Welcome to the World of Epidemiology

Issue 17 | 2021

Source: FDA.GOV
Welcome to the Department of Epidemiology at the Robert Stempel College of Public Health and Social Work! We would like to share the outstanding achievements of our students and faculty with you in this newsletter.

We also invite you to explore our masters and doctoral programs at https://stempel.fiu.edu/academics/public-health/epidemiology/. Through our academic programs, we prepare our students to become public health professionals that can lead our local, national and global communities in addressing public health challenges of the 21st Century.

Mary Jo Trepka, MD, MSPH
Professor and Chair
Department of Epidemiology
Semiu Gbadamosi

Doctoral Candidate, **Semiu Gbadamosi**, was accepted into Merck's PhD/SciD Co-Operative Program to provide analytical and technical support to fulfill the company's commercial objectives. He graduated with honors from the 5-month Correlation One Data Science (DS4A) Fellowship and was named the City of Miami DS4A/Empowerment Endowed Scholar. He also received the Stempel Travel Award for Fall 2021.

Prem Gautam

Doctoral candidate, **Prem Gautam**, presented posters at several conferences including the Annual Meeting of the American Public Health Association (APHA), the New England Science Symposium at Harvard, and FIU’s Graduate Student Appreciation Week Scholarly Forum, where he won the Best Poster Presentation Award.

Anny Rodriguez

Doctoral candidate, **Anny Rodriguez**, has been working alongside Dr. Trepka, Dr. Bursac, and Dr. Odom to create weekly updates for current COVID-19 cases in Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties. She also assisted at FIU’s on-site COVID-19 vaccination clinics.
Rahel Dawit successfully defended her dissertation titled “Examining the effects of neighborhood factors and geography on racial/ethnic disparities in achieving sustained viral suppression” on December 10, 2021.


Recent PhD graduate, **Dr. Tanjila Taskin**, is working at Washington State Department of Health as a Dashboard Visualization Supervisor.

Recent PhD graduate, **Dr. Sandra Kigpalat**, is working as a PHI/CDC Global Epidemiology fellow with the Global Immunization Safety Team of the Immunization Safety Branch at Global Immunization Division, CDC.

Recent PhD graduate, **Dr. Abir Rahman**, is working at the Cabell-Huntington Health Department as the Director of Epidemiology.

Recent PhD graduate, **Dr. Ebi Kalan** is working as a postdoctoral fellow at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill’s Gillings School of Global Public Health.
Dr. Daisy Ramirez-Ortiz was awarded a FIU-RCMI pilot grant in August 2021 to study multilevel barriers to retention and re-engagement in HIV care among Latino immigrants with HIV in Miami-Dade County, Florida. She is also a co-investigator in an administrative supplement awarded by the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) in September 2021 to identify barriers to COVID-19 vaccination and potential points of intervention to increase COVID-19 vaccination among African American, Hispanic, and Haitian people with HIV. She was also selected to participate in the 2021 Health Disparities Research Institute (HDRI) hosted by NIMHD in August.

She presented an e-poster entitled “Barriers and Facilitators to Retention in Care and Treatment Adherence Among Racially/Ethnically Diverse Women with HIV in South Florida” at the Adherence 2021 Conference in September. In addition, she presented an e-poster entitled “Pre- and Post-immigration HIV Testing Behaviors among Young Adult Recent Latino Immigrants in Miami-Dade County, Florida” at the 22nd annual virtual conference of the National Hispanic Science Network in November.
Dr. Mary Jo Trepka, professor and chair of the Department of Epidemiology, was awarded an additional supplement for “Influence of patient-centered HIV care on retention and viral suppression disparities COVID-19 - Vaccination Supplement”. She was also awarded an honorable mention from FIU’s Community Award for her work with the Miami COVID Project as well as a finalist for FIU’s Presidential Excellence Award.

