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CCHSRD Newsletter

“Better Health Systems...Healthier Lives”

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About this Issue

Contents

Editorial

Reverse Research Day: Using Policy Priorities
to Drive Research for Health 3

CCHSRD's Commitment to Building Capacity in
Evidence Informed Policymaking (EIP):
Follow-Up Training Workshop with the Ministry of Health 6

Canadian Students Impress in "Rapid" Internship:
McMaster Interns Contribute to Social Systems
Strengthening in T&T 9

Research Highlight: Impact of Chronic Disease and
Accompanying Bio-psycho-social Factors on
Health-Related Quality of Life 12

Coming Soon: Top-Ranked Researchers Seminar Series 18

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Editorial

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Policy Priorities to Drive
Research for Health

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Workshop with Ministry of Health

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“Rapid” Internship

Impact of Chronic Disease and
Accompanying Bio-psycho-social
Factors on Health-Related
Quality of Life

Coming Soon: Top-Ranked
Researchers Seminar Series

EDITORIAL

CCHSRD Continues its Work in Evidence Informed Policymaking, Research and Training

The Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research and Development has a mandate to support evidence informed decision-making in the Region. From its inception in 2018, CCHSRD has been collaborating with stakeholders in the health and other social sectors to develop capacity and generate knowledge translation products. The latter are critical inputs to the policymaking process and include Evidence Briefs for Policy and Rapid Response Briefs as well as the hosting of Stakeholder Dialogues. These partnerships ensure that the Centre’s work is always guided by the expressed needs of policymakers and therefore contributes to the availability of timely and relevant evidence to support their decision making. CCHSRD values its collaboration with stakeholders, including civil society, and strives to identify ways to strengthen it. Consistent with this, we recently hosted a Reverse Research Day, which is highlighted in an article in this edition of the CCHSRD Newsletter. This is a novel mechanism to bring key stakeholders together so that they can jointly identify and prioritize areas for which research evidence is urgently needed to guide policymaking. This concept is innovative as unlike traditional research conferences, the decision-makers are the ones delivering the presentations and the researchers are in the audience to learn about the former’s research priorities. This was the first time that a Reverse Research Day was hosted in Trinidad and Tobago, and it is also likely that none had been previously held elsewhere in the English-speaking Caribbean.



CCHSRD Continues its Work in Evidence Informed Policymaking, Research and Training

We also have a critical mandate to build the research capacity of academic staff at the Faculty of Medical Sciences (FMS). This has always been prioritized with the hosting of research skills workshops and the provision of technical support to FMS academics in areas such as research design and data analysis. This support also includes the hosting of research conferences, which play a very important role in strengthening the research culture and nurturing young researchers. That is, in addition to the dissemination of research findings/evidence with key stakeholders such as health officials and the public. CCHSRD led the hosting of the FMS Research Day in 2019, which has since expanded into the Trinidad & Tobago Annual National Health Research Conference. The latter is co-hosted by all institutions involved in the production and uptake of research in the country.

CCHSRD established the [Research Discussion Forum](#) (RDF) earlier this year to promote research discourse among FMS staff and to facilitate peer-to-peer support as they identify solutions to the challenges encountered as researchers. This is significant as there is considerable research expertise and experience within the FMS. The Forum has been serving as a virtual platform for the exchange of ideas and the spawning of collaborations. There are over 75 RDF members, and they have indicated that they also look forward to the information about research funding and training opportunities, which they regularly receive.

We have been using the RDF platform to expand the range of research services that the Centre provides and to streamline our support to FMS researchers. Several new capacity building initiatives have been or are about to be launched through the Forum to complement the existing services. The upcoming Research Mentorship programme is highly anticipated and is highlighted in this Issue of the Newsletter. We expect that it would redound positively on the quantity and quality of research produced at the FMS. Also featured in this Issue is the Top-ranked Researchers Interview Series. Academics from the UWI, St. Augustine Campus who had been determined by researchers at Stanford University as being in the top two percent of researchers in their fields globally, were interviewed and they shared tips with junior academics regarding how to have successful research careers. This is expected to strengthen the research culture at the FMS as well as inspire young researchers to similar achievements. Upcoming RDF initiatives also include the revamping of the research training workshops that CCHSRD has been conducting since 2018. These will be relaunched as Health Research Clinics during the first quarter of 2023. More details will follow.

