



# BOW STREET BULLETIN

News and Ideas from the  
**Harvard Center for Population and  
Development Studies**

[www.hsph.harvard.edu/cpds](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/cpds) • Fall 2015



## Harvard Pop Center economist studies implications of Burundi's high fertility rate

A consortium of researchers from Harvard's Center for Population and Development Studies (Pop Center), the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, the Harvard Medical School, and the University of Burundi have undertaken a series of studies to investigate the impact of reproductive health and family planning on well-being and poverty in Burundi. The country and its people are of a particular passion for Jocelyn Finlay, director of the Research Core at the Pop Center. Over the past few years, she has served as an investigator on two ongoing Burundi studies and is in preparations to serve as principal investigator for a third.



From left, collaborators Jocelyn Finlay, Jacques Ndikubagenzi, David Canning, and Mahesh Karra

Burundi—which was entrenched in a brutal civil war from 1993 to 2005—is now the third poorest country in the world. Among the many challenges to Burundi's long-term development is its rapid population growth (2.4% per year) and the fact that the country has one of the world's highest total fertility rates (TFR) at 6.5 children per woman. Women start bearing children at an early age and often have several in a short time span. According to the 2010 Burundi Demographic and Health Survey, 18% of the women and 44% of the children suffer from anemia, which can render the women unable to work and care for their children, and the children inhibited in their cognitive growth and development. More

than 30% of children in Burundi are underweight and deprived of proper nutrition.

As a result of these harsh realities, family planning and its impact on overall health and economic well-being is considered critical to

curbing the rapid population growth and breaking out of the desperate cycle of poverty. For Finlay and her colleagues, understanding the cultural norms and other factors that contribute to the high TFR is key. "For young girls in Burundi—particularly those orphaned in the civil war—getting married and having a child is seen as a means of securing their future and their safety. It's their ticket into society; they don't see any other way," explains Finlay. "But having children when they are so young—and having so many children—ends up being the thing that causes them to be more poor and destitute and further entraps them into a cycle of poverty with their children."

### Family planning and family health

The evolution of the Pop Center's work in Burundi has been very organic, with new projects naturally evolving from, and building upon, existing ones. The flagship project in the series, funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, is being led by the Center's associate director, David Canning, and was launched in 2012. The project, "Examining the Impact of Family Planning on Fertility, Maternal and Child Health, and Economic Well-Being: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Urban Burundi," is seeking to identify the causal impact of family planning on fertility, maternal and child health (MCH) outcomes, and measures of economic well-being. The study will also collect biometric data in order to examine child nutrition outcomes, maternal BMI, and mother-child anemia status.

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# BOW STREET BULLETIN

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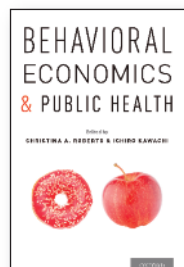
## News briefs

Below is a sampling of the recent achievements of Pop Center faculty, fellows, affiliates, and staff. Congratulations to all!

### Announcements

■ Nominations for the **Sissela Bok Ethics and Population Research Award** will be accepted between September 15, 2015 and December 7, 2015. The \$5,000 grant is awarded every other year to a doctoral student, postdoctoral fellow, or junior faculty member at Harvard who has a stellar record of incorporating ethical considerations into their population science research. Applications should be in the form of written nominations by department chairs or dissertation chairs (for doctoral students). Recipients will be selected by a small committee within the Center. Details can be found at [www.hsph.harvard.edu/cpds](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/cpds).

■ Congratulations to **Ichiro Kawachi** and **Christina Roberto** for the publication of their book, *Behavioral Economics and Public Health*. Kawachi, a Pop Center faculty member, is the John L. Loeb and Frances Lehman Loeb Professor of Social Epidemiology and chair of the Department of Social & Behavioral Sciences at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Roberto, a former RWJF Health & Society Scholar at the Pop Center, is now assistant professor of Medical Ethics & Health Policy at the University of Pennsylvania. This is the first book to apply the groundbreaking insights of behavioral economics to the persisting problems of health behaviors and behavior change. Seed funding to plan the book was provided by the Pop Center in 2014.



### Moving On

■ **Clemens Noelke**, Bell Fellow and research associate at the Harvard Pop Center, has begun a research scientist position at the Institute for Child, Youth and Family Policy, Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University.

■ Research assistant **Jamie Porter** left the Pop Center this summer to begin medical school at the University of Pittsburg.

