Empowerment of Young Women

Using Higher Education Helps to Build Healthier Communities

Tag Words: women, minorities, education, food deserts, health

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Summary

Many minority families live in urban communities where healthy, affordable food is scarce due to the lack of easy access to supermarkets, and these areas are usually designated as food deserts. This results in the consumption of fatty, calorie-dense foods from fast food restaurants and convenience stores leading to future health problems such as diabetes, obesity, heart disease and malnutrition. As women are the primary caregivers in many of these areas, they are frequently responsible for providing their families with healthier alternatives. Since it has been shown that there is a positive correlation between higher maternal education and healthier households, promoting education in women can combat the effects of food deserts. We gave a tour of Rutgers University to girls from minority areas in order to enrich their experience and allow them to see that obtaining a higher education can be a reality for them. Perhaps these young women and others like them will seek higher education resulting in a healthier future lifestyle for them and their families.

Video link

http://youtu.be/cSFC84M_VtI

Women Empowerment: A possible solution to battling the lack of access to healthy and affordable food in urban areas

(AM) General Causes of Obesity and Diabetes

In recent years, obesity and diabetes has clearly been on the rise in America. There is an amalgamation of different causes that have led to this problem, and for the most part, these
causes are a result of human activities. The rise in obesity and diabetes is most likely due to our lack of physical activity and overconsumption of high calorie processed foods.

Other factors accelerate obesity and diabetes. Lack of sleep can lead to the improper regulation of appetite and reduced leptin. Leptin is the hormone that helps one feel satisfied and full, and in turn there is an increase in appetite when it is reduced\(^3\). Also, it is reasonable to believe that more time awake leads to more time eating. In this study, it was found that even an extra 20 minutes of sleep every night inversely related to a reduced body mass index\(^3\). Apparently, the circadian rhythm can have influence on BMI and play a role in obesity prevention if people become more aware of the situation. Also, the bacteria in an individual’s gut influence a person’s weight because they are involved in the metabolism of the food intakes. High fat diets lead to the growth of certain bacteria such as Firmicutes, while a low fat diet doesn’t, which in turn, can lead to gain in body weight regardless of the diet\(^2\). Bisphenol A and pollutants have been shown to contribute to diabetes, but usually the average person cannot influence these factors. Bisphenol A is a chemical found in plastic including plastic bottles that can leak into water or any other foods. While the exact mechanism of action is unknown for bisphenol A, there is a positive correlation between increased bisphenol A and diabetes mellitus\(^4\).

In general, pollutants have been shown to alter gene expression that leads to weight gain, improper regulation of fat and carbohydrate metabolism, faulty glucose uptake and in cells in mice\(^5\). This shows a causal relationship between pollutants and diabetes and obesity especially since pesticides and other pollutants are likely to buildup in fat tissues in animals and humans and degrade very slowly in the environment. Poisons and toxins are especially harmful for children who are still growing and developing, so therefore, parents who are aware of such chemicals can protect their children from them. Clearly, the rise in obesity, diabetes, heart disease, liver disease, and non-communicable disorders and health problems have resulted from a blend of different causes that can effect individuals all over the United States.

(AM) Malnutrition caused by Food Deserts in Urban Areas

While there are many factors that play a role in health problems for every American, food deserts usually effect poor minority populations in urban areas in particular. Food deserts are known as areas where people have difficulty accessing supermarkets and healthy foods for affordable prices. Usually denizens of such areas have no other choice but to eat at fast food restaurants and convenience stores that supply foods high in calories for cheap prices because commercial foods are usually subsidized by the United States government. The idea of food deserts originated in Scotland, but the evidence for it was lacking since studies investigating food deserts have shown to be contradictory and inconclusive. It appears that it may have been just been repeated so many times that it was eventually assumed to be true that food deserts exist\(^6\). Many studies have been launched in recent years to ascertain whether food deserts are real or not, and while no conclusive evidence has been found for their existence in other parts of the world, most conclude that actually they do exist in America.

