



# THE SASH LAB ANNUAL REPORT

**2020-2021**



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 01** Introduction
- 02** Director of the SASH Lab
- 03** Main Research Ideas
- 04** Lab Members
- 07** Research Projects
- 11** Lab Trainings
- 13** Community Engagement
- 14** 2020-2021 Publications  
and Manuscripts
- 18** Acknowledgements

# MISSION

*The Substance Abuse and Sexual Health (SASH) Lab is focused on conducting and disseminating quality substance use and HIV prevention research that highlights the strengths of youth of color, their families, and their communities.*

# DIRECTOR

Dr. Ijeoma Opara, PhD., LMSW, MPH



Principal Investigator and Director

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



The SASH Lab was launched in September 2020 while at Stony Brook University where Dr. Opara worked as an Assistant Professor in the School of Social Welfare. Dr. Opara moved the SASH Lab with her to Yale in July 2021.

The SASH Lab is primarily funded by the **NIH Director's Early Independence Award** which Dr. Opara received in 2020.

The award supports the development of the lab and the Paterson Prevention Project which is a 5 year study that focuses on understanding the impact of neighborhoods on substance use and mental health outcomes in Paterson, NJ youth.

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, and a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from New Jersey City University.

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# MAIN RESEARCH AREAS

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

Strengths of Black Girls	Youth substance use prevention	Youth HIV prevention
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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 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.

Black and Hispanic adolescents are at high risk of contracting STIs and HIV. This is due to contextual factors such as racism, lack of resources and health education, sexism, and neighborhood segregation

The SASH Lab focuses on changing the narrative of Black girls, especially those that live in urban communities in the U.S

Our primary focus is in Paterson, New Jersey is where we engage in community-based participatory research for prevent substance use

USubstance use and HIV often intersect as the same risk factors that contribute to substance use also increase chances of contracting HIV

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.

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.

Our goal is to develop multiple interventions that can serve as resources for the community of Paterson and similiar urban communities that face challenges in reducing substance use and HIV disparities

# LAB MEMBERS

## Project Manager

Cora Gabriel, MPH



Cora-Ann Gabriel, MPH earned her B.A. in Women's and Gender Studies with a minor in Biology at Rutgers University – Newark. She then received her Master of Public Health with a concentration in Health Policy and Management and an Advanced Certificate in Global Health at New York Medical College.

Cora previously worked as a consultant exploring the benefits of implementing a patient safety data platform in hospitals to reduce medical costs and as a strategic planner in an oncology healthcare marketing and advertising agency. She has also worked with a nonprofit focusing on preconception health for marginalized women in Westchester County, NY and co-authored publications for addressing race-based sexuality.

Cora is passionate about improving health outcomes for African American women. She hopes to engage in projects that are cognizant of cultural differences in marginalized communities and strives to bridge the gap in access to adequate care for these populations.

# LAB MEMBERS

## Community Outreach Manager

Kimberly Pierre, MPH, CHES



Kimberly Pierre, MPH, CHES is a public health professional with expertise in health promotion, community outreach, health education, survey research methods, and research. She earned her Master of Public Health at Rutgers School of Public Health, concentrating in Urban Public Health and a Bachelor of Science in Public Health with a concentration in Community Health Education from Montclair State University.

During her graduate studies, she became the first recipient of the Bernard D. Goldstein Award for academic excellence within her concentration.

Kimberly identifies strongly with her Haitian heritage and is a first-generation graduate who is motivated and determined to improve the health of marginalized communities. Her current research interest includes health disparities, health equity research, sexual and reproductive health, and maternal and child health. Her future plans include continuing to pursue her education, earning her Ph. D, and cultivating her experiences to elevate professionally.

# LAB MEMBERS

## Research Assistants in 2020-2021

Courtnae Alves

- Health Sciences and minor in Public Health, Undergraduate at Stony Brook University, Class of 2022

Araba Assan, MPH, CHES

- Health Educator

Carolanne Clark

- Master of Social Work Candidate, Stony Brook University, Class of 2022

Kristina Cross

- Master of Social Work candidate, Stony Brook University, Class of 2022

Tynisha George

- Dual Master of Social Work and Master of Public Health candidate, Stony Brook University, Class of 2022

