



THE SUBSTANCES AND SEXUAL HEALTH LAB
AT YALE UNIVERSITY

Yale

LAB REPORT

2022



Arranged By
Dr. Ijeoma Opara
Director of The SASH Lab



MISSION STATEMENT



·The Substances and Sexual Health (SASH) Lab is focused on conducting and disseminating youth substance use and HIV prevention research to inform interventions and policies that highlights the strengths of youth of color, their families, and their communities.

·For more information on The SASH Lab, please visit: oparalab.org



DR. IJEOMA OPARA

Principal Investigator and Director

Dr. Ijeoma Opara is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences at Yale School of Public Health



Dr. Opara envisions a world where health disparities that impact Black and Brown youth will no longer exist, Black and Brown girls will be nurtured and viewed as leaders, and youth of color will be safe in a world that believes in their success.

Dr. Ijeoma Opara is the director of The Substances and Sexual Health (SASH) at Yale School of Public Health, formerly known as, “The Substance Abuse and Sexual Health” lab. Dr. Opara defines herself as a community-based participatory researcher with experience in working with youth and community organizations dedicated to reducing youth substance use and improving mental health outcomes for youth in urban communities. Dr. Opara’s research focuses on strengths-based approaches for urban youth substance use and HIV prevention. Her second line of research involves highlighting racial and gender specific strategies in prevention research for Black girls. Dr. Opara is an award-winning scientist and has received prestigious awards from the National Institute of Health (NIH) such as the NIH Director’s Early Independence Award which provides five years of funding to support the SASH Lab’s work on youth substance use prevention and advancing health equity for urban youth. Dr. Opara is also a licensed social worker and has worked primarily with youth and women of color living with co-occurring disorders

Education background:

Dr. Opara received a PhD in Family Science and Human Development from Montclair State University, a Master of Social Work from Silver School of Social Work at New York University, Master of Public Health in Epidemiology from New York Medical College and a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from New Jersey City University.





WE MOVED INTO OUR LAB SPACE

TO 47 COLLEGE STREET, SUITE 18 AT YALE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH!

↻ The SASH Lab at Yale Retweeted



Dr. Ijeoma Opara

@ljeomaOparaPHD · Apr 20



Our lab space is slowly coming together! Check out our new sign 🥰🥰🥰

[@thesashlab](#)



Yale School of Public Health and 2 others

💬 29

↻ 27

❤️ 550





RESEARCH PROJECTS:

The SASH Lab has been involved in several research projects in 2021-2022 that all support using strengths-based strategies for youth substance use, HIV and STI prevention for youth in New Jersey. The next few pages will showcase some of the work The SASH Lab has been involved in.



Purpose of the Project

·To investigate the association between substance use, neighborhood characteristics, and mental health including identifying risk and protective factors among youth living in urban communities using qualitative and quantitative methods

Funding Source

·This study is supported by the National Institutes of Health Director's Early Independence Award (DP5OD029636; PI: Ijeoma Opara)

·The award supports outstanding junior scientists with the intellect, scientific creativity, drive, and maturity bypass the traditional postdoctoral training period to launch independent research careers

Progress

Since we received our grant two years ago, we've been working with Community Partners to develop questions for both quantitative and qualitative data collection, conducting focus groups with community members, and worked with our Youth Advisory Board to create a new project.



Data collection and analysis, Pilot intervention

Year 1:

- o Assembled a dedicated research team
- o Developed a Youth and Community Advisory Board
- o Develop qualitative focus group interview questions
 - During this stage we received feedback from our community advisory board, youth advisory board and SASH Lab affiliates and consultants to develop interview questions that Paterson youth would respond best to.
- o Gathered publicly available data from various sources including U.S. Census Bureau, FBI Crime Statistics and State-level data
- o Submitted manuscripts and conference presentations pertaining to neighborhood level differences in Paterson, NJ
- o Presented findings to the Paterson School District
- o Developed and disseminated a Policy Report

Year 2:

- o Developed survey which will serve as a comprehensive needs assessment
 - During this stage we received feedback from our community advisory board, youth advisory board and SASH Lab affiliates and consultants to develop survey questions that were culturally sensitive and appropriate for the community
- o Trained community partners to collect data
 - We brought in our first Community Research Fellow in Training, Cristina Barnes-Lee, LCSW, Director of Paterson Youth Services Bureau, who was trained to conduct focus groups and led several this year.
- o Data collection
 - During this stage, we have interviewed over 76 Paterson youth. We have a target of 100 youth that we plan to interview by the end of 2022



Members from the Youth Advisory Board with Dr. Ijeoma Opara, Cora Gabriel and Jim Walsh Paterson Prevention Project community advisory board member and Chief Operating Officer of OASIS



Dr. Ijeoma Opara with Andriana Herrera, Paterson Prevention Project community advisory board member and program manager for Paterson Coalition Against Substance Abuse (P-CASA)

We are currently recruiting for the survey. If you are between the ages of 13-21 years old and live in Paterson, NJ—please click this link to take complete our survey and you will receive \$10

bit.ly/PatersonPreventionProjectSurvey



“Research Informing Practice”

Cristina Barnes-Lee, a Community Fellow created a mental health group called “**Step 1/Be Aware**” due to the feedback she received while she was facilitating focus groups for the lab’s projects in Paterson, NJ.

She found that the first step in wanting anyone to seek treatment is to first be aware that they need assistance with their mental health. While facilitating groups, Cristina recognized the need to continue the conversation about mental health. She started to create a program that speaks to teens about mental health starting with anxiety. **Step 1/Be Aware** is a 5-week curriculum that is 45 minutes long and is gender based. The group starts with a pre-assessment on their level of anxiety and then introduces anxiety what it is and what their thoughts are about the disorder. The following weeks discuss the wheel of anxiety and coping skills. The last session includes the post assessment regarding their anxiety level and resources to continue to educate or to offer treatment if needed. Cristina is working with The SASH Lab to revise the group to include more evidence-based tools and will offer sessions to Paterson youth in Fall 2022.

We are so honored to be a part of change in the City of Paterson!

Community Advisory Board Members of the Paterson Prevention Project include partnerships with:

Dr. Robert J. Reid

Paterson Coalition Against Substance Abuse at Montclair State University

Andriana Herrera

P-CASA; Montclair

Jim Walsh

Oasis

Tenee Joyner

MAPP; City of Paterson

Cristina Barnes-Lee

Paterson Youth Services Bureau

Stephanie Drag

The Center for Alcohol and Drug Resources

Evelyn Pena

Paterson Public Schools; Community Center

Jada Fulmore

NJ Reentry

Zellie Thomas

Black Lives Matter Paterson

Sharieff Ali Bugg

Growing in Grace Counseling Group

Indira Castillo

Youth Services Bureau



YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

The Youth Advisory Board has been created to provide dedicated youth with the opportunity to participate in research and advocacy to make an impactful difference in the city of Paterson. It was led by: Christine Pham, MPH '22 (Yale School of Public Health) and Cora Gabriel, SASH Lab Project Manager.

Members:

- Linda Rodriguez
- Ayden Ramos-Schneider
- Leidy Rodriguez
- Nasser Eid
- Fhameda Sultan

A sub-group of the Youth Advisory Board, the Latina Youth Advisory Board, was created and led by Beatriz Duran-Becerra, MPH '23 (Yale School of Public Health) and co-led by Unique Bacote.

YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD PROJECTS: PHOTOVOICE PROJECT :

Photovoice is a visual research methodology that puts cameras into the participants' hands to help them to document, reflect upon, and communicate issues of concern, while stimulating social change [1, 2]. With the intention to foster social change, Photovoice can enhance community engagement, increase awareness of community resources, and foster self-efficacy of the research partners [3]. Unique Bacote (Paterson Habitat for Humanity)



Within two feet of the entrance of Clinton Street Park, there are shot bottles along with full sized alcohol bottles littering the ground.



THE “HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS TOOLKIT FOR LATINA GIRLS IN PATERSON, NEW JERSEY”

The “Healthy Relationships Toolkit for Latina Girls” is a self-guided toolkit consisting of informational sections and self-reflective exercises with the goal of providing Latina girls from Paterson, NJ between the ages of 13-18 with the tools to make their own best decisions when it comes to romantic relationships.