According to one systemic review, food deserts are seen as a real threat in urban areas in America, but not in the equally wealthy western nations. The systemic review stated that of the 19 studies, 18 supported the fact that disadvantaged and minorities usually African American residents have been deprived of food retailers in their areas and only one study had mixed results\(^7\). Also, it was observed that distance to the supermarkets is greater and this might have an exaggerated effect since 26.5% of American citizens who make less than $20,000 don’t own a
While these studies did not find clear evidence for correlations among food prices, it is obvious that supermarkets are negatively correlated to obesity and positively correlated with greater fruit and vegetable in the American diet. Meanwhile, accessibility to convenience stores, which is usually seen in low income or areas where African Americans live, is connected to greater risk of obesity. The people living in these areas may not even be aware that they are being subjected to such injustice. On study reinforces the idea that prices of foods play a central role in the consumption of high calorie and harmful foods. It was also found that higher fruit and vegetable prices were associated with an increased body mass index. The study demonstrated that low income families are half as likely to buy fruits and vegetables because of the higher prices of these items. When the price of fruits and vegetables is reduced by 10% their intake increased by 7.2%, while a reduction in price of beef or bread by 10% leads to only about a 3-4% increase in its consumption. Also, this study predicts that it may not only be the number of supermarkets in urban areas that creates the food desert, but the size and quality of the food retailers. Low income areas might have more food stores that tend to be smaller with fewer fresh foods and less selling space.

Methods for combating obesity and diabetes within the US

Since 1999, the Center’s for Disease Control and Prevention has instituted DNPAO, the Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity, which funds policy and environmental changes that create healthier settings for Americans to live in. However, there are only 25 states that are funded by this division of the CDC to implement new programs to help reduce obesity in Americans: Arkansas, California, Colorado, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. Unfortunately, many states that had the highest obesity rates according to the CDC website have not been funded through the DNPAO to set up obesity programs. For instance, two states with some of the highest obesity rates, Mississippi with 34% obesity and Alabama with 32.2% obesity, are not part of this program but states such as Colorado with only 21% obesity rate, Hawaii with 22.7%, and Utah with only 22.5% obesity rate are funded. While giving states funding to improve the health of Americans is important, the money should be allocated to areas that need it the most which may not be the case here.

One part of the program addresses the issue of inactivity in children. Four states are involved in an effort to increase physical fitness by encouraging active transportation to school: Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, and Washington. Iowa for instance is working to ensure the greater walking room, easier crossing of streets, connections between sidewalks, safety for drivers, pedestrians, and cyclists. On the other hand, Minnesota is focused on creating safer school routes for walking. Montana has had a particularly successful Walking/Wheeling Wednesday Program in Shelby. While such initiatives are attempting to address the problems with sedentary lifestyles in the United States, the effectiveness of such programs are not transparently reported. They are shared with county boards of supervisors, city councils, and school boards, but they the information about and success of the programs are not open to the public.

Funding from the CDC also includes efforts to improve nutrition in various different settings. For example, Michigan has sweet and salty snacks available twice a week instead of 3 to 4 times in a week in the facilities that are part of their program and make drinking water more readily accessible to kids in child care centers. These are good improvements, but these
changes might be too small and specific to make considerable changes in the obesity rates since there are so many different factors influencing obesity as mentioned before from everything from diet to genetics to sleep to bacteria influence obesity rates. Plus, these changes may or may not make any impact since they are not mandatory and people can just choose to drink sugary drinks or eat sweets and salty foods when they are outside of those institutions. New York did a better overhaul by creating mandated changes to child-care facilities: These include very specific changes regarding milk, juices, yogurt, artificial sweeteners, sweet grains with regards to quality and timing. Since these policies are enforced it might make a bigger change since the children have no choice but to eat what is given to them, unlike the Michigan program in which the changes would not effect all the children at every meal. Overall changes like these move society toward a healthier future, but they are only impacting children while in schools or childcare center. Utah uses a program that provides incentives for schools to improve physical activity and have better nutrition. This is a good idea if schools are concerned about how their community views them, but a program like this may not work as well in poor urban areas where the schools have greater problems like gangs, violence, drugs, dropouts, and low standardized test scores. Such changes may be useless if there is no intervention in homes implemented with the support of parents. Making changes that impact the household that children live in is a new approach to creating healthier citizens and people because it expands from just institutional changes to lifestyles changes that can have a lasting effect. Especially since the changes that are implemented mostly effect young kids who are already naturally more active than adults who might be sitting in offices all day and have no time to exercise.