### In the News

■ **Hiram Beltran-Sanchez**, a former Harvard Pop Center Bell Fellow and now assistant professor at the School of Public Health at UCLA, received much media attention this summer after his study on male mortality was published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. Using historical data, he and his co-authors found that although female life expectancy now exceeds that of males in all countries, it is a relatively recent demographic phenomenon that emerged, with the reduction of infections and the increase in the share of adult mortality attributed to cancer and cardiovascular disease. The biggest culprit for this surge of death rates for men? Heart disease, the study concludes. Even after accounting for deaths due to smoking, cardiovascular disease appears to still be the leading cause of most preventable deaths in men over 40.

■ **Jennifer Karas Montez**, alumna of the RWJF Health & Society Scholars program at Harvard and currently assistant professor of sociology at Syracuse University, briefed congressional staff on the impact of education on mortality and health in Washington DC on July 27. See the detailed recap at <http://www.populationassociation.org/government-affairs/congressional-activities/>

### New Funding

■ “Health Impact Project,” a two-year grant awarded to Yerby Postdoctoral Fellow **Mariana Arcaya** by the Pew Charitable Trust and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

■ “Stop Stunting in South Asia,” a grant awarded by UNICEF to **SV Subramanian**, Professor of Population Health and Geography, Harvard Chan School and Pop Center faculty member.

### Recent Pop Center seed grant awards funded by the RWJF Health & Society Scholars program included:

■ “Greenspace as an Environmental Buffer to Social Stressors” (**PI: Colleen Reid**, RWJF Health & Society Scholar, Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies)

■ “The Folly of Forgetting History: Why Should Current Ahistorical Global Discourses on Infant Mortality Take into Account How the United States and Other Countries Reduced Infant Mortality during the Early 20th Century?” (PIs: **SV Subramanian**, Professor of Population Health and Geography, and **Nancy Krieger**, Professor of Social Epidemiology, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health)

#### Recent Publications

■ Pop Center Faculty Member **Mauricio Avendano** has co-authored a cross-national study examining whether changes in different forms of social participation were associated with changes in depressive symptoms in older Europeans. Findings show increased participation in religious organizations predicted a decline in depressive symptoms, while participation in political/community organizations was associated with an increase in depressive symptoms. The study was published in the *American Journal of Epidemiology* and was also referenced in *Newsweek*.

■ Harvard Chan School associate professor of child health and human rights and Pop Center faculty member **Theresa Betancourt** was lead author on a study published in *Pediatrics* that assesses the longer-term impact of mental health interventions on war-affected youth in Sierra Leone.

■ **David Cutler**, Harvard economist and Harvard Pop Center faculty member, authored “From the Affordable Care Act to Affordable Care,” that was published as a “Viewpoint” feature in *JAMA*. Cutler argued that future health policies must focus on slowing the increase in health costs and on improving the practice environment for physicians.

■ Harvard Pop Center Research Core Director **Jocelyn Finlay** was lead author on a study published in *Maternal and Child Health Journal* that reveals a much higher mortality rate for those children who lost their mother during or shortly after birth. This suggests that improving health care of mothers, particularly while pregnant and during birth, will help to save children’s lives. Harvard Pop Center Associate Director David Canning was also an author on the study.

■ **Ann Forsyth**, Harvard Design School professor and Pop Center faculty member, was lead author on a paper titled, “Perceived and Police-Reported Neighborhood Crime: Linkages to Adolescent Activity Behaviors and Weight Status.” Published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, the study addressed the relationships of perceived and objective reports of neighborhood crime to adolescent physical activity, screen media use, and BMI.

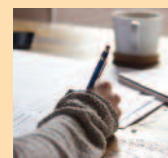
■ Harvard Pop Center Visiting Scientist **Sanjay K. Mohanty** and Faculty Member **SV Subramanian** were co-authors on a study published in *Social Indicators Research* that explored poverty and inequality throughout the regions of India over two decades. They conclude that the extent of poverty in India has lessened, while economic inequality has increased.

■ RWJF Health & Society Scholar program at Harvard alum **Arijit Nandi** co-authored a paper published in *Social Science & Medicine* that studied 20 low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) and found that more generous paid maternity leave benefits were associated with higher rates of immunization for DTP (diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis).

■ RWJF Health & Society Scholar at Harvard **Selena Ortiz** was lead author on a study published in *Medical Care* that reveals that the odds of receiving certain disease-management exams were lower for those Mexican immigrants in California of higher generational status.