This Issue of the Newsletter features articles on the recently hosted Reverse Research Day and an Evidence-Informed Policymaking training workshop that CCHSRD conducted for the Ministry of Health, Trinidad and Tobago. In addition, there is an interview with two McMaster University interns who had a short but productive stint at the Centre; and the findings on a very interesting research study that was co-authored by Dr Mandreker Bahall, one of the UWI faculty members who was identified as being in the top two percent of researchers in his field.

Director, Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research and Development



Editorial

**Reverse Research Day: Using
Policy Priorities to Drive
Research for Health**

Follow-Up EIP Training
Workshop with Ministry of Health

Canadian Students Impress in
“Rapid” Internship

Impact of Chronic Disease and
Accompanying Bio-psycho-social
Factors on Health-Related
Quality of Life

Coming Soon: Top-Ranked
Researchers Seminar Series

Reverse Research Day: Using Policy Priorities to Drive Research for Health

Editorial

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Reverse Research Day

Using Policy Priorities to Drive Research for Health

- *Mr Michael Pierre*
Research Assistant, CCHSRD

To achieve their goal of facilitating better communication between health decision-makers and researchers, CCHSRD and the Ministry of Health (MoH) co-hosted Trinidad and Tobago’s first Reverse Research Day (RRD) in July 2022. RRDs offer policymakers a unique opportunity to indicate to researchers the evidence that they need to guide their decision-making. As we advocate for the use of research evidence as a primary input into the policy development process, it must be emphasized that the availability of quality and timely local research findings is a requirement for success.

At the RRD, key health stakeholders including health policymakers, planners, programme managers, and civil society representatives embraced the opportunity to discuss their priorities and share the topics for which research was urgently needed to inform their decision-making. Leading researchers from the locally based universities as well as professional bodies also participated. To guide the discussion, Mr Lawrence Jaisingh, Director of Health Policy, Research and Planning presented an overview of the Ministry of Health’s Strategic Pillars and the Priority Areas.



[View the RRD Report](#)

Using Policy Priorities to Drive Research for Health

This was followed by presentations from the Ministry's focal points for various Strategic Priority Areas (SPAs) including Mr. Ryan Ramcharan, Deputy Permanent Secretary; Dr Adesh Sirjusingh, Director, Women's Health; Dr Hazel Othello, Director, Mental Health; Dr Anuskha Bisoon NCD Consultant; and Mr Jaisingh. They shared priority topics for research, which were discussed in the group sessions that followed.

Stakeholders were assigned to SPA-specific working groups to deliberate on the research needs, determine whether there was existing relevant data or research evidence, and develop research questions to fill the gaps. Each group also developed follow-up plans for the preparation of proposals and the conduct of their prioritized research. The working groups were asked to develop at least one research proposal for each SPA. Notably, several groups have been meeting since the RRD and, with CCHSRD's technical support, are developing proposals for the topics they determined to be of the highest priority.

The RRD successfully connected policymakers and researchers and identified research priorities for each SPA. The feedback from attendees was positive and they indicated that they were looking forward to collaborating in the conduct of the prioritized research. CCHSRD plans to host more RRDs, including to identify the research needs of the Regional Health Authorities. Notably, the research priorities that were identified have already been incorporated in the ongoing process to develop a national health research agenda. The outputs of future RRDs would also contribute to the agenda.



We appreciate the support from the Knowledge to Policy Centre (K2P Centre) and funding from the WHO Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research, which contributed to the success of the RRD.

Editorial

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Policy Priorities to Drive
Research for Health

**Follow-Up EIP Training
Workshop with Ministry of
Health**

Canadian Students Impress in
“Rapid” Internship

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Accompanying Bio-psycho-social
Factors on Health-Related
Quality of Life

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CCHSRD's Commitment to Building Capacity in Evidence Informed Policymaking (EIP): Follow-Up Training Workshop with the Ministry of Health



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Reverse Research Day: Using
Policy Priorities to Drive
Research for Health

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Workshop with Ministry of
Health**

Canadian Students Impress in
“Rapid” Internship

Impact of Chronic Disease and
Accompanying Bio-psycho-social
Factors on Health-Related
Quality of Life

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CCHSRD's Commitment to Building Capacity in Evidence Informed Policymaking (EIP)

Follow-Up Training Workshop with the Ministry of Health

- Mr Akil Williams

Junior Fellow, Evidence Synthesis, CCHSRD



A one-day Evidence Informed Policymaking (EIP) training workshop was recently hosted by CCHSRD as part of its capacity building programme for the Ministry of Health (MoH), Trinidad and Tobago. Building on previous EIP sessions, the 14 participants comprised technical officers involved in the policymaking process such as those at the Ministry's Directorate of Policy, Research and Planning as well as programme managers from other Directorates.

