Grant Morgan

Public Health 001

Dr. Carol Sipan

June 27, 2016

# Merced Public Health Demographics

Merced is a growing community in the Californian Central Valley, with a proud Chicano culture. According to the US Census Bureau, in may 2016 Merced’s population has reached 81,743 residents. Merced’s average age is 28 years old, and the average salary per worker is $43,255. Merced has a plurality of Hispanic residents at 49% of the population, with a trailing minority of white (30%) followed by Asian (12%). Other minorities including black and pacific islander make up less than 10% of the population. Spanish is spoken at home in 42% of Merced households.

Despite Merced’s endemic dietary health issues, there is a plethora of healthy food options in Merced. There are 12 grocery outlets in Merced, servicing the population from northern, southern, eastern, and western Merced. Additionally, Merced holds biweekly farmer’s markets, where local farmers sell fruits and vegetables, as well as cooking oil. In terms of health safety, all restaurants in Merced have good or satisfactory ratings from health inspections.

Yet Merced’s population still faces endemic health issues resulting from poor diet, including obesity, heart disease, and diabetes. The presence of cheap, unhealthy fast food has contributed to this health crisis, but does not explain the poor diet of Merced citizens alone; poor diets despite healthy options and affordable fresh produce are a result of poor dietary choices; the surge of fast food demand in Merced is a symptom of chronic poverty and a lack of education.

There are few fitness centers and parks in Merced compared to it’s similar valley neighbor, Fresno. Fresno has 21 gyms and fitness centers excluding gyms at schools, colleges, and universities, while Merced has 10 gyms excluding schools, colleges, and universities. Merced currently has 3 large parks and a dog park, with plans to expand parking services to reach citizens in circular 1-mile radius development zones. The 3 parks are located in the densely populated southern and central Merced.

Merced has a central Rascal Bike Path with dedicated bike lanes throughout the city. As a regular bicycle commuter, Merced is bike friendly in comparison to its neighbor Fresno. Merced is also pedestrian friendly, with well kept sidewalks and paths running throughout the city. Despite adequate public transportation services by bus including the Merced The Bus and the University of California Merced CatTracks routes, the average citizen only uses 6.7 trips per capita. A majority of residents commute via personal vehicle or carpool.

Crime in Merced is endemic and above state and national levels. Merced’s reported crime stands at 3,924 cases per 100,000 population. The state average is 2,962 cases per 100,000 population, while the national average is lower at 2,837 cases per 100,000 population.

# Community Data and Health issues

The five leading causes of death are cancer, coronary heart disease, unintentional injuries, cerebrovascular disease or stroke, and chronic lower respiratory disease(cite). When compared to age adjusted state mortality, all causes of death were significantly higher than the state adjusted mortality rate for motor vehicle crashes, unintentional injury, and heart disease, as well as general mortality (cite). Among preventable or screen-able disease, outstanding mortality was found in lung cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. Despite outstanding mortality, Merced met the Healthy People 2010 national objective of no more than 162.0 age adjusted deaths to coronary heart disease per 100,000 population.

Although Merced has met the Healthy People 2010 National Objective for heart disease, Merced has failed to meet other Healthy People 2010 goals and did not meet the Healthy People 2010 national objectives. Merced’s incidence rates were towards the worst (48th out of 58) counties in California. Reported lows for disease and morbidity when compared to the state average are incidence of AIDS and Tuberculosis, at under half the state average.

deaths due to homicide and persons under 18 below were noticeably higher than the state levels. According to Jens Ludwig et al. in research funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, there is a correlation between low income and violent crime, which suggests a reduction in poverty may alleviate crime and criminal injury or morbidity,

# Community Interventions

Merced has many growing community prevention programs designed to prevent incidence of disease, injury, and death. Community School-Based Drug Prevention Services is a program designed to to provide drug education and prevention services to the Merced community including schools and businesses through awareness, workshops and seminars, and parental education. Youth 2 Youth is another prevention program and youth leadership convention where youth are trained to be leaders and positive role models in the community. Although community intervention measures exist, they tend to target the most vocal issues in Merced, namely poverty and drug use. Merced is in desperate need of a better sex education program for youth to promote healthy sexual activity and prevent the incidence of sexually transmitted disease. Such programs are massively successful in preventing a myriad of health issues, including unwanted pregnancy, teen pregnancy, and STDs. Another prevention program that could help Merced improve its general health and reduce morbidity and death would be the adoption of the National Diabetes Prevention Program. Although this program focuses on type II diabetes prevention, the steps taken to prevent type II diabetes, such as regular exercise and a healthy diet can also prevent incidence of heart disease. Additionally, general worker safety education programs can reduce the amount of unintentional injury as a result of occupation.

