

Sasakawa Nursing Fellow 2024

Progress Report

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Introduction and Academic objectives in 2024 – 2025

I am a second-year MPH student at the Rollins School of Public Health, Emory University, in the Behavioral, Social, and Health Education Sciences Department. As a former psychiatric home health nurse, I recognized issues like provider burnout, limited collaboration, and insufficient training. These experiences inspired my goal to strengthen mental health systems and policies that enhance quality of life and promote prevention.

At Emory, I've been building my understanding of psychiatric policy within cultural, political, and economic contexts while strengthening my research and evaluation skills. Over the past year, I've completed coursework including community assessment, program planning, health policy, and public mental health, and have also advanced my practicum and thesis work.

1. Apply research skills in conducting research and employing theoretical frameworks in my thesis.
2. Understand the actual research process and the challenges encountered in the field
3. Gain insight into global public mental health
4. Enhance my communication skills through applied practicum experience and research under different culture
5. Develop the ability to create effective policy memos

Progress for Academic Goal

Objective 1&2:

During my internship at the Health Department of UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) in Jordan, I applied classroom research skills and frameworks to a real-world setting. I independently developed a research plan, conducted data collection, and completed the entire research process from design to reporting.

My project evaluated the strengths and challenges of the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) program at UNRWA health centers in Jordan from healthcare providers'

perspectives. Guided by my thesis advisor, local supervisor, and medical professionals, I gained a deeper understanding of how cultural and organizational contexts, such as religious values and local views on mental health, shape effective research. I developed bilingual tools (English and Arabic) for surveys and semi-structured interviews, using the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR) and the Social Ecological Model. Working with interpreters for Arabic interviews highlighted the critical role of interpreter training in ensuring data quality. For analysis, I handled both quantitative and qualitative data. I used MaxQDA to code and analyze interview transcripts and shared the findings with UNRWA as part of a feedback process. This hands-on experience deepened my understanding of applied research and strengthened my ability to critically engage with academic literature to develop skills essential for advancing global mental health system.

Objective3: Through my internship at UNRWA, I gained practical experience with the World Health Organization's Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP), which aims to expand access to basic mental health care in resource-limited settings. At UNRWA, mhGAP was integrated into primary care, with health centers providing screening and treatment for conditions like depression, anxiety, and PTSD. Interviews and site visits enabled me to understand both the strengths and challenges of implementation, including provider training needs, heavy workloads, stigma, and gaps in continuity of care.

In the course *Case Studies in Public Mental Health*, I explored global mental health issues and realized how to design context-specific, evidence-based interventions. The course emphasized how to translate academic findings into real-world programs, campaigns, and policies that respect cultural diversity. Therefore, these experiences strengthened my ability to address mental health issues from a global and culturally sensitive perspective and skills that will guide my future work in public health policy and practice.

Objective4: Through my internship at UNRWA and coursework projects such as a community assessment and program evaluation, I gained hands-on experience in project-based work and cross-cultural collaboration. At UNRWA, I worked with a multidisciplinary team and conducted interviews with healthcare providers and administrators. Working through interpreters required attention to non-verbal communication and cultural values, which deepened my understanding of effective communication in diverse settings.

In coursework projects, I collaborated with a local nonprofit in Atlanta to assess community health needs and evaluate programs. I built rapport with staff, practiced active listening, and contributed to team communication by clarifying goals and providing regular updates. I also refined my writing and presentation skills, using visual tools to communicate findings clearly. These experiences enabled me to develop key skills for working in multicultural environments, including cultural competence, empathy, adaptability, and effective communication beyond language.

Objective5: Through the Health Policy course, I learned how to write concise and effective policy memos that present issues, analyses, and evidence-based recommendations to decision-makers. A key challenge was selecting and organizing essential information within a two-page limit while maintaining clarity and impact. I developed skills in prioritizing key points, considering stakeholder perspectives, evaluating feasibility, and presenting realistic, actionable solutions. These abilities will be invaluable when making policy recommendations in Japan in the future.

Living Aspect

Realizing the Impact of Politics Through Life in the U.S. : Living in the U.S. made me realize how deeply politics affects daily life and public health. After the president's change of administration, many at Emory University expressed concern and discussions on the role of public health professionals. The new administration's executive orders, such as deportations

and federal agency budget freezes, directly affected both individuals' livelihoods and academic institutions. These measures led to job losses and, within the university context, imposed restrictions on invited CDC guest speakers and caused delays in ongoing research. These experiences highlighted how politics influences systems and lives in the U.S., prompting me to reflect on Japan's relatively low political engagement and the differences in societal impact between the two countries.

Summary

Through my studies at Emory University and field experience with UNRWA in Jordan, I developed practical research skills, cross-cultural communication abilities, and the capacity to propose evidence-based mental health policies. Designing and conducting a culturally sensitive evaluation of the MHPSS program, working with interpreters, and collaborating with diverse stakeholders deepened my understanding of the importance of respecting multiple perspectives. Moving forward, I aim to apply these experiences to improve mental health systems and policies in Japan and the Middle East by promoting sustainable and culturally responsive approaches to mental health support and implementation.

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