

PRCHN Research Seminar Series

Exploring the Impact of the Neighborhood Environment on Health through the Lens of Children

Presented by: *Elizabeth Benninger, PhD, Post-doctoral Scholar, Mary Ann Swetland Center for Environmental Health, CWRU*

Wednesday, November 13th, 2019, 12:00 - 1:15 pm



Elizabeth Benninger, PhD

When it comes to understanding child health disparities, the environment matters. A child's neighborhood environment is comprised of physical, built, and social features, all of which have an impact on child health outcomes. Living in healthy neighborhood environments has a strong influence on the physical and psychological development of children – both in the short-term as well as over their life course. Within Cleveland, racial disparities are pronounced with infant mortality rates among Blacks (16 per 1,000 live births) and Hispanics (10.3 per 1,000 live births) substantially higher than for Whites (9.3 per 1,000). Other concerns facing young people in the city are evident in the teenage pregnancy rate, which is considered to be an important marker of economic disadvantage.

The black teenage birth rate in Cuyahoga county is at 48.1 per 1,000 births, and at 11.6 per 1,000 births for white teenagers. While objective measures such as poverty, infant mortality and pregnancy rates provide valuable indicators of child health disparities, well-being researchers have expressed discontent at the use of objective indicators as the sole measure of determining the health and well-being of children. This discontent is rooted in the contention that objective quality of life indicators only provide a partial understanding of health and well-being and what people think and feel, and how they appraise various aspects of their life, is critical in understanding their overall quality of life. This seminar will discuss the use of participatory methods with children as a means of gathering evidence on children's subjective understanding of their health, environment, and overall well-being and as well as translating research evidence into social change.

Elizabeth Benninger, PhD is a postdoctoral scholar at the Mary Ann Swetland Center for Environmental Health. She completed her M.A. in Psychology with a specialization in Community Psychology from Antioch University, Los Angeles and her doctoral degree in Psychology from the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town, South Africa. Trained as a community, clinical and social psychologist, her research contributions are focused on promoting individual and community health and wellness through innovative and collaborative research designs and approaches. Within this focus, her research specifically addresses health inequities that connect to community need and which are inclusive of diverse populations, including children, women, people of color, and low-income populations. In addition to her role as a researcher, Dr. Benninger has been involved in a number of community health initiatives. This includes providing psychoeducational groups in the school and after-school sector, teacher and youth-care worker trainings related to child mental health, spearheading a coalition for children who live and work on the street, providing entrepreneurial support for youth in Cleveland's high schools, and the developing an after-school health promoting surfing program led by community youth.

The PRCHN Seminar Series is open to the public and takes place from 12:00 - 1:15 on the 2nd Wednesday of every month at the BioEnterprise Building, Room 03B 11000 Cedar Avenue.

Parking is available and a light lunch is served. Contact Madeline Castele at: mcc92@case.edu for more information.



The Prevention Research Center for Healthy Neighborhood's mission is to foster partnerships within Cleveland's urban neighborhoods for developing, testing, and implementing strategies to prevent and reduce the burden of chronic disease.