Dr. Miguel Cano, an associate professor at the Department of Epidemiology, was awarded the Outstanding Alumni Award, College of Education and Human Development, from Texas A&M University. He also became Senior Associate Editor for Behavioral Medicine as well as became a committee member for the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

Dr. Wasim Maziak, professor in the Department of Epidemiology, has received several awards from NIH to study e-cigarettes, helping build FIU as a national hub for regulatory and policy research related to e-cigarette use. In partnership with the University of Miami, Dr. Maziak’s team recently received a 5 year $2.6 million grant from the National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA) to develop and test health warning labels for e-cigarettes. Additionally, a pending award from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and NIDA totaling $1.25 million will allow Dr. Maziak’s team to test nicotine reduction strategies to reduce the addiction and health effects of e-cigarettes. Most recently, Dr. Maziak is slated to receive a $2.4 Million R01 from FDA/NIDA to study the effect of menthol flavor on e-cigarette users' dependence, experience, and exposure to toxicants. Finally, Dr. Maziak received a sub-award on a recent NIH grant to the University of Pennsylvania (PI Andy Tan) to develop and test social media anti-vaping messages to reduce e-cigarette use among sexual and gender minority teens.
Dr. Nasar Ahmed, an associate professor in the Department of Epidemiology, presented his paper titled “Colorectal cancer screening compliance: A shifting pattern among race-ethnicity, gender and health-seeking behaviors after Obama care” at the APHA Annual Meeting. He was also the keynote speaker at an international workshop training and poster competition and was lead presenter at the Global Health Conference of the Americas: Index-based decision making for large-scale reopening during COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr. Diana Sheehan, an assistant professor in the Department of Epidemiology, was nominated and elected as Vice Chair of the Strategic Planning Subcommittee of the Miami-Dade County HIV/AIDS Partnership. The Miami-Dade HIV/AIDS Partnership is the official advisory board to the Miami-Dade County Mayor and Board of County Commissioners for developing a comprehensive response to the county’s HIV epidemic.

Dr. Gladys E. Ibañez, an assistant professor of the Department of Epidemiology, was awarded a COVID-19 supplemental award to examine the impact of cannabis use disorder, cognition, and HIV care continuum among people living with HIV.
Dr. Melissa K. Ward, joined the faculty of the Department of Epidemiology as an Assistant Professor in August 2021. Previously, she was a Postdoctoral Associate at the Community-Based Research Institute, where she coordinated and managed the Research Infrastructure Core for FIU’s Research Center in Minority Institutions (FIU-RCMI). She recently completed a mixed-methods pilot study funded by the National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) through FIU-RCMI that examined barriers to accessing medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD) among women, and currently has a research project, titled the Women-Centered Opioid Recovery Project, under consideration for funding at the National Institute on Drug Abuse. She is also a co-investigator on two NIMHD-funded studies examining patient-centered and women-centered HIV care practices (Principal Investigator: Dr. Mary Jo Trepka).

Dr. Olatokunbo “Ola” Osibogun was a scholar for the Florida Alliances for Graduate Education and Professorate in the summer of 2021. Additionally, Dr. Osibogun successfully transitioned from a NIDA T32 postdoctoral position of 2 years to join the Department of Epidemiology, Stempel College as a tenure-track Assistant Professor in August 2021.
Dr. Mary Jo Trepka, chair and professor of epidemiology; Dr. Zoran Bursac, chair and professor of biostatistics; and Dr. Gabriel Odom, assistant professor of biostatistics, have continuously worked with mayors and representatives from across South Florida since the start of the pandemic, helping them translate complex data into clear messages to help communicate the state of the pandemic to their constituents and make policy decisions. The faculty have spent countless hours curating data, giving interviews to local and national media outlets, and writing reports on daily COVID-19 cases, testing, vaccinations, hospitalizations and deaths. Their work was made available to the public through the Miami COVID Project, which was created to inform researchers, scientists, policymakers, and the general public regarding the projected impact of COVID-19 on Miami-Dade County.

Link to full article: Stempel College faculty recognized by the City of Miami for COVID-19 response efforts – Stempel News (fiu.edu)
Faculty & Students
Peer-reviewed Journal Publications
2021


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**Departmental Activities**

**Epidemiology Departmental Research Seminars**
In these monthly meetings, PhD students and faculty discuss and critically evaluate original research in epidemiology. The purpose is to encourage students to think more about the applied aspects of research methods and how they can be adapted to deal with different research questions or contexts.

**FIU-RCMI & Department of Epidemiology Research in Progress Seminars**
This monthly seminar is sponsored in partnership with FIU-RCMI and spotlights health disparities researchers throughout FIU. Presenters discuss their work with faculty and students to help develop and refine their research. Lunch is provided.

