Elizabeth Valdez Awarded the NIH Ruth L. Kirschstein Predoctoral Individual National Research Service Award

Elizabeth “Libby” Valdez, MPH, a DrPH Candidate in Maternal and Child Health at the Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health at UA, has worked with SIROW for nearly three years as an Assistant Research Social Scientist. Ms. Valdez holds a Master in Public Health in Health Behavior Health Promotion, and is a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer (Peru 2010-2012). She is in the third year of her Doctor of Public Health program. A doctor of public health, commonly referred to as a DrPH, is a professional degree designed for public health practitioners. DrPH programs focus on the practical application of public health principles across a variety of fields, while a PhD in Public Health is focused on the development of advanced research skills, including theory and methodologies. Ms. Valdez will complete her DrPH degree in May 2019.

Recently, Ms. Valdez was awarded a National Institutes of Health (NIH) F31 Ruth L. Kirschstein Predoctoral Individual National Research Service Award (NRSA) from the National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) for funding of her dissertation project titled: “Environmental Factors that Influence Adolescent Substance Use at the U.S.-Mexico Border.” In 2016, NIMHD awarded only 2 awards, with a success rate of 9%. Ms. Valdez’s study will begin to fill a critical gap in knowledge regarding patterns of adolescent substance use on the U.S.-Mexico border and the factors that influence adolescent substance use in the border region (e.g., heightened access to drugs and alcohol and nearby drug trafficking). Furthermore, it will expand the field’s understanding of how the U.S.-Mexico border might affect behavioral health among local residents. For example, border scholars argue that exposure to border-bound stressors including increased border security, immigration enforcement, and discrimination, pose mental health risks to Hispanic border residents. While Ms. Valdez focuses on her dissertation project and training program supported by her NRSA, she will continue to be connected with SIROW as a Research Affiliate.

The purpose of this Kirschstein-NRSA program is enabling promising predoctoral students to develop into productive, independent research scientists, and to obtain mentored research training while conducting dissertation research. Dr. Sally Stevens, former SIROW Executive Director and current Research Professor, will serve as co-sponsor of Ms. Valdez’s NRSA. Dr. Jo Korchmaros, current SIROW Director, will work with Ms. Valdez as a consultant on the award.

Ms. Valdez’s dissertation project is a continuation of previous SIROW work focused on border/maternal health issues. Some of her former projects include SIROW’s
Goals

- Engage in collaborative feminist research on topics pertinent to the lives of girls, women, and families;
- Develop and conduct outreach, education, service, research, and trainings with regard to mental and physical health, sexuality, legal matters, education, workforce, equity, diversity, and other issues;
- Address social inequalities and group-based disparities;
- Examine and support women’s contribution to literature, the arts, and Southwest heritage;
- Advocate for women and families by linking researchers with community organizations and policy makers;
- Identify, illuminate, and disseminate research on girls, women, families, and gender differences.

Pregnant and Postpartum Women and Adolescent Substance Abuse National Cross-Site Evaluation, and the National Cross-Site Evaluation of Juvenile Drug Courts and Reclaiming Futures. Ms. Valdez also served as co-investigator on SIROW’s Mujer Saludable on the US-Mexico Border: A Promotora-led Adaptation and Expansion of a Sexual Health Education Curriculum project. This project works to address reproductive health needs on the U.S.-Mexico border. Ms. Valdez extends her deepest thanks to SIROW staff for their mentorship. She acknowledges that the receipt of this prestigious NRSA award is due in large part to the research skills developed while conducting SIROW projects. She looks forward to continuing their collaborative work to improve the lives of women and girls in the Southwest.

Contact Ms. Valdez for more information about her work at salerno@email.arizona.edu.

SIROW Sponsors Opioid Epidemic Symposium

SIROW was one of several sponsors of the September 15 Southern Arizona Opioid Abuse Prevention Symposium. Cate Clifton, a SIROW Research Technician, attended the symposium along with over 300 professionals, including prevention, treatment, healthcare and law enforcement employees, government officials, and other members of the community. The symposium brought these different sectors together to begin to adequately address the opiate epidemic in Arizona in a comprehensive and holistic way.

Presentations included strategic plans, pain management options, the link between trauma and opioid misuse, community solutions to reduce overdose deaths, and more. Presenters highlighted the realities of opioid addiction, and how it affects the whole community. Others focused on potential solutions, such as how a methadone clinic operates and why opioid-specific clinics are beneficial. One theme of many presentations was breaking down stigma associated with addiction, and treating opiate misuse with the same compassion one would give any chronic illness. The symposium encouraged distributing naloxone kits. Naloxone, sometimes better known by the brand name Narcan, is a medicine that blocks the effects of opioids and reverses overdose. Naloxone kits have been distributed widely in Maricopa County since last summer, and have reportedly reversed over 1,000 overdoses.

SIROW and other Pima County prevention and treatment-related organizations hope to continue the work of the symposium. SIROW’s involvement in the symposium is related to a 5-year SAMHSA-funded grant Bridges to Wellness (B-Well) that seeks to prevent substance abuse, HIV, and viral hepatitis among systems-involved youth. For more information, please contact Monica Davis at midavis@email.arizona.edu.