

Center for Health Services Research
Report on Current Activities
Submitted by Kim Hekimian, August, 1996

The Center for Health Services Research (CHSR) is an applied research center located within the Department of Public Health at the American University of Armenia. CHSR was established in 1995 to respond to the research and development needs in the multidisciplinary field of Public Health in Armenia.

The following represents the results of some of our recent research activities:

1.) Health Education for Pregnant Women :

This project is a research study which will follow three groups of pregnant women: two will receive differing types of health education methods during the study and will be compared with a third group that will not receive any education ("control" group) in order to determine whether health education in and of itself is sufficient to affect the behaviors of pregnant and lactating women which in turn affect the health outcomes of the fetus and infant. The primary method of education will be the publishing of a book in Armenian which will be loosely modeled on the popular American book, "What to Expect When You're Expecting." In addition, we will create a series of posters to put on the walls of the women's polyclinics that will reinforce the primary messages of the educational program (issues on nutrition, smoking, fertility, delivery, breastfeeding, etc.). We will also develop an interpersonal component of education such as seminars in waiting-rooms in order to be able to answer questions that women may have on these and other topics. The effectiveness of our educational methods can then be evaluated and we will be able to make recommendations for cost-effective means for providing pregnant women with appropriate information during the prenatal care period.

2.) Analysis of Yerevan Drinking Water: Due to concerns of many that the drinking water in Yerevan may be contaminated, the Center for Health Services Research worked with AUA's Environmental Research and Management Center (ERMC) to conduct a two-stage comprehensive analysis of water samples taken throughout the city of Yerevan. The primary results of concern were that many regions of the city are experiencing high levels of coliform contamination in their drinking water, some of which are fecal positive. These results suggest a cross-contamination of sewage and drinking water lines, and also point to the need for families with children or elderly, or others who are health-compromised, to be educated about the necessity of boiling water for household usage. In addition, the water analyses demonstrated a very low level of fluoride (twice lower than the US EPA's recommended minimum level of fluoride). This has grave implications for the state of oral and dental health of the Armenian population of Yerevan. The good news, on the other hand, is that the water samples did not show significant contamination by metals (for

example, lead levels were very low as were mercury and copper). These results were cross-verified by laboratories in the US.

3.) **Knowledge and Attitudes of University Students Regarding STDs, AIDS and Condom Use** : Armenia has recently experienced an increase in the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases, and it is hypothesized that a similar increase in HIV infection has occurred. As a result of this, the CHSR funded a research study that was proposed by two of the Public Health graduate students to look at practices, knowledge and attitudes of Yerevan's university population regarding issues which may affect the prevalence of STDs and HIV. Nearly 900 third-year university students filled out self-administered questionnaires, and the CHSR is in the final stages of data analysis. Preliminary results show that approximately 40% of the respondents are sexually active. Of this population, about 25% state that they never use condoms, and another 25% state that they often use condoms. Of the males who reported sexual activity, 36% stated that they had sexual relations with prostitutes. The students had many misconceptions about STDs and HIV, and the CHSR is currently seeking funding to conduct an educational program at university's to address these issues.

4.) **National Health Action Plan for Karabagh**: During the Fall of 1995, the Minister of Health of the Nagorno Karabagh Republic requested the aid of the CHSR in collecting and analyzing data about the health status of the population of this region. He explained that during the war and since, the Ministry has been unable to thoroughly track the prevalence diseases in Karabagh, and the Ministry also asked for technical assistance to create a national plan of action to address the health needs of the population. As a result, a research analyst from CHSR, Alina Dorian, conducted a survey of 1000 households distributed throughout Karabagh and asked questions about their health status and utilization of health care services. This data is currently being analyzed by the CHSR and will be available for reporting during the Fall of 1996. The results of this research project will aid the Ministry of Health of Karabagh, as well as donor organizations, to strategically plan health programs that are urgently needed in the region.

In addition to the above described projects, the CHSR is involved in a variety of other projects, including: smoking cessation education, analysis of hypertension data from the earthquake region, dental health and fluoride tablet supplementation issues, breastfeeding promotion and evaluation and other issues on reproductive health.