Empowering Latina girls to foster healthy romantic relationships can increase girls’ self-esteem, improve communication skills, and protect girls from substance use and negative sexual health outcomes.

We utilized Youth Participatory Action Research principles to co-develop this toolkit with a Latina Youth Advisory Board through a series of formal meetings. Board members included the following Latina girls from Paterson: Linda, Leidy, and Ty. The toolkit is divided into seven main sections:

- 1) Identifying signs of healthy and unhealthy relationships
- 2) Setting and communicating boundaries
- 3) Identifying and giving consent
- 4) Ending unhealthy relationships
- 5) Supporting friends
- 6) Identifying cultural influences in perceptions of romantic relationships
- 7) Understanding power & privilege in romantic relationships

THE TOOLKIT ALSO FEATURES A CHARACTER PANEL CONSISTING OF FOUR DIVERSE LATINA CHARACTERS WHO GUIDE GIRLS THROUGH THE TOOLKIT SECTIONS.

These characters are shown having conversations with each other about the previously mentioned romantic relationship topics, in addition to modeling skills and behaviors in scenario-based sections. Input from the Latina Youth Advisory Board was used to create scenarios based on real life experiences and information that reflects the experiences of Latina girls in Paterson. The toolkit is also a celebration of the Paterson community and includes important community spaces to highlight the positive assets of Paterson. We look forward to publishing this freely available resource on the SASH Lab website soon!



Healthy Relationships Toolkit for Latina Girls

Developed by Betty Durán-Becerra under the
guidance of Dr. Ijeoma Opara, PhD



Communicating Boundaries



Now that we have identified some of our boundaries, we're going to think about how to communicate them to our partner.

Starting a conversation about boundaries may feel awkward, but it doesn't have to be! Think of it as another way to build trust with your partner.



HERE ARE SOME STEPS YOU COULD USE

1

Clearly describe the activities or behaviors that you don't feel comfortable with

2

Be assertive! Passive communication does not clearly communicate what you need

3

Don't apologize for setting a boundary

4

Compromise only on the boundaries that you identified as things you're okay compromising on

5

Use respectful language and "I" statements



THE DREAMER GIRLS PROJECT

•Purpose of the project

- o The purpose of this study is to adapt a racial and gender specific evidence-based HIV/AIDS and substance use prevention program
- o The goal of The Dreamer Girls Project (DGP) will be to a) increase HIV/AIDS knowledge among Black adolescent girls in Paterson and b) to increase knowledge about licit and illicit substances and their relationship with STI and HIV/AIDS.

•Funding Source

- o National Institute of Mental Health: R25-MH087217

Progress:

2021-2022

- Develop qualitative focus group interview questions
- We also partnered with another city in New Jersey, East Orange, where we will be working with East Orange Public Schools to collect data and develop programming for Black teen girls.
- Interviewed 75 Black teen girls across 10 focus groups via virtual Zoom groups and in person
- Developed a Dreamer Girls Project youth advisory board with 8 Black girls from across the country
- Developed and disseminated a survey in June 2022 which will serve as a mental health, substance use and sexual health needs assessment for Black teen girls between the ages of 13-18 years old
- Using feedback that we received from youth advisory board and focus group findings, we are in the process of developing a comprehensive sexual health and substance use prevention intervention for Black teen girls. We anticipate piloting this intervention by early 2023
- In April 2022, we gathered our Youth Advisory Board, consisting of 7 Black Girls from the ages of 13 -17 and residing in NJ, NY, TX, and FL. Each meeting topic is meant to help develop an HIV intervention program targeted for Black girls and gain valuable research experience. The girls also gain valuable research experience and learn about the process of developing programs for Black girls.
 - The Youth Advisory Board is led by lab members, Sydney Hussett-Richardson and Courtnae Alves.
- Using feedback that we received from youth advisory board and focus group findings, we are in the process of developing a comprehensive sexual health and substance use prevention intervention for Black teen girls. We anticipate piloting this intervention by early 2023



YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

·Thank you to our amazing The Dreamer Girls Project Youth Advisory Board Members who met regularly in Spring and Summer 2022 to discuss issues pertaining to Black teen girls.

