

UCL Collaborative Social Science Domain

Social Science Plus Pilot Project Outcomes Report

Project Title

Overcoming Syndemic Urbanism: Health, Vulnerability and Communities' Resilience (OverSyn)

Amount

£10,000

Academic Year

2021-22

Project Image

If possible, please email an image to us that can be used to illustrate your project. If you are unable to do this, we will use an image from an image library. We will check with you beforehand to make sure it's suitable.

Attached

Social Science Principal Investigator

Professor [Haim Yacobi](#), Professor of Development Planning, Development Planning Unit, Bartlett, BEAMS

Co-Investigator(s)

Non-Social Science Co-Investigator

Professor [Edward Fottrell](#), Professor of Epidemiology & Global Health, Institute for Global Health, Population Health Sciences, LMS

Early Career Researcher

Misheck Julian Nkhata, Research Fellow, Institute of Advanced Studies, Social and Historical Sciences, SLASH

Additional Collaborators (include academic and non-academic partners both UK and international)

UCL Institute for Global Health: Dr Joanna Morrison, Senior Research Associate; Ms Malini Pires, Research Assistant.

Diabetic Association of Bangladesh Centre for Health Research & Implementation: Mr Ashraf Ahmed; Dr Abdul Kuddus

Project outline

This project represents a new interdisciplinary collaboration between a social scientist specialising in urban studies (Yacobi), global health researchers (Fottrell, an epidemiologist and Morrison, a social scientist) and their collaborators in Bangladesh, and a medical anthropologist (Nkhata). Linked a diabetes project in Bangladesh Dclare led by Fottrell, Morrison and the Diabetic Association of Bangladesh (the DClare project), this project adds new perspectives of how urban-spatial elements affect syndemic urbanism, and how they might be used as a vehicle for informing interventions leading to urban health justice. The work used qualitative research methods in two wards of an urban municipality, Faridpur, approximately 130km south west of the Bangladeshi capital, Dhaka. Throughout this project we have investigated how do urban-spatial elements affect syndemic urbanism, and how might they be used as a vehicle for informing interventions leading to urban health justice. Focussing on diabetes in urban Bangladesh, we conducted qualitative research in two wards

of an urban municipality, Faridpur in Bangladesh. One ward was in the centre of the town and the other was on the outskirts. Faridpur is around 130 kilometres south-west of Dhaka on the river Kumar.

Main findings

Please use short bullet points for each finding

- Generally, our research shows that there was high awareness about the symptoms of diabetes (among those with and without diabetes, rich and poor and men and women), and the effect that it can have on the body.
- There was some lack of confidence in this knowledge among socioeconomically worse-off participants, who asked several questions to the researcher during the discussion, often seeking confirmation of their views.
- Most participants without diabetes learned about diabetes from interactions with family and friends who had diabetes, not from public health messaging or community-based organisations.
- Finally, we conclude that syndemic urbanism that focuses on how urban-spatial elements influence the accumulation of several health conditions and how these are experienced in an urban context, is indeed a relevant lens that could be developed further

Detail the extent to which you achieved the aims of your pilot project as detailed in your original application

- We have managed to develop and apply an open-closed methodological framework of studying syndemic urbanism focussing on Infrastructure and population (physical, countable, features), Social organization (relation of people to place, choice among the options), Networks (relations of people to people, patterns of inclusion & exclusion, control of local resources) and Narratives (stories about who is there, who is in the community, who belongs here)
- We achieved a better understanding of how NCD risk factors are linked to urban conditions and to reflect on what might make it easy or difficult to live a life with minimal NCD risk in urban settings

Key achievements and impacts (academic and non-academic), media coverage, etc

A co-authored article in progress

Findings will be discussed in a UCL-led event on diabetes in urban contexts to be held in London in March 2023.

Please detail your plans for external funding application(s) (funder, scheme, date of application, amount, outcome (if known) etc)

Yacobi has submitted a fellowship to the French Institute of advanced Studies in Paris. The main objective of this proposal is to complete research and a book manuscript, which will contribute to the emerging theoretical and practical knowledge on the interrelationships between formal and informal urban processes, health disparities, social justice, and urban development planning in general and in the global South in particular. This interdisciplinary proposal is based on an argument stemming from “Overcoming Syndemic Urbanism” project that beyond the bio-medical lenses through which health is often understood, what is clearly illustrated is the fundamental role of urban space, infrastructure, planning and policy in shaping health inequities in cities. The lack of just planning expressed, for instance, in the provision of infrastructure (water and sanitation for example), the deficiency of housing, and in the privatisation of health services renders the most vulnerable urban populations at higher risk.

Next steps

The team have met to discuss future plans for a proposal and publications.