F26.51 Stress and Health among Parents and Families in northern Arizona

Overview

The inherent demands of parenthood have been exacerbated in recent decades due to shifting sociocultural systems and societal expectations. Consequently, many parents throughout the world are increasingly experiencing chronic stress and burnout characterized by exhaustion from parental responsibilities. Recognizing these concerns, the former Surgeon General of the United States released an advisory on the mental health of American parents, demonstrating that parents in the US consistently report higher levels of stress than other American adults. This report highlights the wellbeing of parents as a public health priority and encourages evidence-based research that investigates parental stress and burnout. In line with these initiatives, the NAU Human Biology and Health Laboratory (HBH Lab), directed by Dr. Melissa Liebert, is in the process of developing an interdisciplinary and community-based project that examines chronic stress, burnout, and health among parents and caregivers in northern Arizona. To date, the project has involved community-capacity building activities, including 20+ meetings with community partners and two outreach forums with local parents. The next stages of the project will prepare for (1) semi-structured interviews that explore the lived experiences of parents; (2) structured surveys that assess parental stress and burnout based on validated instruments; and (3) minimally invasive biomarkers of stress (e.g., blood pressure) that identify links between parental burnout and physical health outcomes. Through I2S, undergraduate students will help to advance the next steps of the project and participate in various stages of the research process.

What the student will DO and LEARN

The HBH Lab is dedicated to building capacity for student-centered research and training and supports experiential learning opportunities for NAU undergraduate students. The HBH Lab aims to provide students with the knowledge and tools to conduct scientifically robust and community-engaged research using qualitative and quantitative methods. For the proposed study on parental stress and health, student interns will contribute to the development of essential resources for project planning, including literature reviews and proposals for the Institutional Review Board. Students will further learn how to collect human subjects data using ethical practices by engaging with community partners and by gaining firsthand experience with participant recruitment and informed consent. Students will also be trained to collect and analyze qualitative and quantitative data using semi-structured interviews, structured surveys, and laboratory-based biological markers of stress and health. Additionally, students will help to prepare proposals for internal and external funding and will contribute to peer-reviewed publications, conference presentations, and reports that highlight preliminary study results for scientific audiences and community partners. Overall, interns will acquire a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical and methodological frameworks used to study parental stress and burnout. Students will further gain practical knowledge of mixed methods research and will learn how to apply both qualitative and quantitative data to address complex research questions. These experiences will offer a range of transferable skills for graduate school and/or academic and professional careers.

Additional benefits

As part of the project, student interns will experience several other valuable benefits, including direct mentorship and guidance on research activities and career development. Students will also acquire essential career-ready skills such as community engagement, critical thinking, problem-solving, attention to detail, and scientific communication. Overall, these experiences will encourage students' interest in

scientific research and will enhance their academic and career opportunities.

Additional qualifications

Preferred qualifications include curiosity in human biology and social science research methods (e.g., interviews and surveys); interest in engaging directly with local community partners and families to conduct scientific and socially relevant research; motivation to prepare high-quality work independently and to accomplish assigned tasks on time.

Time commitment

6 hrs/week for 30 weeks