The workshop was geared towards strengthening their EIP knowledge and competence and the interactive presentations covered topics such as understanding the role of evidence in policymaking; conducting literature searches in relevant and accessible databases; clarifying and framing the policy problems and options; and developing knowledge translation products such as Evidence Briefs for Policy (EBP) and Rapid Response Briefs (RRB).

The post-workshop evaluation indicated that participants found the workshop was well aligned with their responsibilities at the MoH. They also reported that the facilitators were well prepared and the presentations and practical exercises were informative.

CCHSRD's Commitment to Building Capacity in Evidence Informed Policymaking (EIP): Follow-Up Training Workshop with the Ministry of Health

This workshop was timely as CCHSRD continues to provide EIP support the MoH. In addition to training workshops, previous activities include the development of EBPs and RRBs that addressed priority issues as well as the hosting of Stakeholder Dialogues. Notably, the first graduate of the CCHSRD's Evidence Informed Policymaking Training Fellowship was an MoH staff member.



Above: A few of the workshop participants receiving their Certificates of Participation (L-R) Mr Lawrence Jaisingh, Ms Keisha Goodridge, and Ms Jenny Ramssook

Right: Workshop participants listening intently to the co-facilitators



Editorial

Reverse Research Day: Using
Policy Priorities to Drive
Research for Health

Follow-Up EIP Training
Workshop with Ministry of Health

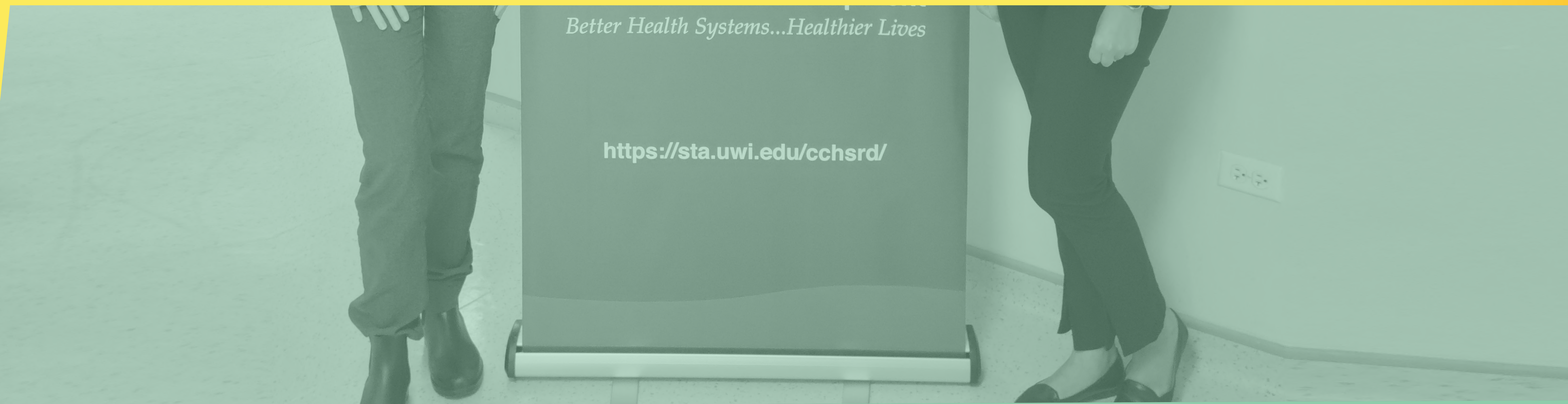
**Canadian Students Impress in
“Rapid” Internship**

Impact of Chronic Disease and
Accompanying Bio-psycho-social
Factors on Health-Related
Quality of Life

Coming Soon: Top-Ranked
Researchers Seminar Series



Canadian Students Impress in “Rapid” Internship: McMaster Interns Contribute to Social Systems Strengthening in T&T



Canadian Students Impress in “Rapid” Internship

McMaster Interns Contribute to Social Systems Strengthening in T&T

- *Ms Kershelle Barker*

Junior Fellow, Evidence Synthesis, CCHSRD

The CCHSRD recently hosted two interns from the McMaster Health Forum (MHF), McMaster University, Canada. Ms Jaclyn Holdsworth and Ms Miray Maher were participants of the Government of Canada’s Global Skills Opportunity Program. The latter provides opportunities for students to build knowledge and skills to support health- and social-system strengthening internationally. They completed a brief but productive three-week internship at the Centre during the summer of 2022. This included working with the CCHSRD team to co-develop a Rapid Response Brief, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour¹, as part of the Partnership for Evidence and Equity in Responsive Social Systems (PEERSS) project.



