

H.J. Heinz Company Foundation Fellowship Program 2005/2006

Report by
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Contents

1. Acknowledgement
2. Introduction
3. Fellowship Activities
4. Academic courses and seminars
5. Conferences, trainings and workshops
6. Professional development
7. Presented lectures
8. Voluntary activities
9. Internship
10. Research and special projects
11. Cultural life and further plans.

Acknowledgements

Saida Karimova
Midterm report, 2005-2006

I would like to thank first H. J. Heinz Company Foundation and International Studies Department University of Pittsburgh which gave me the great chance for me to pursue my professional and personal advancement. It is been a great year full of unforgettable memories: networking, learning, and making wonderful friends.

UCIS staffs also helped me a lot with my learning. Especially, I would like to give my gratitude to Elaine E. Linn, a program coordinator, for providing such a warm environment and professional guidance in all of my activities. I cannot go too far in expressing my appreciation for her supports and time. The helps from Karen Perkins, Mark Weixel and many others are also unforgettable.

Lastly, I feel honored very much to have as my academic mentor Dr. Ron LaPorte, a professor of Epidemiology and a director of WHO Collaborating Center. He has always been a great mentor who has given me excellent guidance in my self-development, opened to me a broader horizon, and encouraged me to be more ambitious. His supports in all of my activities are enormous. Besides, he gave me the invaluable opportunity to learn more about public health by getting me involved in his team for Supercourse Project.

Introduction

I came to Pittsburgh on August 9, 2005 from Azerbaijan, an independent state of Former Soviet Republic (FSU). Azerbaijan gained its independence in 1991. Azerbaijan like all other FSU countries has undergone significant social, political and economic transformation since its independence. And generally speaking, all the change had a negative impact on the health status of people, in particular, women and children as the most vulnerable group. Health indicators have declined dramatically due to the lack of proper interventions of the government into the matter of public health and the shortage of well-trained public health professionals especially in the area of epidemiology and research. Thus public health has become one of the most serious concerns in FSU. As a clinician of Ob/Gyn and at the same time a participant in NGO, I have been actively engaged in promoting family planning and woman's health in my country in cooperation with NGO. The problem, however, was that I did not have sufficient special academic training in the area of public health, which means despite my motivation I had neither enough knowledge nor work experience regarding public health. As such, I looked for the opportunity which would enable me to broaden my experience and get advanced knowledge/skills in the area of public health, particularly in the Epidemiology. And it was the Heinz fellowship that allowed my hope to be realized.

Epidemiology, I think, is a basic science of public health and preventive medicine. This is why I got especially interested in learning Epidemiological methods and the skills in designing, implementing and evaluating prevention programs in a community.

I also think that, as the world get more and more globalized, the Epidemiological research should not be limited to a country. For instance, an epidemic disease such as Avian Flu can have a disastrous influence all over the world, more importantly, on the most vulnerable people in the developing countries, namely, women and children. One of my goals therefore was to develop professional contacts with diverse NGO programs and health professionals working in the area of women's health and also gain a practical experience in a public health programs.

Fellowship Activities

During my fellowship I have participated in the following activities:

- Auditing of academic courses at the Graduate School of Public Health.

- Establishment of networking relationships with the government and non government organizations working in the area of Women's and Reproductive health.
- Participation in conferences, workshops, presentations and giving presentations myself.
- Working for the Supercourse Project.
- Observations and volunteering.
- Doing Internship, conducting research.
- Traveling, making new friends, obtaining more experiences about the social and cultural life in USA.

Academic courses and seminars

I audited the following courses and seminars during the fall and spring semester:

Fall semester:

Seminar in Maternal and Child health (in BSHC);
 Introduction to statistical methods 1;
 Principles of Epidemiology;
 Seminar in Epidemiology;
 Critical issues in Global health.

Spring semester:

Introduction to statistical methods 2;
 Epidemiological methods 1;
 Seminar in Epidemiology.

I also attended weekly conferences at the Magee Women Research Center.

All of these courses were very interesting, challenging, and gave me the bigger picture of the Public health. The seminar in maternal and child health gave me an advanced knowledge in leadership in the area of maternal and child health. Although I was not planning to take Biostatistics course, after hearing from my mentor about the course, I took it, which was because it was offered together with Epidemiology, a core course in Public health education. I continued to take Epidemiology and Biostatistics courses in the following spring term so that I could learn in depth the basics of Epidemiological research. I would like to mention also the course on Critical issues in Global health which enabled me to hear from

many speakers and experts on Global health. It allowed me to broaden and deepen my knowledge of the Global health issues.

Conferences, trainings and workshops

I got an opportunity to attend a number of conferences, workshops and lectures. These allowed me to network and to learn, and they met my needs very effectively in terms of new approaches and ideas. Meeting with my colleagues gave me the bigger picture of women's and public health issues in the USA and other countries, so I could evaluate and seek ways of addressing the problems in my country.

- **Magee-Women's health Hospital and research center**
I am very grateful to Dr. James M. Roberts, Director of Magee-Women's Research institute and Professor Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology & Reproductive Sciences for giving me the opportunity to attend their conferences and seminars, to get exposure to the latest research from one of the leading research centers on women's health in the USA, to be in touch with my colleagues, and to be up to date in the area of women's health research.
- **Childbirth classes for the teen-pregnant**, organized by Womenscare, Magee Women's Hospital.
- **International GAP Conference: Inequality, Health, & Society**; organized by: Global Studies Program, Graduate School of Public Health, May, 2006.
- **Creating poverty – free world by 2025: the Link between Health and Microfinance**. Lecture presented by: John Hatch, Founder, FINCA International, organized by World Affairs and Carnegie Mellon University, May, 2006.
- **Public insurance and Reproductive Health care training**, organized by Planned Parenthood, New York, April, 2006.
- **Advancing Women in the Global Workplace: Principles in Action symposium**, organized by UNIFEM; New York, April, 2006. This was one of the key places for networking. I created professional linkages with many people, which helped me to see again the importance of sharing information, fresh ideas and new approaches. Networking seems to be a key to advancing nowadays.

