Understanding Sexual Health

By Brenda Levy

The World Health Organization defines sexual health as “a state of physical, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality. It requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence.” We live in a world that tends to stigmatize matters surrounding sex and sexual health, and too often shame or stigma prevents people from living their healthiest lives. Sexual health is an essential component of overall well-being and has a direct effect on both mental and physical state. It is more than avoiding STIs or unplanned pregnancy, but instead a comprehensive subject that includes acknowledging and respecting the sexual rights of yourself and others, the ability to speak comfortably about sexual health with partners and healthcare providers, and the ability to understand and making informed decisions that affect your sexual health. The U.S. faces a number of sexual health issues today, most evidently in the drastic health disparities seen between women of color and white women. According to the Center for Reproductive Rights, women of color in the United States are more likely to die in pregnancy or childbirth, contract STIs, and have unintended pregnancy. These disparities reveal a weakness in both policy and sexual health education, resulting in the lack of equal reproductive health for all. In order to address these issues, it is important to bring awareness to them and shed light on this focus of public health that often receives low priority.
**Organizations**

**Right To Know:**

RTK's mission is to raise awareness throughout the UCI community about the widespread prevalence of sexual assault and promote attitudes that contribute to the elimination of sexual violence.

**International Dots:**

A group of international students who help create awareness of sexual assault, relationship violence, and violence prevention on our campus.

**CARE Speakers Bureau:**

In this organization, individuals share personal experiences to increase awareness of emotional, verbal, and physical abuse, violence, gender issues, and personal safety at UCI.

**VIP Program:**

VIOLENCE INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION- A support and educational program where students in Greek Life discuss topics of violence, intervention, and prevention.

**CHAMPS:**

In this organization, individuals share personal experiences to increase awareness of emotional, verbal, and physical abuse, violence, gender issues, and personal safety at UCI.

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**Resources**

**UCI Student Wellness & Health Promotion**

UCI Student Wellness & Health Promotion's goal is to provide students with the knowledge and tools to become more educated and aware of student health and wellness. They offer various workshops and consultation services that cover topics such as HIV/AIDS (and HIV testing), STDs/STIs, contraception, and navigating safe sex.

**UCI Sexual Violence Prevention & Response**

UCI’s Sexual Violence Prevention and Response is dedicated towards creating an environment for the UCI community to be free from all forms of sexual and domestic violence, assault, and misconduct. They provide a variety of services including medical assistance, sexual assault exams, and counseling. If you are interested in preventing sexual violence at UCI, please check out UCI’s education and training program!

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**Interested in writing for us? Submit for our Spring ’18 Newsletter!**

Student submissions should consist of a 250-word analysis of a current global health issue. Pictures relevant to the submission are welcome but must be properly credited. Submissions should be emailed to gh.outreach.uci@gmail.com with “GHREAT Student Submission” in the Subject line.
1.) What projects are you currently working on?

I’m currently working on research concerning: maternal and child health among refugees along the Thai-Myanmar border, Tuberculosis among refugees from the Thai-Myanmar border, Malaria in Karen State, Myanmar and other parts of the Greater Mekong Subregio, and central nervous system related infections in Lao PDR.

2.) What are your future goals?

Most of my work is related to the ways that human movement and migration influences health outcomes and the ways that diseases are distributed across landscapes. I hope to continue this work in Southeast Asia and to also expand into other regions (East Africa, for example).

3.) Why are you interested in global health?

I’ve worked with people and communities who have been negatively affected because of their citizenship (or lack of citizenship), where they were born, or because of other life circumstances. I feel strongly that people should have affordable access to basic health services regardless of who they are, where they were born, where they currently are or any other characteristics.

On a lighter note: Global health does not necessarily mean international health (there is plenty of global health to be done here at home), but for me it has provided the opportunity to travel, meet wonderful people, make strong friends and learn from people in different places. Not only has that been fun, but it has provided a source of ongoing education for me.

What is a random fact about you?

I love epiphytes (especially bromeliads and orchids). In fact, my first published research paper was about bromeliads in Andean cloud forests!
Current college interventions fail to implement skill-based dynamics that teach students how to deal with sexual encounters and do not consider the idea of intersexuality when discussing relationship, especially in terms of cultural values and beliefs within different ethnic groups. As a way to counter this dynamic, implementation of skill based interventions among college students should be considered, especially through reducing rates of intimate partner violence (IPV), which will also reduce rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Skills based interventions have proven to be successful by encompassing education, entertainment and culturally sensitive elements that involve group discussion, video games, brainstorming, experimental exercises and skill building activities (Mitchie & Abraham, 2002). These interventions are proven to provide students with necessary skills such as communication and interpersonal skills, decision-making and critical thinking skills as well as coping and self-management skills. Specific skill based elements include role playing that allows for college students to experience how they might handle potential situations in real life, which is meant to increase empathy for others while developing a healthier and more humanistic point of view (Mitchie & Abraham, 2002). Games and simulations promote fun, active learning and encourage discussion as participants work hard to prove their ideas to earn points. It also requires the combined use of knowledge, attitudes, and skills that allow students to test assumptions and abilities in a safe environment (Mitchie & Abraham, 2002). Lastly, story telling helps students think about problems and develop critical thinking skills. Not having spaces to lead this conversation serves as a disservice to students as many have expressed being fearful or uncertain about condom usage and consent with their partners. Additionally, the idea of cultural specific interventions are necessary due to the fact that people of color, specifically Black women face intimate partner violence (IPV) incidents two times more than white women (Lee, Thompson, & Mechanic, 2002). The dynamic of cultural relationships have much correlation to the mindset of individuals within relationships such as personal responsibility and personal expectations. Interventions that challenge cultural and social norms that may support violence in relationships are needed in order to properly dismantle sabotaging behavior and beliefs.