Youth Advisory Board Members

- o Marley Dias
- o Uzoamaka Gbulie
- o Rachel Oladepo
- o Michelle Matos
- o Natalya Charlemagne
- o Shekinah Glory Peter Mba
- o Kassidy Nola Scott

We want to give a special thanks to Dr. Jamila T. Davis who has helped us to make connections with East Orange Public Health specifically for this project. We are so thrilled to serve the community and create prevention programs that work for Black girls



NEW PROJECTS FOR 2022

Developing a Substance Use Parent-Child Educational Intervention for Urban Black Families

Purpose of Project:

- We will develop and/or adapt a racial-specific parent-child substance use education intervention for Black families in Paterson, New Jersey which can promote family bonding, communication, and supervision, as well as acknowledging racial and ethnic specific norms, values, and pride. The adaptation of this intervention will be designed based on the needs of Black parents and their children and direct input from them as stakeholders.

Funding Source:

- Through an award received through the Partnership to End Addiction , funding by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), the Family Involvement in Recovery Support and Treatment (FIRST) Scholars Program provides 2 years of funding to early career scholars that are dedicated to developing innovative research projects that incorporate family in substance use treatment and prevention.

We anticipate the launch date of the project to be in Fall 2022,
Stay tuned!





BLACK GIRLS GO TO YALE!

In July 2022, we invited over 50 Black teen girls to visit Yale's campus through The Dreamer Girls Project program. We worked with Yale Visitor Center to schedule private organized campus tours with girls from East Orange and Paterson, New Jersey. Thank you to Yale School of Public Health for their support of this initiative and Yale School of Medicine Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for donating gifts to the girls who visited the campus.





BLACK TEEN GIRL SCHOLARSHIP FUND

In 2022, Dr. Ijeoma Opara launched the **Black Teen Girl Scholarship**. She awarded \$500 each to two Black girls in New Jersey who are attending college in Fall 2022 and can come up with a great idea in preventing HIV, STIs, and reducing drug use among Black girls in honor of The Dreamer Girls Project. Funding from the scholarship comes directly from Dr. Opara as a way to give back to Black girls.

“IMPROVING THE HEALTH OF BLACK GIRLS IS A GOAL OF MINE AND I WANT TO SUPPORT A GIRL WHO IS PASSIONATE BUT ALSO WANTS TO BE A PART OF THE SOLUTION TO IMPROVE THE HEALTH OF BLACK GIRLS”

—DR. IJEOMA OPARA

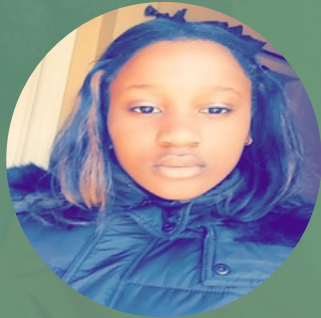
THE 2022 BLACK TEEN GIRL SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS ARE:



NONA RAINE HARRIS FULMORE

Passaic County Community College/Princeton University

Nona graduated from the Diana C. Lobosco STEM Academy in June 2022 and will be attending **Passaic County Community College in Paterson, NJ**, to pursue an Associate’s degree in Computer Science. There, she will be a part of the STEM scholars program funded by NASA. She will then transfer to **Princeton University** on a full scholarship and major in Software Engineering.



GLAELLE GERMAIN

State University of New York at Albany

Glaelle Germain graduated from Irvington High School in June 2022 and will be attending the **State University of New York at Albany** in Fall 2022. There, she will continue her studies in Business Administration.

CONGRATULATIONS NONA & GLAELLE!

For more information about the scholarship fund, visit: <https://oparalab.org/dreamer-girls-project/>



COMMUNITY RESEARCH FELLOWS

In 2022, The SASH Lab launched the Community Research Fellow in Training Program! We welcome two of our trusted community partners to receive research-related training on community-based participatory research methods, data collection, data analysis and dissemination of research.

OUR COMMUNITY RESEARCH FELLOWS ARE:



CRISTINA BARNES-LEE
Community Research Fellow for Paterson Prevention Project



DR. JAMILA T. DAVIS
Community Research Fellow for the Dreamer Girls Project

OUR COMMUNITY PRESENCE

At The SASH Lab, we believe in the importance of bringing our research to the community in a relatable way. We do this through participating in outreach events and volunteering our time to lead talks and informative discussions on mental health, sexual health and youth substance use at community events, school assemblies, and other spaces where we can reach youth directly.