- **Sexual education for young people with disabilities through local program development**, organized by Magee- Women’s Hospital, March, 2006.
- **“Including the Voices of Disabled people in the International Development agenda,”** lecture by Judith E. Heumann, World Bank first adviser on Disability and development, February, 2006
- **10th Annual heart health seminar for minority women**, organized by American heart Association; Pittsburgh, November, 2005.
- **Second Annual John C. Cutler Global Health lecture “The Public health Consequences of Disaster: Challenges for Public health Action,”** presented by one of the leading disaster epidemiologists in the world, Eric Noji, MD, MPH Center for Disease Control and Prevention. I actively participated in organizing this event and provided Russian translation of the lecture on the web.

Professional development

One of the objectives of my fellowship is to develop professional networking relationships with the organizations working on women’s health. Through the year I created contacts with a variety of organizations and my colleagues working on women’s issues.

- **Ambulatory care services, Magee women’s health hospital.** I would like to thank Pamela Dodge, Director of Magee –Women’s Hospital Ambulatory Care Services, who introduced me to their work and allowed me to shadow Ob/Gyn practice at the outpatient clinic.
- **Women’s Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh.** Provides a 24-hour crisis hotline, temporary shelter, ongoing individual counseling and support groups, advocacy and support services for women victims of domestic violence and their children. They also provide school and community education and professional training on the scope and dynamics of domestic violence.
- **The Midwife Center for Birth & Women's Health** is southwestern Pennsylvania's only licensed and accredited freestanding birth center offering women gynecological care, prenatal care and childbirth. This center also provides a variety of courses for women.

- **Pennsylvania/Mid Atlantic AIDS Education and Training center**, which provides training for health care professionals and community members about HIV/AIDS.
- **Community Human Services Corporation**, South Oakland, provides a variety of services for the community, including health programs for women and children.
- **Planned Parenthood organization.** I got an opportunity to visit and develop professional contacts with the Planned Parenthood organization in New York City, one of the leading organizations providing reproductive health services and education for health professionals and the community. I plan to volunteer at the Planned Parenthood branch in Pittsburgh this summer.

Lectures presented:

“Azerbaijani Women: Healthcare and Rights in Upheaval,” organized by UCIS and the Center for Russian and East European Studies, May, 2006.

“Women’s health and rights in Azerbaijan,” Forum on Health care Conditions and Human Rights in Post-War and Developing Societies, Johnstown, University of Pittsburgh, April, 2006.

“Reproductive Health in Azerbaijan and the Supercourse.” Human Rights and the Security Continuum conference, GSPA, University of Pittsburgh, March, 2006.

Volunteer activities

I participated in the preparation of a workshop on childbirth education and healthy pregnancy for the Community Education/Resource Center in Kamchatka, Russia at the Magee Womancare International.

Internship

I have started doing my internship in Bethlehem Haven, a non profit organization which has provided shelter and safety for thousands of homeless and vulnerable

women. It also has a behavioral health clinic and a variety of programs on women's rehabilitation. I have been working on the development training materials on STD's and other health topics and will be conducting training for the residents. I also will be involved in the behavioral health clinic activity.

Research and special projects

- I have done research on maternal and child health care delivery trends in the Former Soviet Union (FSU) and the development of effective informational exchange of epidemiological data among women's health professionals in the FSU and around the globe. With the assistance of my mentor, Dr. Ron LaPorte, I recently submitted a paper, "Maternal and child health, and prevention in the FSU countries," to be published in "Maternal and Child health Journal."

- Since I have been in Pittsburgh, I have been working in the Supercourse project, which is a library of lectures on prevention and Public health from the best faculty's world wide. With the assistance of my mentor, I started developing a Supercourse specifically on women's health. Our main goals were

--to network with scientists and women's health professionals;

--to create a library of academic lectures from the leading faculty's and women's health professionals.

I strongly believe that many of the health problems experienced in Azerbaijan and other developing countries could be alleviated if there was better access to information on prevention. Improved information exchange on public health and prevention between faculty members across all countries, clinicians, and educators is the most cost effective means to improve Women's health. The internet could become a tool that could link women's health professionals world wide and speed up the translation of research information into the classrooms and local clinics.

For a short period, we were able to mobilize the scientist community to our network, collect more than 50 exciting lectures on women's health, and develop a women's health website. I also started a network of organizations working on women's health in Azerbaijan.

- Research funds

I spent part of my research funds on a computer. I also used it for the travel expenses to the conferences and registration fees. I plan to use the rest of my funds for buying books and travel.

Cultural life and further plans

One of the most enjoyable parts of my fellowship has been the opportunity for exposure to different social and cultural activities. I am especially grateful to Elaine Linn for supporting and encouraging us to explore the cultural diversity in Pittsburgh and the USA.

For the next two months, I will continue my internship at Bethlehem Haven and work on the Women's health web based project. I will also begin an internship at the Community Human Services Corporation and volunteer at the Planned Parenthood in Pittsburgh.