MHF Interns - L: Ms Jaclyn Holdsworth, R: Ms Miray Maher

We spoke with the interns about their work at the Centre and their experience in Trinidad and Tobago.

¹ The Rapid Response Brief, “Key Strategies to Mitigate Unfulfilled Demand for Labour and Skills Gaps in the Civil Service in Trinidad and Tobago” is undergoing merit review, following which it would be posted on the CCHSRD’s website.

McMaster Interns Contribute to Social Systems Strengthening in T&T

CCHSRD: Tell us about the Health Policy and Systems Research (HPSR) activities you were engaged in during your internship.

“

Jaclyn Holdsworth and Miray Maher:

The three weeks we spent in Trinidad and Tobago were packed with opportunities to engage with the important work the CCHSRD does. In particular, we explored how HPSR skills can be applied to strengthen social systems research. We hit the ground running, spending our first day observing a basic research skills workshop that CCHSRD hosted for Trinidad and Tobago’s Ministry of Labour.

We continued to engage with the CCHSRD’s partners through virtual workshops and presentations, including one hosted by the University College London and other teams in the PEERSS project.

We were privileged to directly contribute to a few activities including brainstorming for the hosting of a Reverse Research Day and the Ministry of Labour’s Rapid Response Brief, which addressed skill gaps and unfulfilled demand for labour in the public service.

Every day with the CCHSRD was a new experience, filled with opportunities to engage in and learn from HPSR.

”

In what ways do you believe the work done during your internship can contribute to CCHSRD’s agenda to facilitate evidence informed decision-making?

“

Prior to the internship, we were both working as research assistants at the McMaster Health Forum, where we maintained databases dedicated to evidence on health and social system interventions. Our internship built upon this and we applied the work we had previously been doing. The CCHSRD team used databases (including the McMaster Health Forum’s!) to formulate the Rapid Response Brief in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour. Co-producing a knowledge translation product as a part of the CCHSRD team demonstrated to us the importance of reliable databases in promoting evidence-informed decision making. In addition, the CCHSRD’s approach to co-producing knowledge translation products contribute to the building of Ministries’ capacity in Trinidad and Tobago. Practical experience is essential for learning evidence-informed decision-making and HPSR skills.

During our internship, we worked on some of the more time-consuming aspects of knowledge translation so that officials from the Ministry of Labour could better focus on learning from the CCHSRD’s expertise in HPSR. Throughout our internship, we were also privileged to see some of CCHSRD’s other work, like the Reverse Research Day — an ingenious way to address gaps in local evidence by connecting researchers with decision-makers’ research needs. All the CCHSRD’s innovative initiatives ensure that it continues to be a driving force for evidence-informed decision-making in the Caribbean and internationally.

”

McMaster Interns Contribute to Social Systems Strengthening in T&T

What new skills have you acquired during your internship?



We both learned new skills that went above and beyond what we expected to learn about HPSR. We joined the CCHSRD at a point where they were expanding from health to support evidence-informed policymaking in the wider social sector. Seeing the intersection between health and social systems was eye-opening; we are both passionate about effecting change in these intersecting domains, as an aspiring lawyer [Jaclyn] and an aspiring doctor [Miray].

As the internship progressed, we were in many respects learning alongside the Ministry of Labour while we all worked on the co-produced Rapid Response Brief. We are now familiar with the use of problem trees to identify the roots (causes) and consequences of complex problems, and with the roles of international and local, contextual evidence in a Rapid Response Brief. While international systematic reviews are very helpful to know what other countries have done, Rapid Response Briefs also need local evidence to increase relevance. However, local evidence was hard to find and often not available. Even so, we got to sharpen our skills and learn from the CCHSRD’s expertise as we worked on searching for, extracting, and synthesising the best local and international evidence.

