



**Arnold School of
Public Health**
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Fall 2024 Newsletter

The purpose of our Global Health Newsletter is to disseminate the global health research, education, and outreach of our faculty, staff, students, and alumni.

Postdoctoral Fellow Spotlight

*Dèsirée Vidaña-Pérez, PhD, Department of Health Promotion,
Education, and Behavior*



Tell us a bit about yourself, your education, and how it led you to USC.

I was born into a single parent household and my mother did not have a professional career, so she always told me the worth of getting a degree and being able to achieve goals that she only could dream of. This inspired me to pursue clear professional goals.

I wanted to do something related to research and, maybe because all the U.S movies that I saw growing up, I knew that I wanted to study or work abroad. Of course, little Dèsirée thought that she was going to pursue research doing something like chemistry or physics only to discover those subjects were not her strong suit. So, I ultimately found my passion in “human behavior” and graduated as a Social Psychologist. After earning my degree, I felt my education was far from over, so I pursued a Master’s in Sexual and Reproductive Health at the National Institute of Public Health (INSP). This led to a summer scholarship at the T.H. Chan Harvard School of Public Health and subsequently a PhD in Epidemiology, with a year abroad at Drexel University with the incomparable Dr Diez-Roux. Now, I am thrilled to be working as a postdoc under Dr. James Thrasher at USC, focusing on tobacco-related projects in Latin America.

How would you describe your current global health research?

Currently, my global health research is focused on two main areas, the first one revolves around the use of electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes). In Latin American countries, the use of e-cigarettes is becoming an alarming public health problem, especially among the youth. So, we have been researching what are the factors that are associated with this use among adolescents in Guatemala finding that the exposure to online advertisements and having social networks who use cigarettes and e-cigarettes increased adolescent consumption and susceptibility to e-cigarettes. Additionally, I have

been working on understanding how e-cigarettes are obtained in Mexico, since they are currently banned in the country. The second area, that I am more recently exploring is in trying to characterize and understand the patterns of intermittent smoking among adults in Mexico, which is the most prevalent smoking pattern. The first step to being able to tackle a problem is understanding it and generating data.

How has your time at USC prepared you for your future career path?

Having Dr. Thrasher as a mentor has prepared me for my future in many ways. For starters, I have been given the opportunity to grow outside my comfort zone by being involved in projects that use complex statistical methodology and that was completely new to me. I have been able to share the room with top international researchers and be part of the conversation when developing an idea and turning it into a possible funding opportunity. Also, I have been part of writing grants and that is a huge skill to have in the research field. In addition, it has allowed me to work on my strengths, helping me improve those activities that I already liked to do, such as writing manuscripts, teaching, and peer mentoring.

What do you recommend to current students at USC that are interested in global health?

If you have already identified a topic of interest, approach researchers, postdocs, students that are already working on it and talk to them, even if they are currently in no position to offer you something, networking is essential. It goes without saying that you should try to enroll in global health courses, and if possible, try to find internships, volunteer, attend global health events, and even study abroad -if possible. Finally, no matter which part of the world you are interested in working with, it is vital to go the extra mile and really immerse yourself and understand the culture and beliefs of the region or country. Global research needs to be conducted in an ethical way and avoiding the “white saviour complex” that sometimes is attached to global researchers. We need to respect,

collaborate, and most importantly empower the countries or people that we are going to be working with, that is the only way we will help create change.

Student Spotlight

Victoria Adebiyi, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Health Promotion, Education, and Behavior, was recently featured in the ASN Global Nutrition Council Newsletter. See the highlights below:

JANUARY-JUNE 2024



STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS: VICTORIA ADEBIYI

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/victoria-adebiyi/>

Tell us a bit about yourself?

I am from Nigeria, where I obtained my bachelor's degree in Human Nutrition from the University of Ibadan. I also trained as a Nigerian Registered Dietitian at a tertiary hospital – the University College Hospital, Ibadan. Subsequently, I obtained a Master of Public Health degree in Public Health Nutrition from the University of California, Berkeley with the sponsorship of the prestigious Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program.