Funcia Jean-louis

- Undergraduate, George Washington University

Ashley Lizarraga, MSW

- PhD candidate, University of Washington – Seattle

Deanna Parisi

- Master of Public Health Candidate, Stony Brook University, Class of 2022

Ria Rodney, RN, MSN

- 2021 Network for Social Work Management Policy Fellow Mentee of Dr. Opara

Kimona Spencer, MSW

- PhD candidate at Hunter College, CUNY

Daneele Thorpe, MA

- PhD candidate, Stony Brook University

# RESEARCH PROJECTS



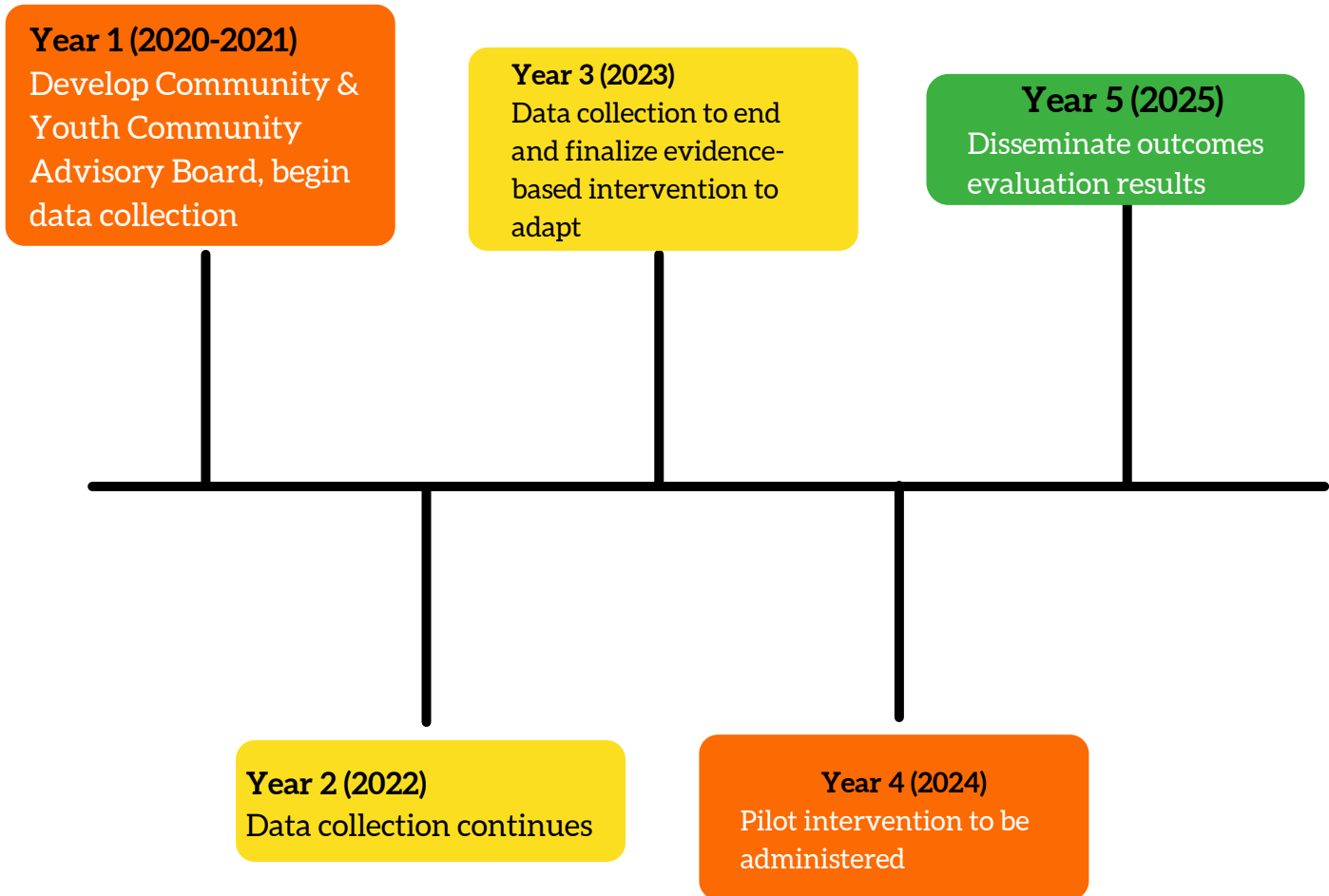
## Purpose of the Study:

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 multiple sources of data. Innovative methods such as venue-based sampling will be used to reach youth who are not connected to schools,

The project plans to achieve this by conducting:

- Focus groups and individual interviews with eligible Paterson youth between the ages of 13-21 years old
- Brief online and in-person surveys with Paterson youth; and
- Periodic neighborhood assessments to understand the influence of neighborhood characteristics on mental health and substance use.

# TIMELINE FOR THE PATERSON PREVENTION PROJECT



Funding source:

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

# RESEARCH PROJECTS



The goal of The Dreamer Girls Project (DGP) will be to a) increase HIV/AIDS knowledge among Black adolescent girls in Paterson, NJ and other urban cities and b) to increase knowledge about licit and illicit substances and their relationship with STI and HIV/AIDS.