**FIU-RCMI Professional Development Seminars**
This series, sponsored by FIU-RCMI, features speakers presenting on topics relevant to professional development for researchers, including best practices for grant writing and strategies for career advancement. Lunch is provided.
Current Faculty and Students
Academic Year 2021-2022

MPH

Chiamaka Achonwa  Mariah Hamalainen-Taylor  Andrea Quinones
Melika Adhanom  Briana Harris  Elda Ramos
Charles Arana Asencio  Michelle Hernandez Ortiz  Jessica Ramos
Sebastian Arenas  Laura Huertas  Alejandro Rodriguez Leon
Mariolga Aymat  Adolfo Izique  Joseph Rodriguez
Amber Balda  Vanise Jean-Baptiste  Nicole Rojas
Alessandra Barahona  Nathalie Jean  Adam Schomer
Endy Barnes  Homere Joseph  Stephen Schomer
Frank Blanco  Bhavya Karkera  Gaitree Seepersaud
Nerming Briones  Sheida Khosravaniardakani  Kenya Simmons
Germith Cadelien  Micaela Lembo  Marianella Siria
Kelsie Campbell  Amelia Leon  Sydney Spector
Stephanie Carrillo  Isabel Maldonado  Rebecca Ubeda
Yolcar Chamorro  Valery Mardini Cespedes  Nickolas Valencia
Liset Cruz Carrillo  Rachel McDougal  Jennifer Vargas
Nelhil Del Valle  Regina Mcpherson  Rachel Voltaire
Anne-Leila Descollines  Brenda Melendrez  Jennah Wallen
Ketaki Dhurve  Tashana Minnis  Jing Zeng
Shirley Dolce  Lorell Morales-Vergara
Jordan Dragon  Joseph Muller
Safoura Eskandari  Thuy-Thuong Nguyen
Gabriela Espejo  Rachna Niwas
Cloris Falcon  Joshua Noreiga
Kassandra Fernandez  Daniel Ochu
Daniel Flores  Simisola Olowodola
Diamond Garard  Olga Ospina
Tiara Glasgow  Veronica Palacios
Elizabeth Gomez  Arpita Paul
Ashley Gray  Vickie Perez-Marrero

PhD

Shyfuddin Ahmed  Rahel Dawit
Prem Gautam  Semiu Gbadamosi
Tendai Gwanzura  Rime Jebai
Lea Li  Lea Nehme
Robert Meek  Ekpereka Nawfal
Anny Rodrguez  Deidre Okeke
Robert Meek  Ekpereka Nawfal
Current Faculty and Students
Academic Year 2021-2022

Faculty & Staff
Nasar Ahmed, PhD
Miguel Cano, PhD, MPH
Gladys Ibañez, PhD
Wasim Maziak, MD, PhD
Olatokunbo Osibogun, MBBS, MPH, PhD
Vukosava Pekovic, MD, PhD
Diana M. Sheehan, PhD, MPH
Mary Jo Trepka, MD, MSPH
Melissa Ward, PhD, MPH

Post-Doctoral Associates
Daisy Ramirez-Ortiz, PhD, MPH

2021 PhD Graduates
Mohammad Ebrahimi Kalan, PhD
Sandra Kigpalat, PhD, M.S.
Abir Rahman, PhD
Tanjila Taskin, PhD

2021 MPH Graduates
Alida Acosta, MPH
Samantha Baudin, MPH
Thomas Boulos, MPH
Ethan Cabrera, MPH
Chaveli Concepcion, MPH
Andrea Contreras, MPH
India Dunning, MPH
Annette Flores, MPH
Ashley Garcia, MPH
Kamelah Jones, MPH
Victoria Martinez, MPH
Lea Nehme, MPH
Alejandro Nunez, MPH
William Phillips IX, MPH
Karen Pineda, MPH
Salman Raja, MPH
Carolina Rivera, MPH
Maria Rivera Martinez, MPH
Maria Celeste Sanchez Mora, MPH
Franklin Saumell, MPH
Eduardo Villoch, MPH
Complete your Master of Public Health in one year with our accelerated track. This track is well suited for pre-med students and professionals looking to obtain a degree in less time.

Applicants to the MPH program (EPI, HPDP, EOH, HPM) at or above the 75 percentile of GRE (in both verbal and quantitative) will be given an option to apply for the 1-year accelerated track at admission.

Applicants eligible for an exemption of GRE (e.g. U.S. Medical graduates) will be given the 1-year accelerated track option as well. Such requests will be evaluated by the admission committees for the final decision.