



# COVID-19 STUDY UPDATE



During COVID-19 the Biobehavioral Assessment Research Center (BARC) has worked on research projects that assess the impact of the pandemic on marginalized populations we engage in our research projects especially people who use drugs (PWUD) and people living with HIV (PLWH). The research team includes many colleagues across UCLA and at collaborating institutions across North America but is led by Drs. Gorbach, Javanbakht and the research staff Amy Ragsdale, Janell Moore, and India Richter, graduate students Allie Rosen, Alexander Moran, Ryan Assaf, and undergraduate students Maria Bazan and Dayeon Hwang.

Main efforts have included developing and implementing a COVID-19 questionnaire module to over 1,500 participants in The Collaborating Consortium of Cohorts Producing NIDA Opportunities (C3PNO) (U24DA044554). This is a consortium of nine cohorts studying the intersection of HIV infection and substance abuse. Dr. Gorbach is the PI of C3PNO and was awarded an NIDA supplement to develop a survey to assess COVID-19 pandemic impact on frequency of substance use, changes in prevalence of use and transitions between drugs; disruptions in substance use disorder treatment; and engagement in HIV prevention and care. The survey was deployed in eight cohorts at two time points during the pandemic. Data collection will be complete by the end of March 2021. Preliminary findings indicate that cohorts testing levels were low (~32%) and that the pattern of change in substance use has varied by drug and population but it is unclear if the drug supply or the individual need is changing (i.e., increased anxiety/depression). Those with increased substance use miss more mental health, HIV care, and substance use treatment appointments. C3PNO will issue a special supplement in a high-impact journal to highlight the consortium's findings.



BARC's other COVID-19 activities were with the mSTUDY (U01DA036267): (Men Who Have Sex with Men and Substance Use Cohort at UCLA Linking Infections, Noting Effects). This a cohort of Latino and Black/African-American people assigned male at birth who have sex with males to assess the intersection of substance use and HIV and is part of the C3PNO and led by Drs. Gorbach and Shoptaw at UCLA. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated halt to in-person research, mSTUDY initiated remote visits on March 26, 2020. Since that time, the study team has contacted most study participants to inform them of the disruption to in-clinic visits and engage them in telephone/online assessments. During the pandemic, the semi-annual visits involve a clinical review of systems and concomitant medications and a behavioral survey with 595 research visits with 350 cohort participants completed through mid-December 2020. mSTUDY was awarded a NIDA administrative supplement to test at home dried blood spot HIV viral load and COVID-19 testing. HIV-positive participants receive an online survey and a mail-in DBS test kit with urine cups for substance use testing to collect at home. The study team has also participated in the C3PNO COVID-19 module described above.

Finally, Dr Gorbach has collaborated with Dr. Ziva Cooper (Semel Institute) with support from Epidemiology doctoral student Ryan Assaf to conduct a web survey on cannabis use frequency and modes of use from adults with past-year cannabis and/or cannabidiol use to assess non-medical and medical cannabis use before the pandemic (January to mid-March 2020) and during the pandemic (past 3 months). Among the 1,886 who completed the survey cannabis use was reported to have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Occasional and heavy users were 2-3 times more likely to increase their cannabis use during the COVID-19 pandemic than frequent users. Those in states with regulated cannabis were more likely to increase their cannabis use likely due to cannabis accessibility during the pandemic. Finally, women were likely to increase their cannabis use during the pandemic reflecting recent national annual trends of increasing use among females compared to males. Because COVID-19 is a respiratory illness and cannabis inhalation is expected to negatively impact COVID-19 outcomes, changes in mode of cannabis use were expected but only modest increase in oral cannabis use during the pandemic was reported. Findings from this study are currently under review at a journal.



# Epidemiology Student Association Winter Updates

By: Ryan Assaf & Julia Koerber, ESA Co-Presidents

## Message to Students:

Happy Winter Quarter! During Fall, the Epidemiology Student Association hosted weekly events, paired incoming students with mentors, generated recommendations with the Epidemiology Department Task Force on Anti-Racism and Racial Justice, and brought in cutting-edge researchers for the Epidemiology Department Seminar Series. This quarter, ESA is proud to continue this work as well as offer more events to give students a chance to connect to each other, network, and deepen their learning.

Sincerely,

Ryan Assaf (rassaf@ucla.edu)

& Julia Koerber (juliajkoerber@g.ucla.edu).