There are plenty of other similar intervention programs, but some issues are not addressed by the government as a possible approach to prevent obesity. For example, even though there is evidence that plastic may lead to diabetes, the Food and drug administration has not banned their usage like in Europe. Being that the plastic industry is so large and the Food and Drug Administration does not want to make it an issue even though there is clear evidence that bisphenol A from water bottles and other plastics leads to diabetes. Now, these are issues that the government can intervene to alter, but has not done so in United States although it is banned in Europe. The plastics industry is enormous and making such changes would require several years to institute. Americans assume that if something on the market that is has been approved by the FDA and is safe for consumption. It wasn’t until recently that BPA was removed from baby bottles. Uninformed mothers may actually be exposing their children to these toxins without realizing the harm that they are doing, especially since toxins are more harmful for young children. Education of women may help in making more aware of such situations so that they protect their families even when the government does not. Instead of relying solely on the government, mothers with higher levels of education may have a better handle of resources to help them healthy choices for their family.

(AM) Solutions to Food Deserts

There have been various solutions offered to fix the problem of food deserts in the United States. One proposed solution is lowering the prices of healthy foods to make them more affordable. It appears that lowering the prices of fresh fruits and vegetables increases their consumption, while lowering the prices of other food products such as meat or bread does not have the same impact. Body mass indexes are reduced in younger children, especially kindergartners and first graders, when the real prices of vegetables and fruits are decreased. For
instance, recently US department of Agriculture initiated a free fruits and vegetables program at schools. Although it is a popular program among students, there has been no study done to evaluate whether such a program can significantly lower the obesity rates in the schools that implement this program. Additionally, since the food is free, it needs to be determined if the benefits actually outweigh the costs because somehow that food has to be paid for. It is highly unlikely that such a program, in which the federal government provides free food for school children, is feasible given the current state of our economy.

Another way to bring fresh and affordable foods into the community is through a community garden. The social component of a community garden alone helps increase the fruit and vegetable consumption according to data collected in one study, but this also means that the garden is only effective if people in the community are volunteering and helping with the garden. Furthermore, with this study it is suggested that with a community garden, an urban dweller can take on a different and most holistic perspective, in which they have a better understanding of the effect of fruits and vegetables on their health and well being. In Flint, Michigan, about 32% of the people that were involved with community gardens ate fruits and vegetables at least five times everyday. On the other hand, in the control population that was not involved in the community gardens, only 18% had fruits and vegetables that frequently every day. Since the 75% of people in the United States eat fruits and vegetables less than 5 times a day, community gardens may provide a sustainable method of reducing obesity and other health problems that are prominent in this country. However, this study did not account for the types and quantity of supermarkets and convenience stores in the local area. This may have a major influence on the effectiveness of community gardens. Also, community gardens are time consuming for individuals, and it has not been demonstrated if this influences the gardening for individuals in poor and urban areas where individuals may not have much leisure time if they have multiple jobs. Other approaches that are similar to community gardens are farmers markets and mobile carts, but the problem with farmers markets is that they can be more expensive than growing your own food or food at a convenience store. In poor areas then where most people are not making that much money, they would rather buy as much high calorie foods for as little as possible.