The University of California, Irvine (UCI) has similar programming set in place that incorporate skill-based elements. In particular, the Center for Student Wellness and Health Promotion provides students with resources and abilities to learn from fellow peers through the Peer Health Educator program. Peer Health Educators focus on campus events and outreach, facilitate workshops, develop health materials and passive campaigns, and serve as health advocates. Their workshops incorporate skill based learning by creating scenarios for students as well as encouraging group efforts. Through these measures, students will be able to begin feeling empowered about their sexual health and personal sexual encounters. Everyone deserves to feel in control of their sexual decisions and feel confident about any sexual experience. Always remember, no matter where or no matter what one is wearing, NO MOST DEFINITELY MEANS NO.

References:
Faculty Spotlight: Beth England-Mackie

Beth England-Mackie has been working in public health education for more than 12 years, first in cancer education, outreach and prevention, and later continuing with obesity, HIV/AIDS, and STI education, outreach and prevention.

1.) How do you define sexual health and how does your office promote sexual health on campus?

You do not need to have sex to talk about sexual health. You can be abstinent and still talk about sexual health! Sexual Health goes beyond sex, and being intimate does not mean sex only, but also extends to your relationships.

2.) How does your office promote sexual health on campus?

As a whole, Student Health and Wellness is here to educate students and promote health. It is not only about prevention, but also about promoting health behaviors - such as practicing self care, good nutrition, and safe sex. We have a nutritionist here who is a licensed dietitian and does consultations. She addresses topics such as body image, alcohol use and drug use. We offer an alcohol awareness class so when students get caught in their dorms with alcohol, they come and see us. That class is not punitive or judgmental. In class, we talk about associated risk, how to help each other out, and what the risk is for continued usage. We offer workshops for self care, time management and whatever may help students succeed in their academic careers. Because many students are a long way from home, we do workshops that help students feel safe by creating a support system on campus.

3.) How do you set up and promote workshops? Are they presented to specific bodies?

We pretty much like to drive people to our website that includes our activities, resources, and everything in between. We know that having a website isn’t the only way to spread the word, so we promote everywhere, every event, all the time. We have interns and we have practicum/field study students to help promote. We also work with other organizations to help promote and make connections with all the student bodies around campus. We do tabling, we have a Facebook, Instagram and anywhere we can talk about our services, we will. If someone is in a bathroom and I go in, I talk to them there. I talk to anyone, anywhere, at any time.

4.) What do you feel is the most important tool to promote sexual health at UCI and elsewhere?

TALK, TALK, TALK about it as much as possible. Reach out to all our professors, partners, utilize our field study students, interns, and volunteers to constantly remind people we are here to be a resource. We want people to get the word out, so we try to do the most events possible with clever incentives and titles to get people to participate and become more and be more knowledgeable on sexual health. We always try to come up with new ways to get people to come to our events because once they are there, they will be engaged.
A MESSAGE FROM GHREAT'S STUDENT CO-DIRECTORS

Melody Malek
This year, I've been co-directing GHREAT with Natasha, and I can honestly say, it's taught me more about leadership than anything else I've ever done. It's taught me that leadership expecting an outcome- it's about listening to people and understanding where they're coming from. It's about following through with assigned tasks, and making sure everything is being done to a certain standard. I've learned so much in just two quarters as a leader, and I cannot wait to learn even more in my upcoming quarters as student director!

Natasha Kaushal
This year, I have had the distinct pleasure of working with a talented group of global health visionaries in the public health department as a Co-Director of GHREAT. After working with GHREAT faculty and students for over a year now, I can say, with confidence, that our program has shaped me to be a more level-headed, organized, and open minded team leader to my peers. The students in our program are motivated and insightful, and work in concert with incredible faculty on a weekly basis. Not only has the faculty helped us in creating a program geared toward helping students find their voices and develop their interpersonal and leadership skills in a global health context, but they have also been integral to the success of our organization by introducing new and innovative topics for discussion and collaboration. GHREAT has been a core part of my journey here at UCI and has allowed me to give back to a department that gave me so much!

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

What type of sex education do you wish you had before college?

