HEALTH EQUITY AND THE ALLIANCE FOR A HEALTHIER WORLD

The defining aim of global health is to find ways to improve people’s health no matter where they live, by promoting social justice, addressing the social and structural determinants of health, empowering people and providing opportunities to achieve good health and wellbeing — this involves building effective, equitable, sustainable and accountable health systems, including the provision of quality health care. The cornerstone of achieving health equity is addressing issues that prevent opportunities for good health and wellbeing, which inspire our four priority research themes: Food Nutrition & Security, Healthy Environments, Gender Equity & Justice, and Transformative Technologies & Institutions. Johns Hopkins University (JHU) launched the Alliance for a Healthier World with the understanding that health equity is influenced by factors such as education, income, gender, race, ethnicity, geography, nutrition, politics, environment and access to technology. The Alliance is an extension of JHU’s longstanding commitment to addressing inequities. What is new, and exciting, is that the Alliance breaks down barriers between disciplines to bring the best and brightest ideas, people, and work to resolve complex global health challenges. Addressing global health disparities requires a recognition that we live in an interdependent world. We need to better understand the diverse connections between and among the people, communities, institutions, and environments in which we live in order to make a significant impact.

“Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation, and it is perhaps the most pervasive. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace.”

— Kofi Annan, Former Secretary General of the United Nations

SPOTLIGHT ON GENDER EQUITY & JUSTICE

Gender Equity & Justice is one of four thematic areas for the Alliance for a Healthier World. Through this work, we study the intersection of gender, oppression, power and discrimination and the negative impact on health equity. Around the world, a major cause of health inequity is gender-based power disparities related to social roles, status, stereotypes and limited access to justice. Although these are among the most intractable issues to address, focusing efforts in these areas offer tremendous potential to make a significant and lasting impact on the health of girls, women, individuals who identify as LGBTQ, and all community members.

Reducing gender-based power disparities has a positive impact on the individual, community, and national levels, extending far beyond health outcomes. Promoting gender equity produces a cascade effect of improved educational attainment, reduction in violence, and increased economic and workforce participation – for women today and future generations. Through this work we will clarify gender disparities in leading health, economic, and social indicators through analysis of gender disparities with an intersectional lens, and will develop, implement, and evaluate transformative initiatives to advance gender equity and justice. This will yield more healthy, peaceful, and prosperous societies and give rise to the next generation of female leaders.

A guiding principle in this work is area is Female-led and -engaged innovation, honoring the unique perspectives of women and harnessing their creativity and ingenuity to contribute to healthier societies.
Native American adolescent girls are frequent victims of gender-based sexual, physical, and emotional violence, and they contract sexually transmitted infections, get pregnant, and suffer from substance abuse at a rate that is two to four times higher than that of other racial and ethnic groups in the United States.

At the same time, residents of rural communities have less access to support services and resources. Technology is one way to bridge that gap, and studies indicate that adolescents are open to receiving information and interventions through smartphones platforms. Our research team is creating a new app—and incorporating some components of two existing successful applications—to provide adolescent girls on reservations in Arizona and Montana with information about sexual and reproductive health. It will include functions such as a rescue-call button and a link to local case managers. The Alliance foresees enormous potential for the Safe Passage app to be customized for and tailored to local settings around the world.

Our Safe Passage team includes researchers and students from three schools at JHU: Public Health, Nursing and Engineering. We are proud to work in partnership with the Assiniboine, White Clay and White Mountain Apache tribes and the Healthy Teen Network.

Research in this area includes:

- Building the evidence base on best practices for prevention and response to gender-based discrimination and violence across sectors
- Innovation in methods to monitor equity in understudied areas and document progress towards equity
- Evaluation of the impact of gender-transformative empowerment programs and policies that aim to promote gender and health equity

ABOUT JOHNS HOPKINS ALLIANCE FOR A HEALTHIER WORLD

The Alliance is an initiative integrating diverse expertise and perspectives to unlock ground-breaking knowledge and resolve the most complex global health equity challenges of our time. Scholars, researchers, and leaders from all disciplines—medicine, nursing, public health, international relations, engineering, education, business, the social sciences, creative arts, and bioethics—work side-by-side with partners and disadvantaged communities around the world to create a healthier, more equitable, and more just world.

THEME LEADERS FOR GENDER EQUITY & JUSTICE

Nancy Glass, PhD, MPH, RN, FAAN
nglass1@jhu.edu

Michele Decker, SCD, MPH
mdecker@jhu.edu

ABOUT JHU

Knowledge for the world
The mission of Johns Hopkins University is to educate its students and cultivate their capacity for lifelong learning, to foster independent and original research, and to bring the benefits of discovery to the world.