We thank our trusted community partners for giving us the access and support to further our mission.



Dr. Ijeoma Opara and Lab Research Assistant, Livia Lazzaro at the Paterson Youth Service Bureau annual Halloween fest in 2021



Paterson Prevention Project community board member Indira Castillo, Marline Francois (PhD candidate at Montclair State University), Cora Gabriel, Project Manager of SASH Lab, Dr. Ijeoma Opara and Community Research Fellow and board member, Cristina Barnes-Lee at a local Paterson High School



Cora Gabriel, SASH Lab project manager at a Halloween event sponsored by Paterson Healing Collective

OUR COMMUNITY PRESENCE



Dr. Antoine Lovell, Mayor Andre Sayegh (Paterson), and Dr. Ijeoma Opara attending a grand opening of a community center in Paterson



Dr. Ijeoma Opara speaking at a community mental health event hosted by Paterson Community Policing



OUR COMMUNITY PRESENCE



Dr. Ijeoma Opara with Community Research Fellow, Dr. Jamila T. Davis at East Orange Campus High School meeting with Black teen girls



Dr. Ijeoma Opara and Cora Gabriel with East Orange Public Schools administrators and counselors on #SEL Day

At the SASH Lab, we engage in community based participatory research which allows us to completely immerse ourselves in the community. We view the community as a place where we can work collaboratively together to develop solutions. We have participated in events in Paterson and have started developing relationships in East Orange, New Jersey.



RESEARCH DISSEMINATION

At The SASH Lab, we focus on three core areas of research

Strengths of Black Girls

- Highlighting strengths of Black girls and promoting empowerment, gender pride, and racial pride, in order to support Black girls to have healthy developmental outcomes.
- The SASH lab focuses on changing the narrative of Black girls, especially those that live in urban communities in the U.S
- Hispanic girls are also a focal interest of ours, and we intend to further incorporate the experiences of Hispanic girls and also Afro-Latina girls especially, as they are often ignored in prevention work.

Substance use prevention

- The association between substance use, neighborhood characteristics, and mental health outcomes in youth is emerging in the literature yet disparities continue to impact youth in urban communities. Paterson, New Jersey is a northeastern, urban community which has one of the highest rates of substance abuse in the nation. Youth living in urban communities, such as Paterson are overly exposed to drug use in their neighborhoods and have extreme access to substances, leaving them more at risk to initiate use at earlier ages and more likely to become dependent into adulthood.

HIV prevention

- Black adolescent girls continue to be disproportionately diagnosed with STIs and HIV/AIDS. Black adolescent girls are more likely to have early sexual debut which is defined as having sex at or before the age of 14 years old, have sex without a condom, having multiple sexual partners, and be sexually abused, all of which are risk factors for contracting HIV and STIs
- To adapt a racial and gender specific evidence-based HIV/AIDS and substance use prevention program for urban Black Girls.
- The goal will be to a) increase HIV/AIDS knowledge among Black adolescent girls in Paterson and b) to increase knowledge about licit and illicit substances and their relationship with STI and HIV/AIDS.



2021-2022 PUBLICATIONS / MANUSCRIPTS

A LIST OF OUR PEER-REVIEWED MANUSCRIPTS THAT WERE PUBLISHED
BETWEEN FALL 2021-SPRING 2022.

TO SEE A FULL LIST OF ALL OF OUR MANUSCRIPTS TO DATE,
PLEASE VISIT: [OPARALAB.ORG/PUBLICATIONS](https://oparalab.org/publications)

Thank you to our study participants, students in our lab, our collaborators and co-authors for helping us to disseminate quality research to improve health outcomes for people of color.

