

Sasakawa Nursing Fellow 2024 Progress Report

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I. Purpose and Overview

I am currently in my first year of the Master of Public Health in Maternal, Child, Adolescent Health (MCAH) Program at UC Berkeley. This program allows me to develop skills to solve the health challenges facing women, children, adolescents, and families of the 21st century. My ultimate goal as a Fellow is to improve the sexual reproductive health issues in Japan. This report will serve two purposes: 1) to reflect and evaluate my progress made as a Sasakawa Nursing Fellow in 2024-25 and 2) to identify the goals that I aim to achieve in the next academic year of 2025-26 .

II. Academic Progress

My goal is to achieve the following six objectives by the end of the program, and the progress is to be described for each objective.

Objective1: Discuss a problem facing MCAH populations with an evidence-based rationale for why it is a topic of importance.

What is Maternal, Child, and Adolescent health? When I was first asked this question in the class, the definition that came to mind was “Improving and maintaining the health of pregnant women, children, and adolescents.” However, over the past year of study, my answer has shifted dramatically. Now I would say that “the definition of the term MCAH is so broad that understanding what it means is not enough to protect their health. Diverse factors such as life, policy, history, and social structure affect health, and furthermore, health is cumulative from generation to generation. That is why protecting their health at a time of great change in their lives is crucial to protecting the health of the next generation.” Every nation, region, and individual holds distinct values. Understanding this concept is crucial, utilizing it correctly across various fields, and discussing subjects grounded in reliable data is essential. The task involves adopting a more hands-on approach to the ideas acquired and enhancing the conversation with concrete evidence.

Objective2: Identify and evaluate the relative contribution of individual and environmental factors associated with MCAH.

Addressing the multifaceted problems of MCAH involves not only identifying the issues that are emerging but also recognizing the most advantageous times for intervention. The major framework for identifying this issue is “Life Course Theory.”

1. Latency: factors experienced at one point in time have long-term effects on subsequent health and development.
2. Cumulative: specific behaviors and circumstances accumulate throughout life and influence health and social outcomes.

3. Pathway: the process by which an event or situation influences subsequent life events and choices.

It is crucial to examine these routes, pinpoint issues, and take action to address them in order to tackle the MICAHA challenge effectively.

Another perspective is the importance of having a perspective on achieving “Equity.” It was not straightforward for me to comprehend the effects of structural racism on health. When I was first exposed to its issue, I was struck by the reality that there are significant barriers to access and choice in health care and that the accumulation of inequalities creates health disparities by race. I was also confused as to what the best solution would be to the paper's call for drastic policy changes. However, through group discussions in class, I became convinced of the importance of the perspective of “equity”, not “equality”. The problem is not unique to the U.S.; it exists potentially in Japan as well, just not brought to the surface. Although it may be tempting to view this as a personal issue, effective solutions necessitate a strategy that uncovers the root cause and promotes systemic reform. In my upcoming practicum and capstone project, I aim to implement these concepts practically and investigate their potential influence on actual policies and interventions.

Objective3: Identify MCAHA issues and evaluate a policy solution.

Upstream approaches are critical to solving the MCAHA problem. However, actually changing or modifying policy is not easy, and advocacy activities are essential to connect research to policy. During the spring semester, the Health Policy Advocacy course enabled me to adopt a strategic method for targeted policy advocacy and to utilize effective tactics to close that divide. In particular, framing the issue, how to convey the message, sharing the narrative, building coalitions, and lobbying. Historically, the U.S., citizens' voices have influenced policy, and there is ample room for application if this approach is adapted in a way that fits Japan's system and culture. On the other hand, I also realized that my own understanding of the Japanese political system is inadequate. A deeper understanding of which laws and policies are decided, by whom, and how they affect society is the first step toward solving MCAHA issues in Japan. The challenge for the future is to learn more about both the Japanese system and the U.S. system, and to seek practical approaches to improve MCAHA.

Objective4: Interpret results of epidemiologic studies of MCAHA problems and synthesize published epidemiological literature in order to summarize current knowledge and develop and test strong research questions that will advance knowledge in the field of MCAHA.

Through lectures in epidemiology and biostatistics, I have learned to select suitable research methods and critically review them. Currently enrolled in Intermediate Biostatistics, I find the course fascinating and it has highlighted the significance of understanding the tools rather than just using them passively. I aim to refine my skills in statistics and epidemiology, not by mechanically, but through a comprehensive grasp of their theoretical foundations and objectives, while also exploring their relevance in the context of MCAH.

Objective5: Knowledge and develop and test strong research questions that will advance knowledge in the field of MCAH.

Prior to my study abroad, I had a broad and vague research topic in mind, but is now looking for a specific approach to promote adolescent health. An important issue for the future is to identify gaps in existing research and current issues, and to establish a research agenda that can promote adolescent sexual and reproductive health while taking into account the social impact of conducting such research.

Objective6: Apply basic principles of quantitative research and epidemiology for understanding and addressing MCAH problems.

During the past year of my academic journey, I have grasped the fundamental concepts and figured out how to relate program design and my thesis to actual practice. By participating in the summer practicum and completing the capstone project, I will have the opportunity to apply the essential principles of quantitative research and epidemiology. These experiences will provide me with the chance to advance my research approaches and analytical skills, which can be directly implemented in the MCAH field.

III. Acknowledgement

I sincerely appreciate the Sasakawa Health Foundation for their generous scholarship, which has allowed me to gain invaluable experience at UC Berkeley. Their continued support has provided me with a solid pathway to commit to my academic pursuits without any concerns. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the distinguished faculty, my supportive classmates and peers, as well as the motivating atmosphere for learning at UC Berkeley.