Supermarkets appear to be both more affordable and healthy. That is why some areas have attempted to create reason for supermarkets to build in those areas where they normally would not. Such incentives include property and sales tax breaks. For instance, Pennsylvania started the Fresh Food Financing Initiative that provides grants and loans for supermarket development, and the development of 58 supermarkets have been funded through this effort with both private and public investments. Similarly, New York City has started up a program called the Food Retail Expansion Health program (FRESH) and it has allowed for reduction on building and land taxes for a period of 25 years and sales tax exemption on the materials used for development of the actual building. In addition to state run programs, the Obama administration has shown a greater interest in improvements in the health of Americans, and in turn, they have launched Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) with over $400 million utilized to equip urban and low income areas with supermarkets and other nutritious food retailers that provide healthy and affordable foods such as fruits and vegetables. The government funding of such programs can certainly help the community get on the road to creating healthier environments for its citizens. A limitation with government programs is that they have so much bureaucracy that is difficult to establish the programs and effectively carry them out. Also, since government
programs are controlled by two political parties that switch in and out of office, the funding declared for such programs by one administration may be removed by another. Projects on a smaller scale may be better making actual change a reality.

(AM) A Different Approach

There are numerous issues that play a role in aggravating the unhealthy way of life that most Americans have. According to one study on obesity in preschool aged children, there were many correlations between daily activities and obesity. For instance, it was found that children who actually eat dinner with the rest of their family at least six times a week, sleep for 10.5 hours every night as well as watch less than 2 hours of TV every day were 40% less likely to be obese than children who did not. These are very simple steps that can be taken to reduce the chances of being obese and having other health problems later on by almost one half.

Unfortunately in most households, children do not grow up living this way. It was determined that the families that followed these daily rituals were usually white two parents families in which the mother was a college graduate and not obese, and the income for the household was greater than the median. Higher levels of education for mothers are clearly associated with lower chances of obesity in children. This is an interesting correlational study since the maternal education is probably also linked to race, household income to poverty ratio, and perhaps even single or two parent household and maternal obesity. Logically, women who have a higher education have the chance to get better paying jobs and in turn, raise the income of their household. Moreover, it is white women who are more likely to get a bachelors degree than minority women. The prevalence of obesity was 13.5% in children when the mothers at least had a bachelors degree, 18.1% when the mother had some college or vocational or technical degree, 20.4% when the mother had a high school diploma or an equivalent, and 24.5% when the mother had anything less than a high school diploma. The greatest difference that maternal education made was in how long the children in these households watched television. When the mother had graduated from college with at least a bachelors degree, almost 60% of the households had a 2 hour limit of watching television, but for those households in which the mothers had not even graduated from high school only a 27.3% limited television viewing time to 2 hours. While this is a correlational link and not a causal one, this may provide a new avenue for fighting unhealthy lifestyles that result in obesity, diabetes, and other health problems. While race, maternal obesity, single parent or two parent households, and household income is difficult to alter even though they may be important factors in the cause of obesity, it is feasible to promote education among young minority women in order to help prevent obesity.

(DB) Role Played By Women in Society

Throughout a lot of the remnants of this paper, an author by the name of John Berger will be employed to illustrate many points central to a woman’s identity in society. This will help portray the role of women as primary caregivers and the importance of every woman in playing a role in making sure the next generation is healthy. Berger is very condescending throughout his text about a woman’s role in society. Conveying Berger’s thoughts touches upon issues that bring the woman gender down. These thoughts are the sort of thoughts that women would succeed without. However, taking a look at these negative thoughts aides in progress, as one can become stronger from them. The empowerment of women plays a central role in the health of
her future generation as a woman’s health is linked inversely with the rates of obesity and diabetes for her offspring. More specifically, the healthier and more educated women in a population are, the lower the rates of obesity and diabetes for both the men and women in that society in years to come.

