

# Building Local Capacity to Identify Barriers to Paternal Engagement and Increase Awareness of Child Malnutrition in Rural Guatemala

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## BACKGROUND

- Guatemala has the highest prevalence of child malnutrition in Latin America with nearly 50% of children experiencing chronic malnutrition and, subsequently, stunting.
- The 2014–2015 National Maternal and Child Health Survey in Guatemala reveals a higher prevalence of stunting among low-income, low-educated, and indigenous communities, suggesting that social, political, and economic factors influence the persistence of malnutrition in Guatemala.
- Globally, engagement with fathers has been shown to help improve the nutrition of children under 5 years old, but research regarding this in Guatemala is limited.
- Primeros Pasos (PP) is an NGO in Quetzaltenango that focuses on alleviating child malnutrition. Since 2002, they have been providing comprehensive healthcare to the ten rural communities of the Palajunoj Valley (PV).
- PP operates a primary care clinic with medical, dental, and pharmacy services as well as mobile clinics and health education initiatives through community outreach.
- Their community-level workshops primarily reach mothers and their children, the majority of whom identify as and/or speak K'iche' (the most widely-spoken indigenous language in Guatemala).

## PURPOSE

- Prior educational programs focused on child malnutrition have primarily targeted women.
- However, within PV, barriers to paternal engagement have not been extensively explored.
- In collaboration with PP, this project aimed to build local capacity through the creation of a sustainable ethical review committee and training PP staff in conducting interviews with fathers.
- These capacity-building strategies will allow for a multisite mixed-methods pilot study to assess barriers to nutrition and promote public health awareness among fathers in PV.

## OBJECTIVES

- Submit a proposal for the This is Public Health (TIPH) Global Grant through the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health (ASPPH)
- Support PP on-site through health education workshops and administrative tasks
- Contact Guatemalan researchers and healthcare professionals regarding organizing an ethical review committee for PP to review the proposed pilot study
- Train PP staff in IRB protocols and conducting in-depth interviews with fathers in PV
- Complete a six-week K'iche' language program through the Mayan Language Institute to better understand the communities within PV and their relationship with nutrition and health



## OUTCOMES

Through my practicum, I:

- Co-wrote and submitted a TIPH Global Grant proposal that was selected for funding
- Co-developed a study protocol, consent form, eligibility survey, and in-depth interview guide in Spanish for IRB review
- Co-created a sustainable ethical review committee for PP alongside a local consultant, which Vanderbilt's IRB approved
- Conducted on-site engagement at PP between May-June 2023 to identify partners and facilitate 5 health education workshops for 30+ community members
- Completed the K'iche' language program between June-July 2023 to inform my understanding of the communities within PV
- Will train PP staff in IRB protocols and conducting in-depth interviews with fathers in PV

## LESSONS LEARNED

- Receiving local ethical approval for projects within countries outside the United States is essential to global health.
- However, context-specific barriers can delay ethical review.
- Integrating intercultural humility is necessary when navigating multisectoral parties in various countries.
- There is a high interest within Guatemala for increasing male engagement in nutrition programming to expand funding mechanisms that support community empowerment efforts.
- The community you intend to serve must be actively involved at every step.

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