In order to address these issues we will do the following:

## Focus Groups

- We aim to discussing what it means to be a Black girl and what challenges they see in their communities surrounding drug use and sexual health with at least 40 black girls in urban areas.

## Advisory Board

- We aim to recruit 4 girls to participate in an advisory board. They will be responsible in overseeing the development of the intervention program for Black girls.

## Test the Intervention

- The research team will test out the intervention on a sample of 10-20 Black girls. Participants will be a part of each session that the team develops and will have the opportunity to share feedback on the program

Funding source:

National Institute of Mental Health - housed in Yale University Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS (R25-MH087217)

# RESEARCH PROJECTS

## Impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health and Substance Use

While social distancing is a necessary public health measure to control disease spread in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, it can lead to psychological, behavioral, and social problems. Expected increases in loneliness, defined as the discrepancy in desired and achieved social relationships, are further associated with negative health outcomes among adults, including the onset of depression, cardiovascular disease, early mortality, and risky health behaviors including substance use.

Using a survey of young adults between the ages of 18-35 years old in New York, this study aims to:

- Measure the impact of social isolation, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, on mental health and substance use outcomes
- Examine risk and protective factors associated with mental health and substance use outcomes
- Develop an effective intervention to reduce the burden of mental health and substance use

Funding source:  
SUNY Faculty Rapid COVID Seed Grant 2020 (Pi: Malik & Opara)

# TRAININGS

The SASH Lab is passionate about providing opportunities for members to continuously learn, both inside and outside of the lab. With numerous workshops, webinars and training sessions to build skillsets, the lab has cumulated a number of resources that help members excel in research. Students and staff participated in various events based on not only the lab's mission, but also their own research interests as well.

## Internal Trainings

- Literature review training (led by Daneele Thorpe, PhD student)
- Qualitative analysis (led by Dr. Ijeoma Opara)
- Developing a scientific manuscript (led by Dr. Ijeoma Opara)

## External Trainings

- Rayyan training (led by Dr. Bridgette Brawner (University of Pennsylvania))
- Neighborhood data collection using the Fulcrum app training led by Dr. Daniel Giovenco (Columbia University)
- Introduction to Outreach Methods and Strategies
- Grant Writing Proposal Three-Part Workshop
- Women of Color Conference
- CUNY Accessibility Conference
- Women's Health and Activism Summit
- Advocacy as a Career Panel
- Anti-Asian Violence: A Conversation on the Rise of Hate Crimes and Discrimination
- ADA: Spotlight on Health Care Access

# TRAININGS

## External Trainings (continued)

- A Conversation with Dr. Ibram X. Kendi: Racist Ideas in America/ How to be Antiracist
- (External) LI Virtual Maternal Mortality Forum
- (External – in progress) Public Health Law Academy Certificate
- Introducing All of Us Research Hub – American Public Health Association, May 20, 2021
- Addressing the “C” in ACEs: Combating the Nation’s Silent Crisis – American Public Health Association, May 3, 2021.
- Race-blaming Frameworks in Health Research: Implications for Drug Policy and the Carceral System – Drug Policy Alliance, Department of Research and Academic Engagement, April 29, 2021.
- 4th Annual Black Maternal Health Conference – Tufts University School of Medicine, April 9, 2021.
- Antiracism as Health Policy: Race, COVID-19, and Policy Reform (3-part training series) – Boston University School of Public Health, April 5, 6, 7, 2021.
- Literature Review Training by SBU librarian
- Uprooting the Structural Drivers of Health Inequity: Growing Policy
- Research Data Management in the Health Sciences offered by SBU libraries
- COVID-19 Research Collaboration Series
- Systematic review and meta-analysis training offered by SBU libraries

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

With the creation of the Paterson Prevention Project community advisory board, members of prominent Paterson-based organizations have collectively worked together to build the foundation of the project's objective through their hands-on experience, insight from their network through daily (monthly) meetings to ensure sustainability of the project.

Within the duration of the academic school year, community involvement has taken place in the form of both virtual and in person events. To date the Paterson Prevention Project staff has had consistent presence in P-CASA, NJ Reentry Corporation, and BLM Paterson membership meetings and community events.

