

The mission of the [University of Texas Population Research Center \(PRC\)](#) is to facilitate the highest level of population-related research. We advance the training of graduate students and postdoctoral scholars, the production and publication of population-related knowledge, and the dissemination of this work through scholarly meetings, presentations, workshops, teaching, media outlets, and the web. The PRC is funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) and leverages additional support from private foundations and other federal sources.

Texas PRC focuses on **four overlapping and reinforcing primary research areas:**

- **Education, Work, and Inequality**
- **Family Demography**
- **Population Health**
- **Reproductive Health**

Education, Work, and Inequality

[Aprile Benner](#), a PRC Faculty Scholar, with support from the National Science Foundation Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences Directorate (NSF-SBE) studies discrimination and achievement disparities in adolescence. With additional training funding from the National Institutes of Health, Benner collected diary data from teens in the summer of 2020 to assess how the COVID-19 pandemic may be impacting the developmental trajectories of adolescents' mental health, physical health, and academics. Initial daily diary **findings suggest COVID-19 stressors actually heightened the positive supports that adolescents receive, particularly within their families but also within their close friend groups, and this seems to be promotive for socioemotional well-being.** She will also look at the effects of discrimination during the pandemic, with particular attention on exposure that is pandemic-specific.

[Ken-Hou Lin](#), a PRC Faculty scholar, used data from the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS-ASEC) and the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) to profile low-wage/essential workers in the US from 2014 and 2017. Lin investigated three core questions: 1) Who performs low wage work? 2) Which sector are they employed in? 3) Are these 'good' jobs? He found that Latina women, young people, people with the lowest levels of education, and undocumented immigrants are the most likely to perform such work and that the **personal services, retail and professional services sectors employ over half of the low-wage workers in the U.S.** Women, young people, those with less than high school education, and non-union workers are the most likely to experience job insecurity, while Men (except Black men), the better educated, those in middle age, citizens, union workers, and those working for large firms are the most likely to experience mobility. Providing evidence about low-wage workers' economic and social importance can inform policies to address their employment conditions (see [brief](#)).

Family Demography

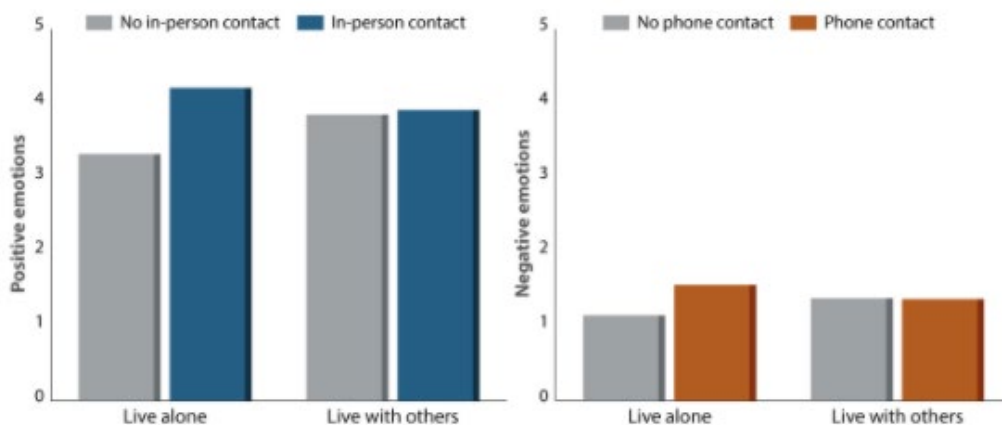
[Shannon Cavanagh](#), a PRC Faculty Scholar, with support from NICHD is using the NIH-funded National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (AddHealth) is examining whether parental health during early adolescence is associated with the educational trajectories of young people in high school and college. **We found that having a parent in poor health significantly shaped the kinds of course taking behavior to teens in high school and lowered the likelihood that they enrolled in college.** Such a finding points to another pathway by which disadvantage can be transmitted across generations.

Funded by an NSF-SBE grant, Cavanagh also runs the **Texas Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU)**, a program **designed to train a new generation of scholars who appreciate the intersection of race/ethnicity and family demography and can use demographic data and insights to do basic research and inform policy and practice**. To that end, we bring in 8 undergraduate students each summer for intensive theoretical and training in statistics. We actively seek to broaden the pipeline into science by recruiting locally and nationally, including through our contacts at the Inter-University Program for Latinx Research and the United Negro College Fund.

Population Health

[Karen Fingerman](#), a PRC Faculty Scholar and co-director of the Center on Aging and Population Sciences (CAPS) funded by the National Institute on Aging, recently published a paper outlining how **older adults living alone during the COVID-19 pandemic benefited from seeing people in person but not necessarily from talking on the phone**. When they did talk on the phone, they reported more negative emotions. For seniors living alone, in-person contact may confer unique benefits to positive emotional well-being – more so than technologically-mediated communication (see [brief](#)).

Older adults who live alone experienced **more positive emotions when they saw someone in person** during the pandemic but **more negative emotions when they talked to someone on the phone**



[Mark Hayward](#), a PRC Faculty Scholar recently showed that **expanded educational opportunities during the early part of the 20th century were related to recent declines in dementia prevalence** among both non-Hispanic Black and non-Hispanic white adults, with non-Hispanic Blacks ages 65 to 74 experiencing the steepest decline. These findings echo numerous studies that link more schooling with a lower risk of dementia which have theorized that education launches multiple biological and social mechanisms that ultimately affect brain health.

Reproductive Health

[Abigail Weitzman](#), a PRC Faculty Scholar, is using NSF-SBE funding to investigate whether migrant women's fertility reflects high desired family sizes or difficulties regulating fertility due to high cost, lack of knowledge about services, and other obstacles. Using data collected in France (a destination country) and data collected from high-fertility African countries (sending countries), she has found that **migrants adapt to the contraceptive norms** of destination contexts, a finding that suggests adaptive contraceptive use should feature prominently in discussions of migrant fertility.