John Berger argues that women are continually and vigilanty surveyed by themselves and men within their society in Chapter 3 of his book, *Ways of Seeing*. He argues that a woman’s presence is “so intrinsic to her person that men tend to think of it as an almost physical emanation, a kind of heat or smell or aura” (Berger 114), whereas the object of a man’s presence “is always exterior to the man” (Berger 114). In other words, the way a woman behaves towards society defines her, whereas a man defines himself by the quality of his actions.

He believes that presence for a woman is intrinsic, while presence for a man is external. His argument is that a woman’s “presence is manifest in her gestures, voice, opinions, expressions, clothes, chosen surroundings, [and] taste” (Berger 114). Definitely, ‘clothes’ are an external quality that women can manipulate to drastically change the presence they have from one day to the next. The same women can appear bold, professional, sporty, classy, preppy, artsy, etc, depending on what she wears that day. Therefore, a woman can change her image with varying jewelry, new hairstyles, and other external adornments. Therefore, a woman is not stuck with the same image for life. A woman can create an image of what she is capable of doing just as a man can. Using this ability to her advantage, a woman can also create the livelihood of the environment she is living in. She has the ability to weld it into one that means prosperous healthy life for her offspring all by changing her intrinsic level of knowledge and key essentials to a healthier, more sanitary life for herself and her offspring.

Berger also expresses controversial views such as, “women are there to feed an appetite, not to have any of their own” (Berger 117). Similarly, Berger says that “to be born a woman has been to be born, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men” (Berger 114). He makes it seem as if women are slaves to men. He writes in a way that makes it seem as if men are superior to women, and that women simply serve to satiate the desires of men. This type of thought process has been very detrimental to society in the past. In societies where this thought process still persists, it shows in the deterioration of the lives of not only the women, but the men as well. As mentioned earlier, since women are the primary caregivers in a society, their well-being directly and indirectly influences the well-being of those who are their dependents—their female and male progeny.

These disparities between men and women in a society are still very distinct and present today. Take the simple example of making a joke. A woman who makes jokes gets labeled as being ‘goofy’, or she becomes a one-dimensional funny person. Berger puts it in this way: “If a woman makes a good joke this is an example of how she treats the joker in herself and accordingly of how she as joker-woman would like to be treated by others” (Berger 115). People would expect that woman to be funny on any occasion. If the woman was to have an off day in which she was not cracking jokes, she’d get a lot of inquisitive looks about why she is not. However, with men, making jokes is just one aspect of a multi-dimensional character. In broader terms, women are expected to behave in a certain manner, whereas men are left alone to behave as they wish. Although this does cause a woman’s job to be much more difficult, it also is the template for the female gender to create a different sort of general image than the one they hold today—one of leadership and a stress on the importance of their role as primary caregivers.
Due to the fact that they have a role as primary caregivers, women must be given more tools for their eventual success in society. Improving health problems in urban areas by empowering women through education and technology is a solution to the imminent problem of alarming rates of obesity, depression, and malnutrition amongst women in minority cultures. The proposed novel solution involves shadowing at local colleges, learning to use technology, and lessons on proper nutrition.

John Berger explores the ‘moment of truth’ in which humans realize that the naked human-being in front of him/her is “more like the rest of their sex than they are different” and how “in this revelation lies the warm and friendly—as opposed to cold and impersonal—anonymity of nakedness” (Berger 118). This explanation of the nakedness of human beings creates a stark sense of equality between all human beings regardless of gender or sexual orientation. Beneath all the clothing, the nakedness of human-beings is a reminder to people that in reality, there is no real difference between a poor man and a rich man, a prostitute and a doctor, a black man and a Japanese man. This awareness breaks down the boundaries between people, and unites them as a species.

