



# Maternal & Child Health Research Fellowships 2020-2021 Project Descriptions

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## **Analysis and Translation of Birth Data for Practice and Policy, including the website Birth by the Numbers**

**Professor:** Eugene DeClercq, PhD

**Department:** Community Health Sciences

**Email:** [declercq@bu.edu](mailto:declercq@bu.edu)

**Number of Fellows:** 1-2

**Timeframe:** November 2020 – December 2021

The project needs a student with some data skills and a great deal of enthusiasm about working with birth data to work on two different projects, specifically: (1) the analysis of U.S. national birth certificate data or data from Listening to Mothers related to multiple questions concerning current birth practices. The project will be developed by the student into an abstract for a presentation at the 2021 APHA meeting which the student is expected to present with Dr. Declercq's support. The second part of the fellowship will involve working with the team of students who develop materials for the website "Birth by the Numbers." The Business of Being Born was a 2008 documentary on childbirth in the U.S. It was re-edited into a shorter 30 minute version for college classroom use and supplemented by a study guide and educational materials (developed by an MCH Fellow) to support in-class and internet use. An extra on the DVD was "Birth by the Numbers," a short presentation on trends in childbirth in the US. As part of this project, a companion website examining data on childbirth in the US was developed and made available to educators, the public and the press to provide up-to-date statistics on childbirth in the U.S. and cross-nationally. The fellowship will involve working with Prof. Declercq and former fellows who are collaborating on these efforts and directly overseeing the *Birth by the Numbers* website ([www.birthbythenumbers.org](http://www.birthbythenumbers.org)). The fellow will work on website development and support, with a particular emphasis on developing up-to-date resources and presentations, including mapping, on childbirth data that can be downloaded for use in college classrooms and made available to students and the press. Students have an opportunity to develop a section on the site devoted to a special interest of theirs related to childbirth (e.g. in the past students have worked on cesarean section, breastfeeding, doula and midwifery related data).

## The BRIGHT Project: Eating Disorders Prevention for Transgender Youth

**Professor:** Allegra Gordon, ScD, MPH  
**Department:** Community Health Sciences  
**Email:** [allegrag@bu.edu](mailto:allegrag@bu.edu)  
**Number of Fellows:** 1  
**Timeframe:** Dec 2020 – Dec 2021



**The BRIGHT Project** is a mixed methods study being conducted in collaboration with the advocacy organization Trans Folx Fighting Eating Disorders. Motivated by mounting epidemiologic evidence that transgender and gender diverse youth are at 2-4 times greater risk of eating disorder symptoms compared to cisgender youth, the BRIGHT Project is using a community-engaged research approach to inform future eating disorders preventive interventions.

We are seeking a student with strong writing skills and an interest in intersectional LGBTQ health equity research to join our team for the year. The Fellow will work directly with Dr. Gordon on data analysis, interpretation, and dissemination. Key activities will include: (a) writing-up findings from a series of Community Expert Working Groups held last spring; (b) interfacing with Community Experts, synthesizing feedback, and producing a final recommendations report on eating disorders prevention programs for transgender and gender diverse youth; and (c) designing dissemination materials (e.g., participant newsletter, infographic) to share findings with community stakeholders and policy-makers. The project will be developed by the Fellow into an abstract for presentation at the 2021 American Public Health Association annual meeting or another conference relevant to the Fellow's career goals. For interested students with *quantitative* data analysis expertise, there is an additional opportunity to conduct analysis and co-author a manuscript on eating disorders risk factors in a national sample of 700 gender- and racially diverse transgender young adults. For interested students with *qualitative* data analysis expertise, there is an opportunity to analyze focus group data and co-author a manuscript on eating disorders risk factors in social media environments.

## **Assessing the measurement, determinants, and impact of hunger in food pantry clients**

**Professor:** Jacey A. Greece, DSc, MPH

**Department:** Community Health Sciences

**Email:** [jabloom@bu.edu](mailto:jabloom@bu.edu)

**Number of Fellows:** 1-2

**Timeframe:** November 2020 – December 2021

The **Hunger Indicator Research Study**, conducted in collaboration with the Greater Boston Food Bank (GBFB), aims to identify and test an appropriate indicator to assess levels of hunger in communities so that for the first time GBFB and the field can begin to understand how the food provided by food pantries and GBFB impacts hunger among GBFB food pantry clients. Pre-test/post-test survey data was collected during summer 2018 from 10 food pantries in Massachusetts. Surveys included socio-demographic, food expenditure, economic hardship, and food assistance program questions, and the evidence-informed household hunger indicator (HHI) questions. A total of 825 participants were eligible and completed the baseline survey with a 60% matched rate on the follow-up survey. A brief qualitative study was also conducted to provide context to the survey questions. The survey data is already cleaned and has been partially analyzed.