■ It is well known that adolescent body mass index (BMI) shows school-level clustering. And now a new study by Harvard Pop Center faculty member **SV Subramanian** and RWJF Health & Society Scholar **Adam Lippert** shows that years after leaving school, BMIs are persistently clustered by the school the respondents attended during adolescence. The study was published in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*.

■ Harvard Pop Center faculty members and Mass General Hospital physicians **Atheendar Venkataramani** and **Alexander Tsai** have co-authored a study in *Social Science and Medicine* examining the causal effect of education on HIV stigma in Uganda. The study finds that negative attitudes about HIV are as prevalent among younger people as among older, despite the younger people having received additional schooling.



## CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

This fall we are accepting applications for two postdoctoral training programs at the Harvard Pop Center:

### David E. Bell Fellowship

The Bell Fellowship Program provides opportunities for research and leadership training in a flexible, 1 or 2 year non-degree, interdisciplinary training program for researchers and practitioners in the field of population and development.

### Sloan Fellowship on Aging and Work

The Sloan Fellowship on Aging and Work is also an interdisciplinary, postdoctoral training program that focusses on the challenges of aging societies and labor force participation.

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Selected fellows in both programs will conduct self-directed research (proposed in their applications) under the guidance of a faculty mentor team. Salary plus fringe benefits and research/travel funds are offered.

The fellowships will begin on September 1, 2016. All doctoral requirements must be completed by the time of entry in the program.

Complete details can be found on our website at [www.hsph.harvard.edu/cpds](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/cpds).

The deadline to submit applications is December 7, 2015.



## Pop Center economist studies implications of Burundi's high fertility rate, *continued from page 1*

Unrest in Burundi, coupled with a recent travel advisory, necessitated a temporary halt of all field work for the project, which is currently in the pilot phase. But Finlay, who serves as a co-investigator, believes the project has already been invaluable, not only as a source of data, but as a vehicle for relationship building between the Pop Center researchers and their colleagues in Burundi.



The Republic of Burundi, whose neighboring countries include Rwanda, Tanzania, and Democratic Republic of the Congo, has a population of 10 million (World Bank 2013).

### The nature of work

The family planning aspects of the Canning-led study naturally gave rise to a new study that Finlay led in Burundi in January 2015. Entitled “Qualitative Study on Women’s Attitudes towards the Relationship between Children and Work in Bujumbura,” the project sought to uncover local terminology relating to the daily activities of local women to better understand how they think about work. The qualitative study was funded by the Pop Center and allowed for the opportunity to talk to the women about how they make ends meet, the role poverty plays in their idea of work, and the relationship between children and work (i.e., the work-family balance).

Finlay felt that the qualitative nature of the study yielded a deep understanding of the lives and beliefs of Burundi’s women. “When you talk in detail with open-ended questions to the local women, you get so much detail about their lives,” she says. The close

relationship between Canning’s quantitative study and Finlay’s qualitative work created a mixed methodology approach that is rare in the world of research studies, but it’s an approach Finlay finds beneficial nonetheless. “From the qualitative studies, you also get insight into the types of questions you want to ask in the bigger, quantitative surveys like David’s. And you can construct those questions so that they make sense with the women being surveyed.”

### Who are the most vulnerable women?

As Finlay spoke in detail to the women in her focus groups, she became aware of the fact that a certain segment of women in Burundi are more vulnerable to circumstances and behaviors that ensnare them in a cycle of poverty. In an effort to learn more about who these women are, and how they might be helped, Finlay and her colleagues conceived a new study to investigate the impact of reproductive health and family planning on health and poverty in Burundi. The three-year-long project, to be launched in 2016, will focus specifically on empowering young women in Burundi to improve their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

Finlay and her team believe that by identifying Burundi’s most vulnerable

understanding what they can do to ensure that their circumstances aren’t quite so difficult.”

One assumption is that the most vulnerable women are those who were orphaned in the civil war. But they could also be young girls in general who start having children at a very young age—and keep on having them at a steady rate. “Many of the women I’ve talked to said that one baby is not a problem at all. They say you can always manage to work a little bit when you have one baby,” says Finlay, “It’s when you start having multiple babies close together that the poverty really kicks in and becomes acute.” Some women told Finlay that spacing out the children was critical for balancing the families’ financial resources, as well as the mothers’ ability to work and otherwise provide for the children. As a result, one of the interventions likely to be developed will teach women how to space apart their pregnancies.

