



Kellogg Health Scholars

Connecting Academe, Community, and Policy

M E E T T H E K E L L O G G H E A L T H S C H O L A R S

Angela Thrasher, Ph.D., M.P.H.

A common thread of Angela Thrasher's work in academia, government and with community groups has been the effort to understand the reasons behind racial and ethnic disparities in health and health care. Not content to describe the gaps that exist, she wants to get at just how perceived racism gets "under the skin" to cause actual differences.

Currently based at the University of California, San Francisco, Thrasher recently completed a Kellogg postdoctoral fellowship at the same institution. Prior to that she received her masters and doctorate from the University of North Carolina School of Public Health, specializing in health behavior and health education. Her drive to understand disparities stems in part from the four years she spent at a nonprofit consulting firm providing technical assistance and training to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Health Resources and Services Administration, and Office of HIV/AIDS Policy helping to address the minority HIV/AIDS epidemic. "That sent me back to get my doctorate and do research, but not without an appreciation for the links between research and the real world," she says.

Research, Results and Policy Implications

Evans Thrasher examined the relationship between discrimination, distrust, and poor adherence to antiretroviral therapy in a national sample of HIV-infected patients. She found that, contrary to expectations, patient-level variables explained little of observed racial/ethnic disparities in treatment adherence. "The socioenvironmental context of minority and white HIV-positive patients differed significantly, suggesting that minority patients may need more targeted, multilevel approaches to support adherence behavior," Thrasher explains, "and that better measurement is needed as well." She is also concerned that changes in policy favoring broad-scale testing of all care-seeking patients may shift scarce resources away from high-risk populations.

A related area of inquiry that may have been overlooked involves generational differences in the perception of racism. Thrasher designed a series of studies to examine how African Americans whose history predated the civil rights revolution of the sixties varied from younger cohorts in their expectations of racism, felt the fears of parents and children, and experienced racism-related physical stress. She is examining changes in perceptions over time and adding questions on coping within groups; and conducting cognitive interviews as to how the new survey questions are interpreted. Next on the agenda: looking at consistency of interpretation across cohorts, and creating and pretesting a new measure. "This work is important because if survey questions are interpreted differently across subgroups, validity may be undermined. It has implications for how we look at acute and chronic racism and how we incorporate our findings into practice."

To learn more about Angela D. Thrasher, Ph.D., and her work, contact her at thrasher@fcm.ucsf.edu and/or consult the following publications:

Thrasher, A.D., Earp, J.L., Golin, C.E., and Zimmer, C.R. 2008. Discrimination, Distrust and Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Antiretroviral Therapy Adherence Among a National Sample of HIV-Infected Patients. *JAIDS* 49 (1), September 1, 2008.

Thrasher, A.D., Golin, C.F., Earp, J.L., Hsiao, T., Porter, C., and Howie, L. 2006. Motivational Interviewing to Support Antiretroviral Therapy Adherence: The Role of Quality Counseling. *Patient Education and Counseling* 62 (1):64-71.

Thrasher, A. D., Ford, C.L., and Nearing, K.A. 2005. Cost-effectiveness of screening for HIV. *N Engl J Med* 352 (20):2137-9; author reply 2137-9.

To learn more about the Kellogg Health Scholars Program, contact Barbara Krimgold of the Center for the Advancement of Health at bkrimgold@cfah.org or visit www.kellogghealthscholars.org.