This project needs students with strong literature review, writing, and data analysis skills and an interest in food access initiatives and addressing hunger to help the study team analyze and prepare manuscripts to address the following aims: 1) To test the feasibility and validity of the Hunger Indicator to measure hunger among food pantry clients in Eastern Massachusetts; 2) To compare hunger levels in new and established food pantry clients; 3) To compare changes in hunger from baseline to follow-up; and, 4) To examine determinants of hunger among food pantry clients including economic hardships. In collaboration with the study team at GBFB, we plan to disseminate 2-3 manuscripts next year on these aims and the student will have the opportunity to co-author these manuscripts and prepare national conference presentations.

The data may show other interesting relationships worthy of further investigation and dissemination. There is also the opportunity for a student that is interested and willing to conduct a qualitative sub-study in the food pantries to investigate how hunger has changed as a result of COVID-19 including conducting interviews and focus groups with food pantry clients and staff. Other research questions can be explored in the qualitative study including the impact of economic hardships as a result of COVID-19 on families and children. This is flexible and the student can propose research ideas to the Hunger Indicator Research Study team.

## **The Young Men & Media Project**

**Professor:** Kimberly Nelson, PhD, MPH

**Department:** Community Health Sciences

**Email:** [knel@bu.edu](mailto:knel@bu.edu)

**Number of Fellows:** 1

**Timeframe:** December 2020 – December 2021

Adolescent sexual minority males (ASMM), ages 14-17, are disproportionately affected by HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in the United States (US). Despite increased HIV/STI risk, there is a lack of formal sexual health education resources to prepare ASMM for engaging in healthy sexual activity. Lacking such guidance, ASMM often turn to the Internet, including pornography, to get information about male-male sexual relationships. Although the Internet can be a convenient and affirming source of sexual health information, it can also be unreliable, often providing misinformation or misleading characterizations of male-male sexual relations. The primary goal of the Young Men & Media project is to develop and pilot test a community-informed, online sexual health program that promotes the critical examination of online media by ASMM in order to promote healthy sexual development and to decrease their sexual risk-taking. The fellowship will provide training and experience in evaluating the usability and acceptability of the Young Men & Media intervention. As key members of the research team, fellows will work directly with Professor Nelson and her team. Fellowship activities will include: qualitative coding and analysis and disseminating findings through both scientific writing and social media. If it is of interest to the fellow there may also be an opportunity to develop a quantitative research project.

## **COVID-19 US State Policy Database (CUSP)**

**Professor:** Julia Raifman, ScD

**Department:** Health Law, Policy, and Management

**Email:** [jraifman@bu.edu](mailto:jraifman@bu.edu)

**Number of Fellows:** 1

**Timeframe:** December 2020 - December 2021

Health and social policies shape population health and health equity in all times, and especially at a time of increased vulnerability to infectious disease, mental distress, and financial instability due to COVID-19. Dr. Julia Raifman started the COVID-19 US State Policy Database (CUSP, <https://tinyurl.com/statepolicies>) to track state level health and economic policy responses to COVID-19. The MCH Fellow will help the CUSP team track policies relevant to maternal and child health such as school reopening policies and nutrition assistance policies. There will be opportunities to engage in mentored data visualization and research most of interest to the MCH fellow on topics such as child food insecurity.

## **Promoting adherence to antiretroviral therapy (ART) among adolescents and pregnant women in low-income countries**

**Professor:** Lora Sabin

**Email:** [lsabin@bu.edu](mailto:lsabin@bu.edu)

**Number of Fellows:** 1

**Timeframe:** November 2020—December 2021

This fellowship is designed to equip a student with the expertise and skills to conduct qualitative and quantitative analyses (possibly including cost data), interpret data, and build on our findings to draft one or more manuscripts for publication related to sub-optimal HIV treatment adherence among adolescents and pregnant women. Dr. Sabin has several studies that focus on youth and pregnant women living with HIV, with some interesting work that needs to be done in 2021! One study concerns adolescents living with HIV in Kenya, another relates to a study we recently completed in South Africa, and a third one (currently awaiting a funding decision, but likely to be funded) builds on our work in Vietnam to implement an intervention to reduce stigma among HIV-positive adolescents. The fellow will work closely with Lora on one or more of these projects, depending on what emerges as most urgent and timely and engage in: analysis of data, interpretation of data, drafting of a manuscript (or two!), discussion of follow-on research, and possibly work on a research proposal.

## **Preventing Childhood Obesity Through Youth Empowerment**

**Professor:** Monica Wang

**Email:** [mlwang@bu.edu](mailto:mlwang@bu.edu)

**Number of Fellows:** 1

**Timeframe:** November 2020—December 2021

This fellowship provides training and hands-on experience in the public health field, particularly in working directly with communities by integrating community-engagement research strategies to influence health behavior changes. This opportunity will focus on a community-based intervention to target childhood obesity, specifically in reducing consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages. The target population includes underserved children and families who are members of Boys & Girls Clubs throughout MA. As key members of the research team, fellows will work directly with Professor Wang and the study team. Fellowship activities will build upon content and skills acquired in the classroom and include: assisting with program implementation and evaluation; data collection and management; and overall project monitoring. Additionally, fellows will have the opportunity to connect with skilled professionals to foster skills in areas of interest, including public health intervention design, health equity, writing, and professional development mentorship.