



Meet
Christy
Solorio,
a student
whose
research
tackles
childhood
obesity

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IS THERE A LINK between childhood obesity and household eating practices in which parents instruct their children to “clean their plates?” And is the way parents feed their children influenced by household circumstances in which access to adequate food is consistently lacking?

These are some of the questions Christy Solorio, a student in the Nursing Science and Health-Care Leadership Master’s Degree Program at the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing, is trying to answer through her thesis research.

Solorio is a pediatric nurse who is well acquainted with the harmful health effects of obesity among children. Childhood obesity has more than tripled in the U.S. over the last 30 years. Obese youth are at increased risk for high blood pressure, high cholesterol and prediabetes, and increased risk for Type II diabetes, heart disease and stroke as adults.

“I see the pain that obesity causes in children,” Solorio said. “They’re not able to do the things that kids should be doing.”

Because of her passion to address this health crisis—especially among populations that are at increased risk for obesity, such as low-income minority groups—Solorio decided to conduct thesis research that could address some of the causes of the obesity epidemic.

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—Christy Solorio,
master’s-degree student



Solorio enjoyed the research experience so much that she now sees herself teaching and conducting research after graduation.

“I have the goal of becoming a full professor of nursing,” she said.

Solorio’s research examines the association between food insecurity—doubt about whether one has access to sufficient, safe food—and household eating habits. For example, she is analyzing the connection between childhood obesity and such familiar parental feeding practices as the requirement that children “clean their plate.”

Student Christy Solorio researches the connection between childhood obesity and household eating practices.

Solorio, who has a bachelor’s degree in psychology, is interested in what motivates parents to implement certain feeding practices with their children.

“I am particularly interested in this research because it looks at feeding practices with young children, and the earlier you intervene in the way children are fed, the more of an impact you can have,” she said.

Solorio collaborates with an interdisciplinary team of UC Davis researchers who are conducting a multiyear study to help Mexican-heritage children between 3 and 8 years old who live in California’s Central Valley maintain healthy weights.

The Niños Sanos, Familia Sana (Healthy Children, Healthy Family) study, led by Adela de la Torre—a UC Davis professor of Chicana/o studies and director of the university’s Center for Transnational Health—provides multifaceted health interventions to Mexican-origin children and families in two rural, low-income Central Valley towns: Firebaugh and San Joaquin. The study aims to determine which interventions are most effective in helping this population of children maintain healthy weights. The study utilizes community-based participatory research methods, which means that the community is deeply involved in each phase of the project.

For her research project, Solorio uses measurements such as body-mass index, family responses to a health survey and family responses to a U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Security Assessment to evaluate the connections between food insecurity, feeding practices and childhood obesity. She hopes her research proves useful as the health-promoting interventions in the interdisciplinary UC Davis study are implemented in the Central Valley.

Solorio’s graduate education is supported in part through an endowed scholarship, the Hersted Fund for Pediatric Nursing.

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