Exploring the Impact of Socioeconomic Status on Access to Preventive Healthcare in Tarija, Bolivia

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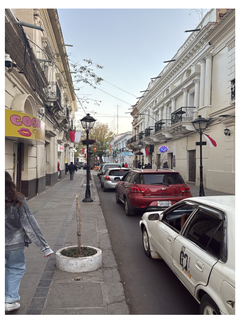
Research Question

What barriers related to socioeconomic status limit access to preventive healthcare in Bolivia?

Background

During the Child Family Health International (CFHI) Program in Tarija, Bolivia, I observed how socioeconomic status influences access to preventive healthcare across different communities. Rotating through hospitals and community clinics allowed me to examine the effects of financial barriers, healthcare infrastructure, and social determinants of health on patient outcomes. These experiences provided the foundation for this project and deepened my understanding of global health disparities and the importance of equitable access to preventive healthcare.

Map of Bolivia



Streets of Tarija, Bolivia

Methods

1. Pre-departure coursework to provide context in global public health
2. 3-week Child Family Health International (CFHI) program in Tarija, Bolivia
3. Clinical observations in hospitals and community health centers with reflective field journals
4. Analysis of qualitative observations and healthcare access through a social determinants of health framework

Observations

- Patients from low-income areas often traveled long distances for care, increasing time and transportation costs.
- Limited clinic resources led to long wait times and fewer preventative services offered.
- Observed surgeries in the operating room, including patient preparation, sterile technique, and teamwork among the surgical staff.
- Health education and awareness about preventive care were limited, especially in rural communities.

Visualizations

Week 1: Clinic

Me in front of the Centro de Salud Clinic

Centro de Salud Exam Room

Family Medicine Physician Dra. Paola and I

Week 2: Surgery

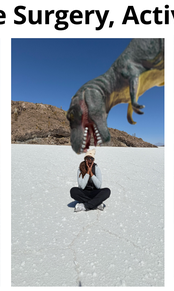
Hospital San Juan de Dios

Hospital San Juan de Dios Operating room

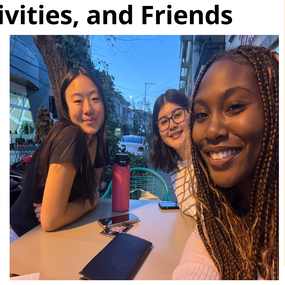
Hospital San Juan de Dios Recovery Room

Week 3: More Surgery, Activities, and Friends

Salar de Uyuni, Bolivian Salt Flats



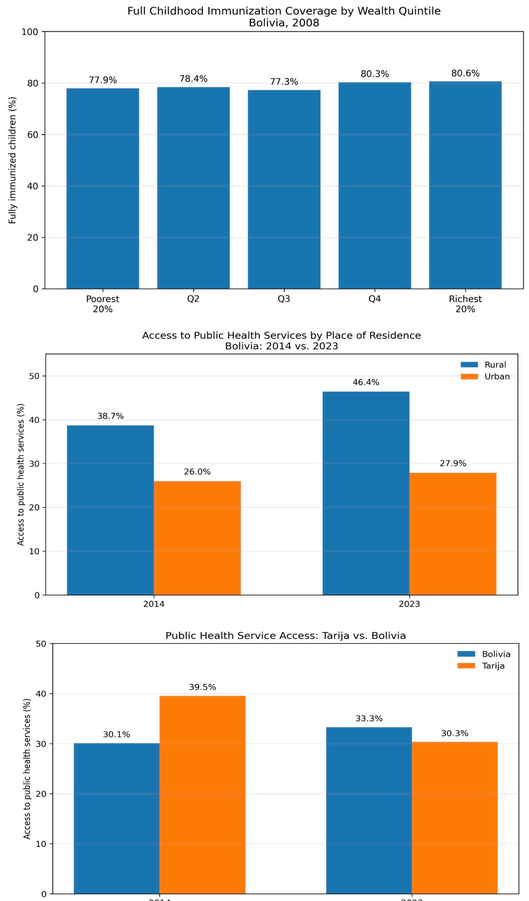
More Salt Flats!



Samantha, Kira, and I at dinner

Results

- Socioeconomic status influences access to preventive healthcare services in Bolivia.
- People living in rural areas may face different healthcare access challenges, including greater reliance on public health services. Financial costs, transportation, and long travel distances can limit access to preventive care.
- Clinical observations were consistent with published research describing disparities in healthcare access.



Figures 1-3: Childhood immunization coverage by income and access to public health services in Bolivia.

Interpretation of Findings

Public health service access increased among rural populations from 38.7% in 2014 to 46.4% in 2023, while urban access increased only slightly from 26.0% to 27.9%. This suggests that rural communities relied more heavily on public health services than urban communities. However, higher public-service access does not necessarily indicate fewer barriers to healthcare, as rural populations may have fewer alternatives and greater dependence on public facilities.

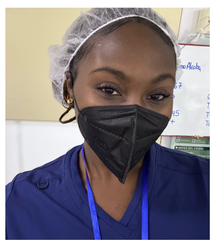
Main Takeaways

- Socioeconomic status significantly impacts access to preventive healthcare in Tarija.
- Financial, infrastructural, and educational barriers prevent many from receiving timely care.
- Strengthening primary care infrastructure and community education could improve access and outcomes.

Future Direction

- Expand preventive healthcare services in rural and underserved communities.
- Increase funding for community health programs and healthcare infrastructure.
- Improve transportation and access to healthcare facilities.
- Strengthen public health education to encourage preventive care and early disease detection.
- Conduct additional research on barriers to preventive healthcare across different regions of Bolivia.
- Foster international collaborations to improve healthcare access and health equity.

Samantha and I Scrubbed in to Observe a Lumbar Fusion Surgery



Me in the Operating Room

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References