# Improving Community Health Measures

Merced’s health is improving but like much of the United States needs attention and preventative care. Preventative action, much like research, pays for itself. Prevention saves money by preventing costly tertiary aid provided in hospitals by overworked hospital staff. If the amount of cases can be reduced before they are ever started, the healthcare system will be much more reactive to those who still require tertiary aid. Merced, like the rest of the United States, desperately needs public health measures.

Mandatory vaccinations for schooling can help virtually eradicate incidence of some disease through herd immunity. By vaccinating a majority of a population, those who are unable to be vaccinated are aided by the immunity of others, whereby there is less opportunity for infectious disease to reach them.

Another effective public health measure to improve the Merced community would be targeting harmful use of alcohol through effective ad campaigns about healthy consumption. Although no consumption of alcohol would be preferable, it is not likely to be popular or adopted, much like sexual abstinence campaigns targeting teens. Thus a campaign that encourages designated drivers, as well as moderate alcohol consumption (and the buddy system to prevent sexual assault) can greatly improve public health and reduce morbidity and death.

# Conclusion

The social environment one is raised in dictates much of ones health and health choices. Personally, my social environment has protected me from some dangers, while encouraging others. I do not smoke or drink alcohol; these are a result of being raised in a strict household where such substances were explicitly forbidden until I was old enough or mature enough to understand the dangers of substance abuse. I was also privileged enough to attend a private school where I was targeted and mentored; not many youth in America have access to this opportunity. As a result I do not partake in reckless behavior or take unnecessary risks, and did not seek attention by acting irrationally or dangerously. But social environment also dictates much unhealthy behavior as well. Poor diet in my household has resulted in unhealthy behavior that I partake in, such as drinking sugary drinks and eating a diet low in fruits and vegetables and high in meats. I also have a sedentary lifestyle. This is a result of my social environment where activities such as movies, TV, videogames, and other indoor activities are accepted and encouraged as family activities.

My physical environment has also shaped my health behaviors. Poor air quality and stay inside days due to living in the valley have contributed to my lack of outdoor hobbies. Easy access to fast food and personal transportation also promote unhealthy behavior and obesity. These factors have most likely contributed to being slightly overweight in my youth. Positive environment determinants include acess to fresh and cheap produce, which have helped me maintain a healthy lifestyle once I have adopted a better diet.

I can do many things to address my social and behavioral factors that influence my health. I can take advantage of living in the breadbasket of the world; farmer’s markets every week allow for cheap and tasty fresh produce that are necessary for a healthy diet. I also live in a bike friendly city- commuting by bike reduces carbon footprint that contributes to pollution and also promotes an active lifestyle. Health is in our own hands. Although one can bring a horse to water, one cant make it drink. This is public health’s greatest advantage and largest crutch. Although public health has made remarkable strides in promoting community healthy practices, in the end it is the community that must take health into its own hands and continue to promote a culture that encourages healthy lifestyles that lead to healthy and happy lives.

# Bibliography

Merced County - Environmental Health - Food Inspections. (n.d.). Retrieved June 28, 2016, from http://apps.co.merced.ca.us/PublicApplets/pages/FoodInspect/FoodInspect.aspx

Merced, CA Crime. (n.d.). Retrieved June 28, 2016, from http://www.areavibes.com/merced-ca/crime/

Prevention Programs. (n.d.). Retrieved June 28, 2016, from http://www.co.merced.ca.us/index.aspx?NID=470

Health Status Profile 2012. (n.d.). Retrieved June 28, 2016, from http://www.co.merced.ca.us/index.aspx?nid=82