

Perspectives from CHWs as researchers in a nutrition participatory observation project in South Texas colonias

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**T H E C E N T E R F O R
C O M M U N I T Y H E A L T H D E V E L O P M E N T**

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Hidalgo County, TX



Socio-demographics

Hidalgo County:

- Population: **655,202**
- **90%** Hispanic
- **13.4%** unemployment rate
- **36%** below FPL
- **50%** high school graduate or higher
- **83%** speak a language other than English at home
- **60%** uninsured
- **> 20%** live in colonias



Colonias

Definition of Colonias: unregulated residential areas lacking basic services (water, electricity, roads, etc.) and infrastructure



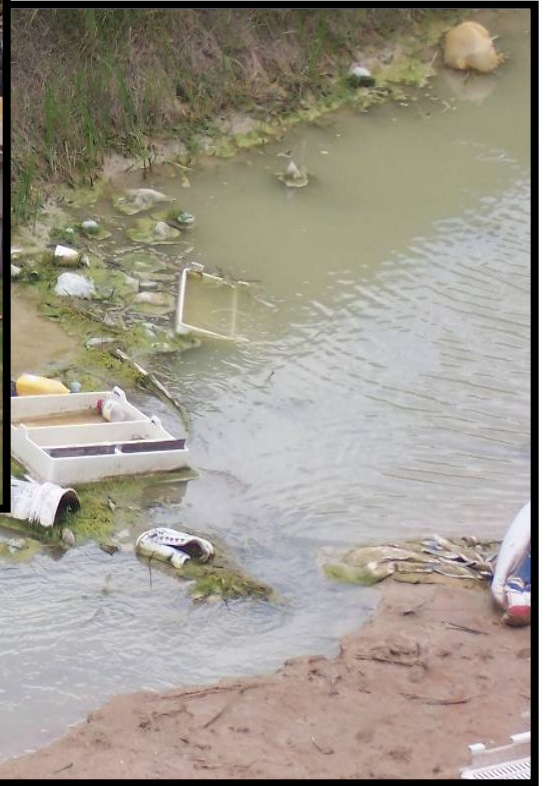
Colonias

- Low-income housing areas
- Key characteristics:
 - Low cost (minimal down & minimal monthly payments)
 - Self-built dwellings
 - Physical conditions improve over time
 - Low-density settlements (ETJ)

Colonias

- Substandard “neighborhoods”
 - Lack basic services
 - Inadequate infrastructure (roads/drainage/electricity/water)
- Mixture of housing types
 - Recycled materials
 - Trailers
 - Self-built

Colonias



Canal in back of house shown above

Colonia Resident Characteristics

- High rates of diabetes and obesity
- Persistent poverty
- Sub-standard housing
- Low educational levels
- High unemployment rates

Participatory Observation Project (POP)

Purpose:

Test a complex form of participant observations focusing on actual food-related behaviors of family members as observed by researchers in the families' colonia homes

Underlying goal:

Demonstrate the effectiveness of using CHWs to conduct research in a community setting.

POP Teams

- Bilingual
- Promotora (community health worker) & formally trained researcher
- Team members involved in developing protocol
- Trained in ethnographic methodologies

Training



- Developed home observation guide
- Ethnography workshops on conducting participant observations and writing detailed field notes

Promotora Role Shift

Traditional & Emerging roles/competencies:

- Health promotion
- Education
- Outreach
- community organizing
- Facilitation
- Problem solving/solution finding
- Program planning/implementation

POP role:

- Conduct research

POP

- Families recruited by *promotoras* from two clusters of *colonias*
- Eight different families for one weekend day and two half-days
- Document feasibility of PO in *colonia* households

Gift Baskets



Home Observations



Debrief



Identified issues:

- Dietary decision-making patterns
- Cultural practices within the geographic & cultural setting of the *colonias*
- Meanings ascribed to these patterns by family members.

POP Team



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