### Thinking long-term

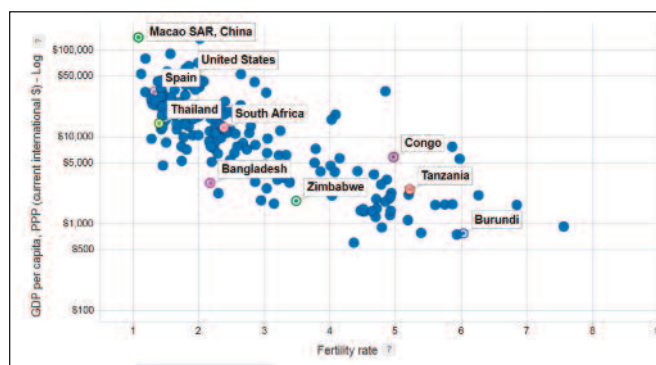
Burundi has been back in the news lately due to the unrest associated with the recent election. As a result, Finlay and her team are entering the early stages of their project with cautious optimism, with the hope of beginning field research in Burundi

in January 2016. In the meantime, she is focusing on completing administrative issues such as budgeting and human subjects approval so that she can hit the ground running once she lands in Burundi.

At the close of the project, Finlay and her colleagues hope to have identified the most vulnerable and at risk women in Burundi in terms of SRHR and to have advanced the

cause of sexual and reproductive health knowledge.

“I feel very committed to the community with whom I work in Burundi,” says Finlay. “And I believe these projects we are working on can have a real impact.” ■



A comparison of GDP per capita with fertility rates. High fertility is both a cause and consequence of poverty.

women in terms of SRHR, they can create targeted education and outreach aimed at empowering these women to claim their reproductive rights. Says Finlay “We see this as a first step toward these women getting a bit more control of their lives and

## Introducing the Pop Center's incoming researchers and staff



**Neha Bairoliya** received her PhD in Economics from the University of Minnesota. Her doctoral dissertation investigated the quantitative impact of the change in pension landscape on the recent

increase in labor force participation of older workers in the U.S. Her research interests lie in quantitative macroeconomic modeling, structural estimation, understanding the determinants of labor market outcomes, and examining pension and healthcare systems for the elderly. As a Pop Center research associate, she is investigating the welfare effects of balancing the federal social security and healthcare budgets with Professor David Canning.



**Xavier Gomez-Olive** is an incoming Bell Fellow who holds a PhD in Public Health from the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa. Xavier's research aims to provide insight

into how health policies and interventions can effectively respond to the demands of an aging population that has been, and will continue to be, profoundly affected by HIV and non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Xavier will also continue to serve as a field research manager for the Pop Center's Health and Aging in Africa: Longitudinal Studies of INDEPTH communities (HAALSI) project.



**H. Ray Miller** is a research associate working with Professor David Canning on a study examining the welfare effects of balancing the federal social security and health care budgets.

He recently graduated with a PhD in Economics from the University of Pittsburgh. Ray's additional research interests include the macro and micro implications of early life health inequalities, including the link between health and schooling gaps and the impact of seasonal food scarcity on child health.



**Collin Payne's** research integrates approaches from demography, epidemiology, sociology, and biostatistics to improve empirical and theoretical models of population health in

low-resource contexts. He received his PhD from the University of Pennsylvania, where his dissertation focused on the health of aging populations in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. As a Bell Fellow, Collin is studying how the HIV epidemic and the introduction of new treatments has impacted population health, economic activity, and family structure in Sub-Saharan Africa.



**Louise Paul-Delvaux** is a research fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School's Evidence for Policy Design and the Harvard Pop Center, working on projects involving financial inclu-

sion in India and on a large-scale project researching maternal and infant health in India. Louise recently graduated from the Paris School of Economics with a Master's degree in Analysis and Policy in Economics (APE) and from ENSAE-Paristech with an MS in Data Science & Statistics.



**Julia Rohr** is a research analyst for the Health and Aging in Africa: Longitudinal Studies of INDEPTH communities (HAALSI) project. She is providing comprehensive data management

and analysis for the study, participating in research dissemination, and training team members on data collection. Julia holds a PhD in Epidemiology from Boston University. Prior to joining us, she worked as a data analyst in the Center for Global Health and Development at the BU School of Public Health, where she served as program manager for a number of studies in Kenya, South Africa, and Uganda.



