



# 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

## **Lisa Goldman Rosas, Ph.D., M.P.H.**

Lisa Goldman Rosas is currently a first-year postdoctoral fellow in the Kellogg Health Scholars Program at the University of California, San Francisco. She began her career as a health educator and social worker, moving every six months with the migrant farmworker stream in the U.S. to provide care to the farmworkers and their families. “Through this work, I came to understand first-hand some of the most important health issues facing Mexican immigrants,” she says, “and so I dedicated my career to addressing them.”

Rosas received her doctoral degree in epidemiology and masters’ degree in maternal and child health from the School of Public Health at the University of California, Berkeley. In addition, she completed a Latin American research fellowship in Mexico with the Population Council, where she was able to learn about health issues in the “sending” communities in Mexico, and to collaborate with Mexican researchers and health officials. Throughout graduate school, she led a community outreach arm of the Center for Children’s Environmental Health Research, which is dedicated to improving child health in low-income Latino communities. Because of her orientation to seeking solutions, leadership in translating research into policy came easily.

### **Research and Results**

One major focus of Rosas’ work has been the impact of agricultural pesticide exposure, faced disproportionately by children of Mexican immigrants. In an earlier study, she found that Mexican immigrant pregnant women who work in the fields or live with those who work in the fields are rarely given information about how to protect themselves or their families from pesticide exposure. A more recent publication summarized current knowledge regarding the effects of pesticides on children’s health. Overall, in utero pesticide exposure has been associated with poorer neurodevelopment in several cohorts, including the group that Rosas has worked with for the past nine years in California’s Salinas Valley.

In response to this research, she developed the Prenatal Environmental Health Kiosk -- an innovative, computer-based program that pregnant women can

use in the doctor’s office while waiting for appointments to learn how to protect themselves from exposures. “Women interact with the kiosk by listening to the information, reading the screen, looking at the graphics and playing games,” Rosas explains. “According to pilot studies, the women learned well and enjoyed using the kiosk. Providers appreciated the kiosk because it did not use additional staff time in the clinic.”

A second important issue that Rosas has addressed in the Mexican immigrant community is childhood obesity. Taking a binational approach to understanding why children of Mexican descent in the U.S. are more likely to be overweight compared with other racial/ethnic groups, she found that on the Mexican side, increasing socioeconomic status led to increased access to junk foods. By extension, she reasoned that the increased food purchasing power that comes when Mexicans migrate to the U.S. may also mean greater access to fattening foods. “Ironically, on the U.S. side, food insecurity, which

disproportionately affects Mexican immigrants, also seems to be at work,” according to Rosas. “Children whose families faced limited resources to buy food consumed more calories and fat in the form of sweets and snacks than children from food secure households.” Most recently, Rosas has turned her attention to understanding how school compliance with physical activity policies affects Latino childhood obesity in California.

## Policy Implications

In order to improve the health of Mexican immigrants in the U.S., Rosas urges policy makers to think about how both the physical and social environments can be modified and regulated to improve health outcomes for the most vulnerable groups. Labor regulations for agricultural workers, such as the E.P.A. Worker Protection Standard, should include special provisions to protect pregnant women and children who may not work directly in the field, but who are inadvertently exposed to pesticides through other family members. In addition, routine prenatal care offers an excellent opportunity to provide Mexican immigrant women the tools to reduce their exposure to harmful chemicals. This could be accomplished by including environmental health education in prenatal care programs for low-income women at the state or community level (for example, in California’s Comprehensive Perinatal Services Program.). Federal agencies such as those operating Community and Migrant Health Centers and Maternal and Child Health services could support such efforts through funding and/or dissemination of model programs.

To reduce the prevalence of childhood obesity among the nation’s largest immigrant group, Rosas recommends improved access to healthy fruits and vegetables through U.S. Department of Agriculture feeding programs such as W.I.C. and Food Stamps, and funding policy-relevant research to identify successful strategies.

**To learn more about Lisa Goldman Rosas, Ph.D., M.P.H., and her work, contact her at [rosasl@fcm.ucsf.edu](mailto:rosasl@fcm.ucsf.edu) and/or consult the following selected publications:**

**Goldman, L.**, Eskenazi, B., Bradman, A., Jewell, N. Risk behaviors of pesticide exposure among pregnant farmworkers in Salinas, California. *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*. 2004 Jun;45(6):491-9.

Eskenazi, B., **Rosas, L.G.**, Marks, A.R., Bradman, A., Harley, K., Holland, N., Johnson, C., Fenster, L., Barr, D.B. Pesticide Toxicity and the Developing Brain. *Basic Clin Pharmacol Toxicol*. 2008 Feb;102(2):228-36. Review.

**Rosas, L.G.**, Eskenazi, B. Pesticides and Child Development. *Curr Opin Pediatr*. 2008 Apr;20(2):191-7. Review

**Rosas, L.G.**, "Childhood Obesity Among Children of Mexican Descent: A Binational Approach" (April 3, 2008). Institute for the Study of Social Change. ISSC Fellows Working Papers. Paper ISSC\_WP\_26. [http://repositories.cdlib.org/issc/fwp/ISSC\\_WP\\_26](http://repositories.cdlib.org/issc/fwp/ISSC_WP_26).

**To learn more about the Kellogg Health Scholars Program, contact Barbara Krimgold of the Center for Advancing Health at [bkrimgold@cfah.org](mailto:bkrimgold@cfah.org) or visit [www.kellogghealthscholars.org](http://www.kellogghealthscholars.org).**