Where are you studying your PhD?:

I am a PhD candidate at the Health Promotion, Education, and Behavior Department in the Arnold School of Public Health, University of South Carolina. Dr. Leila Larson and Dr. Edward Frongillo, both global nutrition researchers are my advisors. Here is the link to our research lab: <https://theneilab.com/>

Tell us about your PhD thesis?

My dissertation aims to understand how working mothers in urban Nigeria make breastfeeding decisions. I also intend to understand the role of mothers' social networks and their workplace environment on their breastfeeding decisions and practices. This study is funded by a training grant from the Nestle Foundation.

Why did you join the GNC?

I joined GNC to engage with GNC members and learn about their work and contribute to discussions in the field of global nutrition and health, since my research interests align with those of GNC. I have had a great experience with the GNC governing committee so far. As a student representative, I appreciate being a part of decision-making in GNC-related issues and bringing student perspectives, including those of international students to GNC discussions. I have also enjoyed meeting people within and outside the United States who are conducting interesting research in global nutrition and health at different career levels.

What are your plans after you finish?

Post-graduation, I intend to explore career opportunities with research institutes, international non-governmental organizations, or academia. I want to lead research to generate evidence and design, implement and evaluate evidence-based interventions for improved maternal and child nutrition and health in Sub-Saharan Africa and other low and middle-income countries.

Highlighting Global Health Work at USC



Congratulations!

Faculty affiliate Dr. Merchant has been honored with the Fulbright Scholars Award, where he was selected to help build capacity for public health research in Pakistan.

 **Nutrition Consortium**
Arnold School of Public Health
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Congratulations to global health faculty member, **Dr. Merchant**, for receiving the Fullbright Scholars Award, where he has been selected to build capacity for public health research in Pakistan. View details below:

Fullbright Scholars Award

As we continue to build our semester newsletters, it would be helpful to get your suggestions on individuals (faculty, staff, students, or alumni) that we should highlight. If you know of anyone at or affiliated with USC who is currently doing global health work that you recommend we reach out to, please email emkenney@email.sc.edu.

Global Health Events

Save the Date!

The Global Health Initiative will host an Implementation Science Seminar featuring Dr. Sara Wilcox and Dr. Pam Gillam on September 6th from 12:00-1:00pm in DISC 331



Save the Date! The Global Health Initiative will host an Implementation Science Seminar featuring Dr. Sara Wilcox and Dr. Pam Gillam on **September 6th from 12:00-1:00pm in DISC 331**. More information coming soon.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT AND GLOBAL HEALTH FORUM: PRESENTERS NEEDED



Each year, the ASPH enrolls around 100 international students who have diverse backgrounds, varied experiences, and come from a variety of countries. We want to hear from you! We are seeking international students who will volunteer to make 15–20-minute presentations on any aspect of public health improvements or challenges related to their home country.

If interested, please contact Victoria Adebiji (vadebiyi@email.sc.edu).



Each year, the ASPH enrolls around 100 international students who have diverse backgrounds, varied experiences, and come from a variety of countries. The International Student and Global Health Forum is a place for students to present their international interests and expertise in global health.

We want to hear from you! We are seeking international students

who will volunteer to make 15–20-minute presentations on any aspect of the public health improvements or challenges of their home country. Please email Victoria Adebiyi (vadebiyi@email.sc.edu) if you are interested in presenting. Also, join the Global Health Student listserv for updates on events, opportunities, and more.

[Join the Student Listserv](#)

Recent Publications

Ahmed F, Boogaerts T, **Bowes DA**, et al. Enhanced estimation of the prevalence of treated mental health disorders by wastewater-based epidemiology. *Nat Mental Health*. 2024;2(4):345-347. doi:[10.1038/s44220-024-00222-4](https://doi.org/10.1038/s44220-024-00222-4)

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