Strengths-based outcomes

1. Opara, I., Lardier Jr., D.T., Garcia-Reid, P., & Reid, R.J. (2021). **Testing the Factor Structure of the Brief Sense of Community Scale among Black Girls and the Relationship with Ethnic Identity, Empowerment and Social Support.** Children & Youth Services Review.
2. Wint, K., Opara, I., Gordon, R., & Brooms, D. (2021). **Countering Educational Disparities Among Black Boys and Young Men from Pre-K to High School: A Life Course Intersectional Perspective.** Urban Review
3. Opara, I. & Brown, T. (2021). **#BlackGirlsMatter and the Social Work Curriculum: Integrating Intersectionality within Social Work Education.** Journal of Social Work Education.
4. Lardier, D.T., Opara, I., & Roach, E. (2021). **A Latent Class Analysis of Psychological Sense of Community and Ethnic Identity among Young Adults of Color from the Southwestern United States.** Journal of Community Psychology.

Sexual Health

5. Opara, I., Pierre, K., Assan, A., Scheinfeld, L., Alves, C., Cross, K., Lizarraga, A., & Brawner, B. (2021). **A systematic review on sexual health and drug use prevention interventions for Black Girls.** International Journal on Environmental Research and Public Health.
6. Harvey, T., Opara, I., & Wang, E. (2022). **Role of the Intersections of Gender, Race, Sexual Orientation in the Association Between Substance Use Behaviors and Sexually Transmitted Infections in a National Sample of Adults with Recent Criminal Legal Involvement.** International Journal on Environmental Research and Public Health
7. Opara, I., Weser, V., Sands, B., Fernandes, C.S., Husset-Richardson, S., & Hieftje, K. (2022). **Feeling Invisible & Unheard: A Qualitative Exploration of Gendered-Racist Stereotypes Influence on Sexual Decision Making and Mistreatment of Black Teen Girls.** Youth & Society.
8. Opara, I., Abrams, J., Cross, K., & Amutah-Onukagha, N. (2021). **Reframing Sexual Health for Black Girls and Women in HIV/STI Prevention Work: Highlighting the Role of Identity and Interpersonal Relationships.** International Journal on Environmental Research and Public Health.
9. Opara, I., Hill, A., Calhoun, A., Francois, M., Alves, C., Garcia-Reid, P., & Reid, R.J. (2021). **Sociopolitical Control as a Mediator between Ethnic Identity and Social Support on 30-Day Drug Use among Black Girls.** Journal of Ethnicity in Substance Abuse
10. Opara, I., Lizarraga, A., Lardier D.T., Jr., Herrera, A., Garcia-Reid, P., & Reid, R.J. (2022). **What Happens When We Ask? A Phenomenological Focus Group on HIV Prevention and Sexual Health Education Among Emancipated Foster Care Youth.** Children & Youth Services Review.



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Thank you to our study participants, students in our lab, our collaborators and co-authors for helping us to disseminate quality research to improve health outcomes for people of color.

11. Ramos, S.R., Lardier, D.T., Jr., Opara, I., Williams, C., Turpin, R.E., Boyd, D.T., Gutierrez, J., Nelson, L.E., & Kershaw, T. (2021). **Intersectional Effects of Internalized Homophobia, Gender Expression, and Sexual Orientation Concealment on Health Literacy and HIV Risk Among Sexual Minority Men of Color: A Path Analysis.** Journal of the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care.

Substance Use and Mental Health

12. Robertson, R., Corbin, S., Gunn, J. III., & Opara, I. (2022). **Structural indicators of suicide: An exploration of state-level risk factors among Black and White people in the United States, 2015-2019.** Journal of Public Mental Health

13. McDanal, R, Parisi, D., Opara, I., & Schleider, J. (2021). **Effects of Brief Interventions on Mental Health and Substance Use Outcomes.** Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review

14. Godbolt, D., Opara, I., & Amutah-Onukagha, N. (2022). **Strong Black Women: Stress, overeating, and health disparities among a sample of Black Female College Students.** Journal of Black Studies



MEET OUR TEAM

HERE IS THE TEAM THAT MAKES ALL THE MAGIC HAPPEN AT THE SASH LAB!

STAFF

Cora Gabriel, MPH

Title: Project Manager

Cora is the Research Project Manager of the SASH Lab. In her role, she supports the lab by managing the Research Assistants, oversees the budgeting relating to the grants, administrative and operational management, and has a hand in assisting in research. Through administering tasks to Research Assistants and mentoring, Cora strives to ensure that each member is gaining experience in different areas of what the lab represents. She also led nine focus groups for the Dreamer Girls Project, and three for the Paterson Prevention Project. She supports the Youth Advisory Board meetings and provides resources for members to enhance their skillsets. Additionally, Cora assists with the IRB Protocol, data collection (both qualitative and quantitative) and assembling the lab and policy reports.