Stakeholders that are affiliated with the Paterson Prevention Project include partnerships with:

- NJ Reentry Corporation
- Oasis-A Haven for Women and Children
- Paterson Coalition Against Substance Abuse (P-CASA)
- Paterson Youth Services Bureau
- Paterson Public Schools
- Black Lives Matters (BLM) Paterson
- Municipal Alliance Prevention Program

Other SASH Lab affiliations:

- Vivian A. and James L. Curtis Center School of Social Work Center for Health Equity Research and Training, University of Michigan
- ICHAD & SMART Africa Center, Washington University Brown School of Social Work, St. Louis
- Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS, Yale University
- Center for Drug Use and HIV/HCV Research, New York University

# 2020–2021 PUBLICATIONS AND MANUSCRIPTS

**Opara, I., Malik, S., Lardier Jr. D.T., Gamble-George, J., Kelly, R., Okafor, E., Greene, N.R., & Parisi, D.** (2021). .Increased Alcohol Use and Misuse among Young Adults (18- 35 years old) in New York during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly*. doi: 10.1080/07347324.2021.1950091

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Okafor, E., Asare, M., Bautista, K., & **Opara, I.** (2021). Symptoms of distress during the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. *American Journal of Health Studies*. doi: 10.47779/ajhs.2021.638

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Lardier, D.T., **Opara, I.**, Lin, Y., Roach, E., Herrera, A., Garcia-Reid, P., Reid, R.J. (2021). A Spatial Analysis of Alcohol Outlet Density, Abandoned Properties and Police Call to Service on Non-Fatal Shootings and Aggravated Assaults in a Northeastern United States Urban City. *Substance Use & Misuse*. doi: 10.1080/10826084.2021.1942053

**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*. doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2021.106095

# 2020–2021 PUBLICATIONS AND MANUSCRIPTS

**Opara, I., Leonard, N., Thorpe, D., & Kershaw, T. (2021).** Understanding Neighborhoods' Impact on Youth Substance Use and Mental Health Outcomes in Paterson, New Jersey: Protocol for a Community-Based Participatory Research Study. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*. doi: 10.2196/29427.

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Okafor, E., Asare, M., Bautista, K., & **Opara, I.** (2021). Coping in the time of COVID-19: Buffering stressors with coping strategies. *Journal of Loss & Trauma*. doi: 10.1080/15325024.2021.1914987

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**Opara, I.**, Weissinger, G., Lardier, D.T., Jr., Lanier, Y., Carter, S., & Brawner, B. (2021). Mental Health Burden among Black Adolescents: The Need for Better Assessment, Diagnosis and Treatment Engagement. *Social Work in Mental Health*. doi: 10.1080/15332985.2021.1879345

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# 2020–2021 PUBLICATIONS AND MANUSCRIPTS

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**Opara, I., Lardier Jr. D.T., Fernandez, Y., Garcia-Reid, P., & Reid, R.J. (2020).** Intrapersonal Psychological Empowerment Profiles on Ethnic Identity, Social Support, and Lifetime Drug Use among Hispanic Adolescent Girls. *Journal of Ethnicity in Substance Abuse*. doi: 10.1080/15332640.2020.1803780

**Opara, I., Assan, M.A., Pierre, K., Gunn, J III., Metzger, I., Hamilton J., & Arugu, E. (2020).** Suicide among Black children: An integrated model of the interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide and intersectionality theory for researchers & clinicians. *Journal of Black Studies*. doi: 10.1177/0021934720935641

**Opara, I., Lardier Jr., D.T., Metzger, I., Herrera, A., Franklin, L., Garcia-Reid, P., & Reid, R.J. (2020).** “Bullets have no names”: A qualitative exploration of community trauma among Black and Latinx youth. *Journal of Child & Family Studies*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1007/s10826-020-01764-8

**Opara, I., Chandler, C., Alcena-Stiner, D, Nnawulezi, N., & Kershaw, T. (2020).** When Pandemics Call: Community-Based Research Considerations for HIV Scholars. *AIDS and Behavior*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1007/s10461-020-02878-2

Amutah-Onukagha, N., Mahadevan, M., **Opara, I.**, Rodriguez, M., Kelly, J., & Trusdell, M. (2020). Commentary: Project THANKS: Examining HIV/AIDS-Related Barriers and Facilitators to Care in African American Women: A Community Perspective. *Journal of International Associations of Providers of AIDS Care*. doi: 10.1177/2325958220936406

# 2020–2021 PUBLICATIONS AND MANUSCRIPTS

Doamekpor, L.A., Gleason, J.L., **Opara, I.**, & Amutah-Onukagha N. (2020). Nativity and Cardiovascular Dysregulation: Evidence from the 2001-2016 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Disparities*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1007/s40615-020-00765-z

Metzger, I., Cooper, S., Griffin, C. B., Golden, A., **Opara, I.**, & Ritchwood, T. (2020). Parenting profiles of academic and racial socialization: Associations with academic engagement and perception of academic ability of African American adolescents. *Journal of School Psychology*. doi: 10.1016/j.jsp.2020.07.001

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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*A special thank you to **Dr. Latrice Montgomery** for her generous donation to The SASH Lab. All proceeds donated to the lab go directly too ur Youth Advisory Board.*

*To donate, use **\$thesashlab** on **Cash app** or email for more options*

**We are looking forward to an even more productive year at Yale School of Public Health!**



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