Although John Berger makes the point that “nakedness acts as a confirmation and provokes a very strong sense of relief”—“that she is a woman like any other: or he is a man like another”, he continuously makes females seem inferior to males. For example, in the following quote, he makes the man seem like the owner of the property that is women: “On the one hand the individualism of the artist, the thinker, the patron, the owner: on the other hand, the person who is the object of their activities—the woman—treated as a thing or an abstraction” (Berger 119). This is comparable to slavery. Berger makes a point that men own women, and he even relates it back to the Genesis by claiming that even it stated that “[Adam] shall rule over [Eve]” (Berger 115).

Women do not live to serve the appetite of men. Women are capable of accomplishing just as much as men. All throughout Ways of Seeing, John Berger makes blanket statements about the qualities of men and women in order to aide him in making conclusions about the two genders. From his statements today’s generation can learn what perceptions need to be improved upon to make the female gender a more empowering one.

(DB) –Women and Inequalities

A woman’s life is molded early on by the people and places she surrounds her during childhood. Some women are scarred by the events of their childhoods, while others build a strong foundation for themselves during their youth. The lucky ones grow up in environments that promote equality for both men and women with parents believing in financial independence. This directly reflects the life a woman lives. Not only that, but it influences the lives of her children as well. Some unfortunate women grow up in poverty and face sexism at every turn in life.

There are many inequalities that exist between men and women to this day that have lasting consequences on the health of individuals in a population. Some fields of work are predominantly female oriented, but if they were a male oriented profession the general consensus is that the financial reward would be higher. “An analysis of year-end 1998 data from the Bureau
of Labor Statistics clearly demonstrates that salary disparities continue to exist between men and women (Gibelman, 2003)\(^8\).

In third world countries such as India, “women academic scientists endure exclusion from social networks, and overt discrimination and conflicts between personal and work lives” (Gupta, and Sharma 901-902)\(^9\). In fact, approximately ninety percent of women in India work in the informal sector because “much of their work is not documented or accounted for in official statistics” (“Women in India”)\(^23\). Discrimination was more common in small villages and country-like settings. In large cities like Bombay, it is not as prevalent. This is comparable to regions in the United States where women endure more inequality when living in low income areas where minority women struggle with so many issues due to lack of equality. Health is a major issue that people living in these areas have to deal with.

The importance of empowering women and mothers has a noteworthy positive correlation with the health of the larger community. Many researchers who study the woman’s role in society have called for the “empowerment and involvement of women and mothers for health-promotion and disease-prevention interventions in various domains” (Kar, Pascual, and Chickering 1431-1460)\(^26\). A remarkable research study done in Switzerland concluded the following: “education, income and occupational class were independently associated with overweight and obesity. However, in the joint model, education had the strongest and most significant effect. Persons with low education must therefore be the main target group for specific programmes and policies aimed at preventing excess weight (Faeh, Braun, and Bopp 151-166)\(^24\). Our project aimed at doing exactly that. Another study in Bangladesh illustrated that policies implemented by the government regarding women’s empowerment such as maternal child health campaigns helps to dramatically reduce child mortality ("World Health Organization Europe")\(^25\). This shows how the lives of individuals’ directly related to the empowered women (in this case, children), are bettered through interventions which provide the women with a better education.

(DB)-Role of women as primary care givers

One woman quotes the importance her mother played in her own development and security as a woman: “my mom was a driving force where she believed that women should be independent—financially independent. Financial independence is very important for women. For a lady who didn’t work herself, she didn’t really have the opportunities herself, she felt that women needed to be financially independent and she believed that one of the reasons for that is it boosts your self-confidence”(anonymous).

According to a website called “Wisdom of Rich Dad”, “not only are women expected to live an average of seven to 10 years longer than men, their retirement income is less than half that of men […] Basically, if you are not financially independent then there is a strong chance someone -- whether it be a partner or the government - will at least in part be determining what you can and cannot do” (Bina, 2007)\(^17\). Today, many women are increasingly more financially independent. They have jobs and they spend the money as they wish—however, this may be just an illusion of being financially independent. Women still are unaware of what to do when it
comes to making investments and dealing with mortgages. This is because men have a tendency to take care of mortgages and such things. Women have financial independence in that they are working and earning money, but there’s no financial independence when it comes to what to do with the money and how to invest the money. This reflects the inequality between the genders. But this illustrates the importance of teaching women skills that men normally take care of. This will only progress and not deteriorate the lives of women, and thus the prosperity of their children.