The tools required to create a robust policy-informing document went beyond anything we could have expected. We even dabbled a little in graphics design! We tweaked appendices and tables to best display information for the policymakers who will use the Brief. Effective graphics design is a must-have for presenting complex information in a digestible format. Moreover, working on the Brief emphasised to us the importance of being organized and team cohesiveness. The Ministry of Labour and the CCHSRD benefited from each other’s strengths and expertise to complete a high-quality Brief on a tight timeline. By the end of our internship, we had acquired invaluable skills in evidence synthesis, knowledge translation, effective collaboration, and technical communication.



McMaster Interns Contribute to Social Systems Strengthening in T&T

What has been the highlight of your time spent in Trinidad and Tobago?

“

Miray:

Trinidad and Tobago is a beautiful country that gave me a new outlook on Caribbean culture. I enjoyed the multiculturalism and the religious pluralism in T&T. Islam, Hinduism, and many Christian sects coexisted harmoniously. While I was there, I visited two Hindu temples. At Temple by the Sea, I witnessed my first cremation ritual. Witnessing this allowed me to reflect on my own religious beliefs and admire the differences between religious traditions. The Hanuman Temple was magnificent, being the second largest temple in the world dedicated to Lord Hanuman, the largest being in India. I also visited a Catholic monastery, Mount St. Benedict Abbey, the oldest Catholic monastery in the Caribbean. All these places contribute to the rich cultural fabric of T&T and I’m sure if I go again I will discover more places that make the country so unique. I’ve also placed it on my bucket list to return to T&T in February, to attend Carnival! This trip has also made me want to explore the culture of the Caribbean diaspora here in Toronto.

Jaclyn:

Trinidad is so beautiful. The food, the scenery, the people, everything and everyone is so vibrant and alive. I made a few people laugh because I was never taking photos of myself – I was too busy trying to take pictures of the beautiful vegetation, mountains, and storms! Seeing me crouched on the ground in the hallway, taking a photo of a new insect or lizard, wasn’t exactly unusual. In terms of people, I had many open and honest conversations about our different experiences with mental health, gender norms, religion, and family values. Getting to know so many authentic and wonderful people at once was such a privilege. At the end of the day, I wouldn’t have been able to explore and enjoy half of the natural beauty I saw in Trinidad if it weren’t for everyone who showed us around and made us feel welcome – so the people I’ve met are, hands down, my biggest highlight.

”



Miray and Jaclyn enjoyed sightseeing in Trinidad & Tobago, including (from top left) the Hanuman Temple, the Temple in the Sea and Mount St Benedict. Jaclyn also enjoyed photographing interesting insects (left).

Canadian Students Impress in “Rapid” Internship:
McMaster Interns Contribute to Social Systems Strengthening in T&T



More photos from Jaclyn and Miray’s time in T&T, including their visit to the sister isle of Tobago, and our farewell dinner before their return to Canada

What has been the highlight of your time spent at CCHSRD?

“

Miray:

The staff at CCHSRD went above and beyond at making sure our short stay was memorable in every aspect. By far, our trip to Tobago has to be the highlight of my time. From trying jet skiing for the first time, to exploring the historical site of Fort George, everything was spectacular. The glass bottom boat was such a fun way to explore must-go sites in Tobago like the Nylon Pool, Buccoo Reef and No-Man’s Land. It was also my first time visiting a mangrove forest. I was astonished at the intricate nature of these trees. Also, trying Crab and Dumpling and Mango Chow beside the beautiful beachside was an extra treat!

Jaclyn:

Not to be repetitive, but... the biggest highlight was the people! The CCHSRD has a wonderful work environment that is only possible with the right management and the right team. The office was always a safe space to ask questions and learn. Everyone had their own unique skills and perspectives, and everyone felt safe and valued enough to share their skills and perspectives. Every single person was a valued member of the CCHSRD team. I loved learning more about HPSR from the CCHSRD team, but above all, I appreciated the opportunity to consider the kind of professional I want to be as I start to build my own career.

”

It should be noted that in 2019, the CCHSRD had also hosted two interns from the McMaster Health Forum, in accordance with their MoU. CCHSRD has been using this and other such MOUs to build networks that promote evidence informed decision-making through an increase in the uptake of research findings for policymaking and the strengthening of health systems in the Caribbean.



