

## Capstone for Impact Submission | GY2019

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**Project Title:** Qualitative evaluation of community worker-led child-development program in the Western Region of São Paulo, Brazil

**Student Name(s):** Ho, Michael

**Advisor Names(s):** Michele Heisler

**Branch:** Systems & Hospital Based Care

**Path of Excellence:** Global Health & Disparities

**Handover/Transition:**

If this project can be continued by another UMMS student, you may contact them at the following email address/phone number (N/A if project cannot be handed over): **N/A**

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**Summary:**

I designed and implemented a qualitative impact evaluation of a community health worker-led, early childhood development program in low-socioeconomic status communities in the Western Region of São Paulo, Brazil.

Over the course of two months, I performed home visits and qualitative interviews in Portuguese with the mothers who participated and assessed the following domains: impact of the program on maternal confidence, perceptions of a home visit-based model, relationships with community health workers, and effects on maternal mental health.

I presented our findings at the Sujal Symposium for Health and Social Justice (Ann Arbor, MI, November 2016) and the Henry Ford Global Health Symposium (Detroit, MI, October 2017).

In addition, I authored a paper that was recently submitted to *Child Abuse & Neglect: The International Journal*.

**Methodology:**

Methods: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 23 caregivers stratified into groups of high-, medium-, and low-engagement. Interviews were conducted until thematic saturation was reached. Transcripts were then translated to English and coded for analysis.

## **Results/Conclusion:**

Key ways participants reported that the program impacted them include:

- (1) improvements in their child's cognitive abilities;
- (2) helpful instructions about parenting;
- (3) improved maternal confidence;
- (4) empowerment to engage with their child.

Some caregivers reported experiencing improvements in the following areas:

- (1) mental health,
- (2) stress level,
- (3) confidence in accessing healthcare.

**Conclusion:** The overwhelmingly positive responses from the mothers in this intervention regarding benefits to their child and themselves reinforce the benefits of this type of program in low-SES communities. In addition to perceived cognitive benefits to their children, findings suggest that this may be effective in promoting awareness among caregivers of the value of stimulating cognitive development, and that the benefits of CW visits can reach far beyond their intended scope, and the positive effects on mothers' wellbeing should also be measured.

## **Reflection/Lessons Learned:**

I entered medical school interested in pursuing a career in primary care and exploring alternative models of care delivery. The pediatrics focus of the Global Reach program and the home-visit based model of intervention were both extremely appealing. In practice in São Paulo, I was not disappointed. We visited mothers in their homes to discuss their experience in our program, gathering rich stories and getting to observe firsthand the complex urban environments where these families live.

In addition to wanting to learn more about international public health initiatives, I was also eager to improve my Portuguese language skills. During the year leading up to my time in Brazil, I practiced Portuguese weekly with a Brazilian staff member from Global REACH. But it was once I arrived in Brazil that my Portuguese really began to improve rapidly. By spending all of our working hours writing, speaking, interviewing, and transcribing in Portuguese it was the best opportunity to hone my language skills. By the time I left Brazil, I was very confident speaking Portuguese in almost any social situation. I hope to continue to keep up my skills as much as I can here in the United States.

But as much as my language fluency improved, I think my cultural fluency improved just as much. I was extremely privileged to have had the opportunity to visit women in their homes and interview them about

sensitive, nuanced topics. I was fortunate to have rich discussions with women about topics like parenting concerns, economic hardship, grief and loss, and community violence. This required a trusting relationship that I was extraordinarily lucky to have. I cannot claim to understand the hardship that these women face in their daily lives, but I am extremely grateful to have been afforded a window into their experience.

Finally, after my return to the US, I began work on turning our qualitative data into a research poster and paper. I am very grateful to be working under the direction of Dr. Michele Heisler, who is an excellent mentor and an expert on qualitative and mixed-methods research. Submitting the paper for publication has been a challenge and disheartening at times. Unfortunately, our manuscript has been rejected from several journals but we have re-submitted most recently to a Brazilian journal and are hopeful that it will be published somewhere.