**Bettina Siflinger** obtained a PhD in Economics at the University of Munich in 2013. Her primary research interests are focused in the fields of empirical health eco-

nomics, the economics of aging, and microeconometrics. In a number of previous research projects, she has analyzed the long-lasting consequences of adverse life events for socioeconomic and health outcomes later in life. As a visiting scientist for 2015–2016 at the HCPDS, she will continue her research on the impact of life events on health, marriage, and labor market outcomes over the life cycle.



**Juli Simon Thomas** holds a PhD in Sociology from the University of California, Los Angeles. She is particularly interested in the roles that education and income inequality

play in social stratification and mobility. Her dissertation focused on how children's education attainment is affected by "event shock" brought on by disruptions in their parents' lives. As a Bell Fellow, Juli is expanding this work by conducting cross-national comparisons to see if children's educational outcomes after parental disruptive events vary between countries.

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# Upcoming Fall 2015 Events

## POP CENTER SEMINARS

Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies, 9 Bow Street, Cambridge, 4:00 PM – 5:30 PM

These Monday sessions are open to everyone: faculty, research scientists, postdoctoral fellows and students.

DATE	TITLES & SEMINAR LEADERS
September 29	<b>Killer Kool: Menthol Smokes, Identity, and the Troubled History of Racial Health Disparities</b> Keith Wailoo, Townsend Martin Professor of History and Public Affairs, Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University
October 26	<b>The Demographic and Health Surveys Program: Current Research</b> Thomas W. Pullum, Director of Research, The Demographic Health Surveys Program, ICF International
November 16	<b>Economic Opportunity and Health in the United States</b> Atheendar Venkataramani, Physician, Harvard Medical School and Instructor, Division of General Internal Medicine, Massachusetts General Hospital
December 7	<b>Social Determinants of Health: Research in Action in Different Contexts</b> Sir Michael Marmot, Director, Institute of Health Equity, University College London

## ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION HEALTH & SOCIETY SCHOLARS SEMINARS

Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, 677 Huntington Ave, Kresge 708, 4:00 PM – 5:30 PM (unless noted by an \*)

These Thursday sessions are open to faculty, research scientists, and postdoctoral fellows.

DATE	TITLES & SEMINAR LEADERS
September 24	<b>Getting Respect: Dealing with Stigma and Discrimination in the United States, Brazil, and Israel</b> Michèle Lamont, Robert I. Goldman Professor of European Studies and Professor of Sociology and African and African-American Studies, Harvard University; Director Designate, Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University <i>*Note: This event will be held at the Harvard Pop Center.</i>
October 8	<b>The End of an Epidemic: Public Health Practices and HIV/AIDS in 2015</b> Evelynn M. Hammonds, Barbara Gutmann Rosenkrantz Professor of the History of Science and Professor of African and African American Studies, Harvard University <i>*Note: This event will be held in Kresge 606.</i>
October 22	<b>Gender Expression, Stigma, and Public Health: Research Insights Into the Burden on Child Health</b> S. Bryn Austin, Professor in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health
November 5	<b>Affect Contagion: Physiological Covariation Among Strangers and Close Others</b> Wendy Berry Mendes, Sarlo/Ekman Endowed Chair in the Study of Human Emotion and Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry, University of California, San Francisco
November 19	<b>Fetal Origins of the Aging of Memory Circuitry</b> Emily Goard Jacobs, Instructor of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School; Research Associate Psychologist, Brigham and Women's Hospital
December 10	<b>The Effects of Early Psychosocial Deprivation on Brain-behavioral Development</b> Charles Nelson, Professor of Pediatrics, Boston Children's Hospital; Director of Research, Developmental Medicine Center, Boston Children's Hospital

## FRIDAY LUNCHEON SEMINARS

Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies, 9 Bow Street, Cambridge, 12:30 PM – 1:30 PM

These Friday seminars, co-sponsored by the Harvard Pop Center and the Program on the Global Demography of Aging, focus on salient issues in population health, demography, and economics, and serve as opportunities for researchers to garner important feedback from others working in similar areas. Open to everyone: faculty, research scientists, postdoctoral fellows and students. Lunch is provided. Please check our website for seminar titles.

