

**Anna S. Pruitt, M.A.**  
**Research Statement**

**Research Description**

Taking a mixed-methods, ecological approach, my research attempts to quantify and explain the ways in which individual and contextual factors interact to impact community and individual health and quality of life. Ultimately, I aim to produce applied research that promotes individual and community wellbeing over harmful ideologies and practices. This approach lends itself to the investigation of multiple topics, and I have been involved in various projects from investigating barriers to HIV treatment to female juvenile delinquency. However, I have focused primarily on the effects of *disasters* and *homelessness* on communities and individuals. When disaster strikes – whether its natural or man-made (e.g., housing crisis) – some people are systematically rendered more vulnerable than others. Identifying the ways in which systematic oppression interacts with individual vulnerabilities can be useful in prevention and intervention planning. Thus, my research focuses on this interaction and often uses participatory research methods to ensure that vulnerable individuals have a voice in the research process.

**Housing projects.** Since December 2014, I have worked with Dr. Barile and the Institute for Human Service to conduct an ongoing evaluation of the City and County of Honolulu’s Housing First program. The program provides quick, low-barriers housing to persons experiencing homelessness on O‘ahu. This mixed-methods evaluation project includes analysis of client surveys and client/staff interviews. Findings show that after housing, clients’ mental and physical health improved, arrest rates declined, and community engagement increased substantially. In 2016, I complemented the evaluation by using geographic information systems mapping to determine neighborhood suitability. Results indicated that most clients were housed in desirable areas close to transportation and social services. Dr. Barile and I communicated these findings through yearly reports to the program and its funders.

In January 2016, I worked with Housing First program staff and clients to conduct a Photovoice project in an effort to further understand clients’ experiences. Using photography, clients captured elements of their experiences in the program, and together, we conducted analysis on the photos and reported on the findings. These findings were included in Dr. Barile’s and my report, which led to renewed program funding and program adaptations that addressed clients’ concerns. Additionally, our work has been covered extensively in the local media.

Interested in further dissemination and advocacy, the group and I have continued to meet weekly for the past two years. In July 2016, clients chose to advocate for the program by holding an exhibit at Honolulu Hale in collaboration with IHS, the City, and the College of Social Sciences. In 2017, the group co-authored an academic article for the *American Journal of Community Psychology*. The article was one of only 12 articles selected for publication in a special issue on re-engagement in community mental health. The article is the first of its kind in that, as the journal editors noted, it “engaged Housing First tenants in the entire research process, from study design to analysis, and particularly in the dissemination of findings, as numerous project participants were involved as co-

authors on this article” (Townley et al., 2018). Finally, our group received a grant from the Society for Community Research and Action to conduct a follow-up study. This study will provide a much needed longitudinal perspective from the clients themselves.

**Disaster projects.** As part of an on-going NSF-funded project with geologist, Susan Cutter and sociologist, Lynn Weber, my thesis sought to understand the ways in which CBOs on the Mississippi Gulf Coast transitioned into long-term recovery from Hurricane Katrina. This study found that CBOs navigated a complex and challenging political and economic context complicated by national policies and attitudes and local historical patterns. I am currently working with Dr. Weber to publish these results in several disaster journals. Additionally, I have produced a policy brief recommending ways to more effectively disperse disaster funds and incorporate CBOs in disaster recovery.

In 2016, I received full funding from the Graduate Student Organization to study the impact of the 2015 South Carolina flood on family farms and surrounding communities. Using a grounded theory approach, I conducted and analyzed interviews with farm operators and agriculture leaders. Preliminary results suggest that this disaster not only threatened economic wellbeing but also farmers’ identities, potentially compromising mental health for many individuals. This study also revealed the inadequacy of crop insurance in widespread disaster, as even prominent farmers slipped the cracks. Upon completing analysis, I plan to disseminate a brief report to S.C. policymakers.

### **Additional Evidence of Impact**

I have published and presented extensively on these research projects. Since admission to the program, I have given 17 conference paper presentations, co-authored 6 reports, and authored or co-authored 5 publications. Recently, I received a Gartley Award to present at the Association for Psychological Science Annual Convention this May, and I have two conference paper submissions currently under review. Dr. Barile and I recently published an article in the *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology* on causes of homelessness. This article emphasizes the voices of people who have experienced homelessness and offers suggestions for homelessness prevention.

In addition to disseminating research results, I have also worked to promote innovative and participatory methods. Dr. Barile and I published an article in the *Global Journal of Community Psychology and Practice* on the importance of methods in advancing community psychology theory. Recently, I authored a blog post for the American Evaluation Association’s *AEA365 Blog* that provided tips for conducting evaluations of programs serving marginalized groups using participatory methods. Additionally, I have been invited to speak in graduate courses on participatory methods, and I was recently invited to give a paid workshop on Photovoice at the Hawai‘i-Pacific Evaluation Association conference.

Given the applied nature of my research, community impact is just as important as academic impact, and my research strives not only to impact the field but also the local community and its most vulnerable members.