## Featured Events This Quarter:

### Virtual Student Lounge on Zoom

Every Thursday, 6-7PM PST

Meeting ID 95843723368

Password 906492

*Drop in to meet and mingle with other Epi students! All degree paths welcomed.*

### Field Studies Advice Panel for 1st Year

#### MPH Students

Wednesday, January 20th, 12-1PM PST

*Thinking about your field studies placement?*

*Learn from the experiences of second year Epi MPH students to get advice on the ins and outs of finding an internship placement. Dr. Bailey will also be available to answer questions.*

### Seminar Series: "Adventures in Modeling for Policy" with Dr. Eric Lofgren

Tuesday, January 26th, 12-1PM PST

*Dr. Lofgren, assistant professor at the Paul G. Allen School for Global Animal Health at Washington State University, will be discussing how to use mathematical modeling to drive policy decisions during times of crisis, including COVID-19.*

### Professional Panel and Networking Event

Wednesday, February 24th, 6-8PM PST

*Join us to learn from a panel of epidemiologists working in a variety of sectors about everything from available opportunities to what to expect from your first position after graduating. The second hour will be open for networking with panelists. Watch out for emails about additional upcoming events!*

## ESA 2020-2021 Board:

-Co-Presidents: Ryan Assaf and Julia Koerber

-VP of Financial Affairs: Victoria Murray

-VP of Doctoral Affairs: Melissa Soohoo and Angie Barrall

-Outreach/Communications: Stephen Ma, Elizabeth Agredano, Lamia Khan, and Weilu Song

-PHSA Liaisons: Jackie Markt Maloney and Nayelie Benitez Santos

-Mentorship Chairs: Elizabeth Chen and Haesoo Kim

-Seminar Series: Pat Arena, Angie Barrall, Nehaa Khadka, and Xinyue Liu



# Publications Hot off the Press!



- Baker Z, **Gorbach P**, de Melo MG, Varela I, Sprinz E, Santos B, de Melo Rocha T, Simon M, Almeida M, Lira R, Chaves MC, Kerin T, Nielsen-Saines K. The Effect of Partnership Presence and Support on HIV Viral Suppression Among Serodiscordant Partnered and Single Heterosexual HIV-Positive Individuals in Brazil. *AIDS Behav.* 2021 Jan 2:1–8. doi: 10.1007/s10461-020-03124-5. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 33389326; PMCID: PMC7778561.
- Blossnich JR, Clark KA, Mays VM, **Cochran SD**. Sexual and Gender Minority Status and Firearms in the Household: Findings From the 2017 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Surveys, California and Texas. *Public Health Rep.* 2020 Nov/Dec;135(6):778-784. doi: 10.1177/0033354920954789. Epub 2020 Oct 7. PMID: 33026962; PMCID: PMC7650000.
- **Chen L**, Zhu Y, Fei Z, Xia T, Hinkle S, Liu X, Wu Jing, Weir NL, Tsai MY, Zhang C. Plasma Phospholipid n-3/n-6 Polyunsaturated Fatty Acids and Desaturase Activities in Relation to Moderate-to-Vigorous Physical Activity through Pregnancy-A Longitudinal Study within the NICHD Fetal Growth Studies. *Nutrients.* 2020 Nov 19:12(11):3544. PMID: 33227993; PMCID: PMC7699189
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- **Folle, A.D.**, Paul, K.C., Kusters, C., Bronstein, J.M., Kenner, A.M., & **Ritz, B.** (2020). Parkinson's Disease Motor and Non-Motor Features Accompanying Insomnia and Excessive Daytime Sleepiness Symptoms, a Large Population-Based Study. *Geriatrics*, 4, 1-17.
- Francis, E. C., Charron, E., Li, M., **Chen, L.**, Mayo, R., Butler, L. S., & Rennert, L. (2020). Third trimester maternal vitamin D and early childhood socioemotional development. *Paediatric and perinatal epidemiology*, 10.1111/ppe.12736. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ppe.12736>
- Hazlett C, Wulf DA, Pasaniuc B, **Arah OA**, Erlandson KM, Montague BT. Credible learning of hydroxychloroquine and dexamethasone effects on COVID-19 mortality outside of randomized trials. *medRxiv [Preprint]*. 2020 Dec 8:2020.12.06.20244798. doi: 10.1101/2020.12.06.20244798. PMID: 33330889; PMCID: PMC7743100.
- Inoue K, **Nianogo R**, Telesca D, Goto A, Khachadourian V, Tsugawa Y, Sugiyama T, **Mayeda ER**, **Ritz B**. Low HbA1c levels and all-cause or cardiovascular mortality among people without diabetes: the US National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey 1999-2015. *Int J Epidemiol.* 2020 Dec 30:dyaa263. doi: 10.1093/ije/dyaa263. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 33378417.
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- **Saleska, J. L.**, & **Lee, S. J.** (2020). Normalization of Preexposure Prophylaxis for Adolescents: Empowerment, Not Vulnerability. *JAMA pediatrics*, 174(12), 1133–1134. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2020.2545>
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