Another predominant issue that women in minority and major cultures face is that they cannot be outside late without fearing that they will be raped or sexually assaulted in some way. Taking a walk outdoors after sunset presents a danger to women. They do not have a peace of mind.

Many women also completely leave their jobs after they have children. This probably contributes to the lesser amount of pay that women receive than men in the same profession. Women leave their jobs for their children, because they feel guilty about not being good mothers. According to a Pew Research Center survey, “only 10 percent of mothers working full-time give themselves the highest rating for their parenting and just 24 percent of mothers working part-time give themselves a 10 as a parent” (Taylor, Funk, & Clark, 2007)\(^2\). Many women leave their careers on the back burner for their children, whereas most men do not go through these guilt pangs. In the United States, the quality of the maternity leaves pale in comparison to most of the other nations.

The state of New Jersey gives only 6 weeks after normal delivery and 8 weeks after C-section for a woman to get back her job in order to make money. If the state does not even recognize it, how can one question that there’s discrimination. Clearly, discrimination is happening at a higher level. This causes many women to leave their jobs, because they want to be with their babies for at least the first year. This certainly does represent an insidious form of discrimination at the government level. If the government was more lenient, and gave women more time for maternity leave, women would be able to return to their jobs at a later time. However, because this is not the case, many women lose their jobs. It was shown in a Harvard University study last year that “out of 168 nations, 163 had some form of paid maternity leave, leaving the United States in the company of Lesotho, Papua, New Guinea and Swaziland”("U.s. stands apart," 2005)\(^2\). This further leads to the inequality in pay between men and women that women are trying to change. The insufficient amount of maternity leave puts women at a disadvantage. In Europe, “the European Commission plans to raise the minimum length of paid maternity leave from 14 to 18 continuous weeks--six weeks of mandatory leave after childbirth and 12 weeks before or after, at the parents' discretion. (1) According to a draft of the plan, the purpose of the increase is to give women a greater chance to recover from pregnancy and deliver; more time with their children and an opportunity to breast-feed for a longer period” (Hollander, 2009)\(^2\). This gives women a break before they need to return to work. Unfortunately, the United States does not have this policy.

Due to the fact that many women leave their professions when they have infants to take care of, female-dominated professions suffer. According to research, working mothers still provide better care for children than stay at home dads
As people progress forward, women should be taught to aim for financial independence. Growing up in an environment that promotes equality between men and women will encourage the individual to look for a lifestyle that respects this fairness. This will also diminish health problems faced by future generations as there is an upward correlation between impoverished women and health problems in their communities.

**Empowering Women to Create Healthier Communities Service Project**

(AM) A College Visit

For our service project, we planned to provide eight high school females from local urban areas a chance to shadow Rutgers students and learn more about obtaining a higher education. Although eight girls were supposed to attend, only five of the girls came out. Two girls were juniors from an all-girls high school, and the other three were sophomores from a girls advocacy group at a local church. By introducing them to college early on, we hope that the girls will be motivated to achieve a higher education even though it may not be the norm for the areas that they come from. This was the first college visit for the majority of the girls. They received an exclusive inside look at the Rutgers facilities and actually had the chance to sit in on a biology lecture since all the girls were interested in science.