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Research Highlight

Impact of Chronic Disease and Accompanying Bio-psycho-social Factors on Health-Related Quality of Life

- *Dr Mandreker Bahall¹; Dr Henry Bailey²*

¹ *Arthur Lok Jack Global School of Business*

² *Department of Economics, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine*



Dr Mandreker Bahall



Dr Henry Bailey

Chronic disease, especially when accompanied by anxiety and depression can adversely affect Health-Related Quality of Life (HRQoL). On the other hand, life satisfaction and support from family and friends were associated with better HRQoL. These are findings from a study of 312 patients: female (66.8%) and Indo-Trinidadian (63.9%) with at least one of four primary diagnoses (Renal Disease, Cancer, Diabetes Mellitus and Ischaemic Heart Disease). We measured their HRQoL using the EQ-5D-5L i.e., the European Quality of Life, 5 Dimensions (5 Level Version) instrument, which was previously validated for use in Trinidad and Tobago.

We found that the EQ-5D-5L ceiling levels of the patients were much lower than local population norms, with no significant difference between the sexes. The patients reported problems on all EQ-5D dimensions (mobility, self-care, usual activities, pain/discomfort, and anxiety/depression). The dimensions with the largest deficits were usual activities and anxiety/depression.

Associations between six psychosocial constructs (community attachment, family and friends, life satisfaction, depression symptoms, social support, and lifestyle) and the EQ-5D dimensions were explored using canonical correlation analysis. Construct 2 (Family and Friends) was significantly associated with mobility and anxiety / depression while Life Satisfaction (Construct 3) was significantly associated with self-care and anxiety / depression.

Impact of Chronic Disease and Bio-psycho-social Factors on Health-Related Quality of Life

Quality of life is defined by the World Health Organization as “an individual’s perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns”. The findings from other researchers had previously indicated that in addition to chronic illnesses, accompanying psychosocial factors such as depression, lack of social support, and economic hardships often compromised HRQoL.

Although HRQoL is an important marker of clinical outcomes, it has not been routinely measured in our local setting. Self-reported health is important and can identify at-risk patients who might need targeted intervention. This has policy implications. Further research is required to evaluate HRQoL with disease progression and to compare different interventions for chronic illnesses.

Original Article

The impact of chronic disease and accompanying bio-psycho-social factors on health-related quality of life

Mandreker Bahall¹, Henry Bailey²

¹Department of Business, Arthur Lok Jack Global School of Business, the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus,
²Department of Economics, the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus, Trinidad and Tobago

ACCESS THE ARTICLE

The impact of chronic disease and accompanying bio-psycho-social factors on health-related quality of life

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TOP 20%

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Top-Ranked Researchers Seminar Series**

Coming Soon: Top-Ranked Researchers Seminar Series

- Ms Alissa Moore
Research Assistant, CCHSRD

CCHSRD through the Faculty of Medical Science's [Research Discussion Forum](#) invites you to tune in to its Top-Ranked Researchers Seminar Series. This weekly series will consist of pre-recorded armchair interviews, culminating in a live panel discussion with six top-ranked researchers from The UWI, St. Augustine. These researchers – Professor Terence Seemungal, Professor Christopher Oura, Professor Hazi Azamathulla, Dr Mandreker Bahall, Dr Rajiv Dahiya and Dr Sephra Rampersad, were listed in a global database prepared and authored by academics from Stanford University and published in PLOS Biology. They were ranked among the top 2% most impactful scientists in their respective disciplines. [Click here](#) for more information.



This Seminar Series aims to share with early and mid-career researchers, tacit knowledge and advice from top-ranked researchers, enabling them to position themselves for a successful research career. The top-ranked researchers share their experiences, including lessons learned through years of research, and advice on fostering successful collaborations, writing impactful papers and attracting grant funding. The series will also capture the obstacles they would have faced and the strategies used to overcome them. Viewers will have the opportunity to submit questions to be answered during the live panel discussion.

If you are an early- or mid-career researcher interested in the production of quality and impactful research, this is a series you do not want to miss. Stay tuned for more information about the airing of the interviews and live panel, which is expected to occur in early 2023.

How to Position Yourself for a Successful Research Career: Lessons Learned from UWI (St. Augustine) Top-Ranked Researchers SEMINAR SERIES



Prof. Terence Seemungal Prof. Hazi Azamathulla Dr Sephra Rampersad Dr Rajiv Dahiya Dr Mandreker Bahall Prof. Christopher Oura





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