DATE	SEMINAR LEADERS
September 18	Iris Kesternich, Assistant Professor for Applied Microeconometrics, University of Leuven
October 2	<b>Special Event: A Conversation with Margaret Ann Jay, Baroness Jay of Paddington, Labour Party Politician, United Kingdom</b> Please join Pop Center Director Lisa Berkman and special guest Baroness Jay of Paddington in a facilitated discussion on aging in the UK and the U.S., the rise of extremism among young people in Europe, and the threat of a UK breakup.
October 9	Sebastian Vollmer, Assistant Professor of Development Economics, University of Göttingen
October 16	Chandra Jackson, Research Associate, Department of Epidemiology, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health
October 30	Colleen Reid, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health & Society Scholar, Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies
November 6	Yusuf Ransome, Alonzo Smythe Yerby Fellow, Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health
November 13	Stéphane Verguet, Assistant Professor of Global Health, Department of Global Health and Population, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health
November 20	Ester Villalonga Olives, Research Fellow, Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health
December 4	Angie Boyce, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health & Society Scholar, Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies
December 11	Jessica Houston Su, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University at Buffalo-SUNY

## FEATURED SEMINAR



### **Memorial Workshop: John Briscoe's Enduring Legacy Panel Discussion on Water, Sanitation and Poverty; Natural Resources and Environment; Population and Development.**

**Friday October 23, 2015, 3:00 PM – 5:00 PM, with a reception to follow.**

The Harvard Pop Center is pleased to host a memorial workshop in honor of the late John Briscoe, who served as director of the Harvard Water Security Initiative, an interdisciplinary program for graduate and undergraduate students. Briscoe also held professorships at the Harvard School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, the School of Public Health, and the Harvard Kennedy School. A native of South Africa, he was a former Senior Water Advisor at the World Bank and Country Director for Brazil. In March of 2014, Briscoe won the Stockholm Water Prize, widely known as “the Nobel Prize of water,” for his “unparalleled contributions to global and local management of water—contributions covering vast thematic, geographic, and institutional environments—that have improved the lives and livelihoods of millions of people worldwide.” He provided “the world with tools for peaceful, productive, and equitable management of the Earth’s water resources.” ■

Please join us at the Harvard Pop Center, 9 Bow Street in Cambridge, on October 23 for this event. The workshop runs from 3:00 PM – 5:00 PM, with a reception to follow.



## David Williams speaks on racial bias and its effect on health care

Eliminating racial and ethnic disparities in health in the U.S. isn't just the job of the health care sector—it's the job of society as a whole, argues David R. Williams, Florence Sprague Norman and Laura Smart Norman Professor of Public Health at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and Harvard Pop Center faculty member. Last month, Harvard Chan School senior writer, Karen Feldscher, interviewed Williams about race and health, excerpts of which are below:



Professor David Williams

“cheerful,” and “dangerous.” The word “white,” on the other hand, is most often linked with words such as “wealthy,” “progressive,” “conventional,” “stubborn,” “successful,” and “educated.” People absorb these sorts of messages and develop unconscious biases that favor whites over blacks. This happens even among people who believe in racial equality. Clinicians are no exception. Previous studies have shown, for instance, that higher levels of implicit bias among clinicians is linked with biased treatment recommendations for black patients, as well as poorer quality patient-doctor communication and lower ratings by patients from racial or ethnic minority groups about the quality of their encounters with doctors.

**Q: The article also noted that low socioeconomic status contributes to the health disparities faced by blacks and other nonwhites. What are some of the major ways that these two problems are connected?**

Blacks, American Indians, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders, low socioeconomic status Asian communities, and Latinos born in the U.S. all fall into an unfortunate category—compared with whites, they face illnesses earlier, experience illnesses more severely, deal with more rapid progression of illnesses, and suffer higher rates of impairment and death. Many of these

problems start before they even approach the health care system for help. That's because their socioeconomic status puts them at a disadvantage. In 2013, for every household income dollar earned by whites, Hispanics earned 70 cents and blacks just 59 cents. These economic disparities affect where people live, learn, work, play, and worship—and all of these factors can in turn impact health.

**Q: What about the role of stress—either from dealing personally with racial bias, or from hearing about tragedies such as the racially motivated killings in a black church in Charleston, South Carolina, or recent killings of unarmed black men by law enforcement?**

Stress certainly plays a huge part. We know that high levels of psychosocial stress can have serious health consequences—such as high blood pressure, asthma, obesity, cancer, and death, as well as damaging behaviors, such as poor sleep, smoking, and substance abuse. To lessen the negative health impacts of our nation's undercurrent of racial bias, we can work on several fronts. We can train our health care workers about the prevalence of disparities in health and health care. We can implement policies and interventions in homes, schools, neighborhoods, workplaces, and religious organizations aimed at promoting equality and encouraging healthy choices by individuals. Beyond that, there's a larger goal, of course—to dismantle racial bias not just in health care and in health, but wherever it exists in society. ■



### Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies

Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health  
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