The day started off with the tour of three different residence buildings, and the girls were able to see the study lounges, dorms, kitchens, laundry rooms, common areas, and bathrooms. Then, we showed them around the campus center on Busch, where we also ate lunch. Next, we toured the gym, tutoring center, classrooms, computer labs, and library. The girls also got to experience taking the buses on campus, which they were excited about. This tour was more personal than the usual tours given at Rutgers since it was a small group, and everyone could have their questions answered and also they felt comfortable asking questions. Additionally, they were able to converse with actual college students, who were not being paid to give tours so opinions of college are more honest. Moreover, most students do not get the chance to go inside all the buildings since normally tours are given on buses or foot and only the outside of these buildings are shown especially since the tours are not very long. Lastly, one of the most important components of the days visit was attending the first year biology lecture because the size of classes are drastically different from those that high school are used to.

(AM) Concerns Addressed

When we asked about what they were most concerned about, one girl stated that she was worried about the level of difficulty of the classes in college. This is an important issue that guidance counselors should address. Every high school is different and has different standards of education. The students from a rich and suburban area might have an advantage in college over someone from a more urban area because their high school had more resources or the teachers were more qualified if the schools could afford to greater salaries for the teachers. This is can intimidating to students since a professor in college is not going to be concerned about a single students background or perhaps even their progress. However, there are many ways to help students who may have difficulty adjusting to college. We told the girls about the tutors available for center classes at the math and science learning centers and the office hours that
professors hold in case students need help. Also, we explained the importance of good studying habits and time management skills, as these are crucial in succeeding in college. Another girl was more concerned about the paying for college. We allayed her fears by explaining about the work study program and scholarships that are available to students. She was especially interested by the work study program since that was something that she had not heard of before. It is important for high school officials to focus on financing college for students in low income areas as this may be a major deterrent for students who may actually want to attend college.

Promoting education among girls in low income areas may be a great way to battle the effects of health inequality found in these areas. By giving these girls a taste of college, they become more interested in applying and attending college as they can actually picture themselves there. As the education and income of the population of an area increases, supermarkets have a greater incentive to move into those areas. Consequently, higher education can get rid of food deserts. Also, while the food deserts are still there, greater maternal education provides children more structure creating a more lifestyle for them by limiting television time. Also, with greater education comes higher paying jobs that allow mothers to provide healthier food and/or vehicles that allow transportation to areas with more affordable foods.

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Letters to the Editor

Letter to the editor of the Star Ledger:

Recently, Americans have expressed a great outcry over the shooting of Trayvon Martin, a young innocent black teenager, who was killed because of racial profiling. Clearly, racial prejudice is still alive, but what many people do not see is how racial segregation in this country affects the health and lives of minorities everyday. Food deserts are designated areas where people have limited access to healthy and affordable food. Food deserts should be brought to the attention of the public because they are a form of social injustice since these areas are usually low-income urban centers where minorities live. Instead of having supermarkets with a variety of cheap fresh fruits and vegetables, food deserts are surrounded by convenience stores and fast food joints where the healthy food is expensive and the affordable food items lead to obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.

Investment in education is a better long-term solution to battle the issue than the usual community gardens. Education results in greater awareness of social injustice. Educated citizens are also more likely to believe in political efficacy, and thus demand local government officials to provide incentives for larger supermarkets. Moreover, higher maternal education is associated with reduced obesity in children.

Amanpreet Mashiana

To the editor of the Targum:
Dear Editor of the Targum,

In Professor Fagan’s Colloquium in the Ethics of Sciences, my partner, Amanpreet Mashiana (Rutgers Class of 2013) and I (Rutgers Class of 2012) have taken the opportunity to empower women through education. The importance of education is so ubiquitous that it affects all other aspects of a woman’s life including her own health and well-being. Not only does it affect her own health, but it also affects the health of those surrounding her, most immediately her family and future generations. Therefore, Amanpreet and I will spend some time with girls who are looking to go to college at some point in their lives, to give them a tour of Rutgers, New Brunswick, so they can get a feel for college lifestyle. This would give them a head start and something to look forward to as they are beginning to apply for colleges. It is a gateway to a life full of opportunities that we have made possible to them through this civil service project with our Professor Julie Fagan.

Thank you,
Deepa Balavijayan