and identify the barriers between high-risk pregnant women who deliver at high risk facilities and those who do not. This information would have a direct impact on improving perinatal systems.

Infant Death and Child Welfare

Through analysis of child fatality review team (CFRT) data throughout Texas, an association between open child protective services cases and infant mortality. CFRT data are incomplete. A more thorough methodology is needed before drawing conclusions from these data. A need exists to work with Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) to match linked birth-death files to DFPS data to determine the prevalence and correlates of DFPS involvement among infant deaths.

Childhood Obesity

DSHS has several datasets that may be used to examine aspects of childhood obesity. These datasets include school-based data collected with funding from DSHS and national datasets such as the National Children's Health Survey. Upon review of the available codebooks, project(s) can be proposed and analyses completed and published.

Assignment Location: Austin, TX

Primary Mentor: Aaron Sayegh, Ph.D., M.P.H.
Research Specialist V

Advanced Degrees: Ph.D., Purdue University (2002)
M.P.H., Indiana University (2004)
M.S., Purdue University (1999)

Secondary Mentor: Brian C. Castrucci, MA
Director of Family Health Research and Program Development
Unit, Texas Department of State Health Services

Advanced Degree: M.A., Columbia University (2006)