WELCOME TO OUR NEW STAFF!

Sitara Weerakoon, PhD, MPH

Title: Post-Doctoral Fellow

Dr. Sitara M. Weerakoon is a postdoctoral fellow with the Yale School of Medicine NIDA T32 Postdoctoral Research Training Program in Substance Abuse Prevention and the SASH Lab at the Yale School of Public Health. Dr. Weerakoon obtained a PhD in Epidemiology and Biostatistics and a Master of Public Health in Epidemiology from the University of Texas Health Science Center School of Public Health (UTH SPH), and a Bachelor of Arts in Public Health from Austin College. Her research focuses on substance use impact on health in the child and adolescent population with a life course approach. She is skilled in research design, quantitative data analysis, data visualization, survey development, GIS mapping, health communication, and academic writing. Her master's thesis combined the use of structural equation modeling and geographic information system (GIS) mapping software, while her dissertation ("Effect of in utero polysubstance exposure on anthropometric and cardiovascular health outcomes in ethnically diverse adolescents") used mixed effects growth curve modeling and regression modeling to explore child growth over time and cardiovascular disease risk in adolescence after prenatal exposure to maternal drug use.





WELCOME TO OUR NEW STAFF!

Beatriz Duran-Becerra, MPH

Title: Post Graduate Associate (starting August 2022)

Betty recently received her Master of Public Health in the Social and Behavioral Sciences department at Yale School of Public Health. At Yale, Betty served as one of the Executive Directors at the HAVEN Free Clinic, a student-run clinic that provides comprehensive primary care services to the uninsured community in New Haven. Betty is passionate about empowering girls of color as well as developing and implementing youth-led programs to address health inequities.

- Betty recently completed her Master's thesis research on understanding protective factors in sexual health among Latina adolescents in Paterson, New Jersey. Under the mentorship and advisement of Dr. Opara, Betty is creating a strengths-based approach to develop a sexual health and substance use prevention toolkit for Latina girls in Paterson, New Jersey. Upon graduation, Betty accepted a full time post graduate position at The SASH Lab where her responsibilities will include building off her intervention for Latina girls in Paterson and further contributing to sexual health and substance use prevention research for youth of color in Paterson, New Jersey





MEET OUR TEAM

Research Assistants

Sydney Hussett-Richardson

- Master of Public Health Candidate, Yale University

Livia Lizzaro, MPH, MA

- The College of New Jersey

Christine Pham, MPH

- Yale School of Public Health

Unique Bacote

- Passaic County College

Ebony Laboy, MPH

- Social Media Specialist, Emory University

Dr. Dharmi Desai, MBBS

- Social Media Specialist, Yale School of Public Health

Courtnae Alves,

- Research Assistant, Health Sciences and minor in Public Health, Undergraduate at Stony Brook University

Funcia Jean Louis

- Social Media Specialist, George Washington University

PhD students/Candidates

Daneele Thorpe

- Research Assistant, PhD candidate, Stony Brook University

Emmanuella Asabor

- MD / PhD Candidate, Yale School of Medicine and Yale School of Public Health

Petty Tineo

- PhD Candidate, Montclair State University

Interns for Summer 2022

Taylor Choe

- Department of Epidemiology of Microbial Diseases Master of Public Health Candidate, Yale School of Public Health

Nasser Eid

- Undergraduate, Yale College

Ann Abraham

- Master of Social Work and Master of Public Health, Epidemiology, Columbia University

Acknowledgments:

Thank you to the research assistants, lab affiliates, advisory board members, friends, and supporters of the SASH Lab, and to the volunteers who donated their time to gaining valuable experience and to supporters of the lab who believe in our mission.

If you are reading this report and would like to donate to any of our initiatives or projects, please contact the Senior Director of Development at Alumni Affairs at the Yale School of Public Health fundraising office,

Cornelia Evans cornelia.evans@yale.edu