Alexis Artounian
Public Health Sciences Major

Coming from a very conservative region, my sex education courses were not very useful. It consisted of my teacher having us write down pages and pages of vocabulary words. She showed us a few videos on top of that, but I never learned anything valuable. I wish the teachers in high school would take this education more seriously and actually teach something valuable. Instead of just teaching abstinence, they should have taught safety, as well. This would greatly reduce the spread of disease and increase safety. Teaching abstinence is not the most realistic method. Some people who venture out to college afterwards without the proper sex education might come across great dangers. I feel that high school sex classes should be taken seriously, so as to prevent sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies.

Dominique White
Public Health Policy Major

During my years in elementary and high school, I can count on one hand how many times I was taught about sexual health and sex education. What I learned mainly consisted of safe sex, abstinence, how to use pads/tampons, how to use a condom, and STIs/STDs. What I wish I knew before college, or rather, at an earlier age, is how to self-check and recognize if you are both sexually and reproductively healthy. There are many disorders for women that don't get diagnosed until later such as polycystic ovary syndrome. Common symptoms include irregular menstruation and excessive hair growth which tend to get overlooked because of weight, eating habits, and other factors.
PEER MENTOR
GLOBAL HEALTH MENTOR PROGRAM
The peer mentor ship program pairs undergraduate mentees with graduate or professional mentors. The program aims to create a network of individuals interested in the field of global health. The overall goal of the mentorship program is to provide a valuable resource for students interested in pursuing global health research and service. Mentees and mentors communicate via email and in-person meetings to discuss their interests in global health.

JOURNAL CLUB
GLOBAL HEALTH JOURNAL CLUB
Journal Club organizes events in which Public Health faculty promote awareness and analyze current global health issues. Previous meeting topics include: melanoma detection/prevention, and maternal/child health. By creating an open and engaging forum for the discussion of global health topics, students may heighten their understanding of health issues both at home and abroad.

OUTREACH & NEWSLETTER
The Newsletter Committee from Global Health Research, Education, and Translation (GHREAT) publishes GHREAT’s Quarterly Newsletter every quarter. The newsletter includes information about faculty and student-led global health projects, global health news, and spotlights on various organizations and individuals who contribute to the global health field. Please stay tuned for our next newsletter, which will be published at the end of Spring Quarter!

RESEARCH
Hey everyone! The lead researcher on GHREAT's research team, Samar Arshad, is currently conducting a study regarding women's reproductive health. Specifically, she is looking to assess the knowledge of and access to contraceptives amongst female undergrads at UCI. Through an anonymous survey, data will be collected that she's hypothesized will point to underlying religious, cultural, or socio-economic barriers that may impede an undergraduate female's access to and knowledge of contraceptives. Please fill out this quick survey to help Samar reach her data collection goals! At the end of the survey, there will be an option for you to be entered into a raffle to win a $5.00 Starbucks gift card!

bit.do/ghreatresearch
GHREAT at UCI is committed to promoting global health awareness and developing a comprehensive global health research, education, and training program. GHREAT activities include the Global Health Journal Club, the Global Health Certificate Program, the Global Health Peer Mentor Program, collaborations with faculty and the UCI community, and spreading awareness on- and off-campus. This quarterly newsletter, focuses on sexual health which includes input from UCI faculty members and students.

MEET THE GHREAT TEAM

CO-COURSE STUDENT DIRECTORS
Natasha Kaushal - 4th Year, Majors: Public Health Policy and Political Science
Melody Malek - 3rd Year, Major: Public Health Sciences

OUTREACH & NEWSLETTER
Dominique White - 3rd Year, Major: Public Health Policy; Minor: African American Studies
Brenda Levy - 4th Year, Major: Public Health Sciences
Theresa Do - 3rd Year, Majors: Public Health Policy and Political Science
Natalie Aguilar - 5th Year, Majors: Public Health Policy, Psychology and Social Behavior, & Criminology, Law and Society

JOURNAL CLUB
Uyen Mai - 1st Year, Major: Public Health Sciences; Minor: International Studies
Sharon Gil - 2nd Year, Public Health Sciences
Jessica Ramirez - 1st Year, Major: Public Health Sciences
Adrianna Saire - 3rd Year, Major: Biological Sciences

RESEARCH
Cindy Chwa - 3rd Year, Major: Public Health Policy; Minor: Management
Samar Arshad - 2nd Year, Major: Public Health Sciences
Catherine Chiou - 4th Year, Major: Biological Sciences; Minor: Health Informatics

PEER MENTOR
Mo Hashemian - 2nd Year, Major: Biology
Alexis Artounian - 3rd Year, Major: Public Health Sciences
Isabel Zamora - 4th Year, Major: Public Health Sciences
Ali Alrakabi - 1st Year, Major: Psychology

Dr. Daniel Parker
GHREAT Course Instructor & Faculty Director
Sandra M. Perez
GHREAT Administrator
Dominique White
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Theresa Do
Natalie Aguilar
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