

NMSU researcher looks into relation between border poverty and health

By Justin Bannister

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The area just north of the Mexican border has some of the highest poverty rates in the United States. And, according to one researcher at New Mexico State University, those poverty rates can be linked to poor health and higher mortality rates for people in the region.

"The number of people who are either overweight or obese along the border is alarming," said Rebecca Palacios, an assistant professor in health science at NMSU.

"Overweight and obesity numbers are important because those conditions can lead to chronic diseases and an increased mortality rate from those diseases."

Palacios studied socioeconomic data for the population of 24 U.S. counties in New Mexico, Texas, Arizona and California, each within 100 kilometers of the Mexican border. While San Diego County, Calif., stood out as an affluent area, many of the remaining counties demonstrated some of the highest poverty levels in the country.

Palacios attributed the low economic status she found in these areas to low education levels. She said 30-50 percent of people in these areas had not received a high school diploma. The average for the rest of the U.S. is around 15 percent. She also found approximately 26 percent of the population along the border lacks health insurance. The national average is about 15 percent.

"When you don't have a high school diploma, you must rely on low-skill, low-paying jobs," she

said. "Working these kinds of jobs also contributes to low health insurance rates. Lacking health insurance equates to reduced health screening and reduced prevention for diseases. By the time people realize they are sick, it might be too late."

The problem is especially serious for diseases linked to obesity, such as diabetes, heart disease and cancer. Her research found more than 37 percent of the border population was overweight and another 34 percent was obese - meaning more than seven in 10 people along the border have a weight issue.

"This is unacceptable," she said. "The goal for any state is to have a 15 percent or less rate of obesity. In 2011, no state met this goal. Twenty years ago, no state had an obesity rate higher than 15 percent. This is quite alarming."

Palacios said weight issues are also being seen in children. Being

overweight or obese as a child is one of the strongest predictors for being overweight in adulthood and can lead to premature chronic diseases, such as arthritis, diabetes and even sleep disorders.

"Physical inactivity and an unhealthy diet are the most likely cause of these weight issues," she said. "The U.S. has settled into a largely sedentary lifestyle because of technology, advancements in transportation and school policies."

She said adults who take part in low-skill jobs are less likely to engage in physical activity once they get home. She also said there is an overabundance of fat, sugar and carbohydrates in affordable food, making it harder for low-income families to prepare healthy food.

Palacios hopes to help people become more aware of the situation, and thus take steps to eat healthier, become more active and improve their overall wellbeing.



DARREN PHILLIPS / NMSU

REBECCA PALACIOS, an assistant professor in health science at NMSU, is researching how poverty rates can be linked to poor health and higher mortality rates for people in the border region.

"Eye on Research" is a weekly feature provided by New Mexico State University. This week's feature was written by Justin Bannister of University Communications.

WSMR police get a new look

By Adriana Salas

MISSILE RANGER
STAFF WRITER

WHITE SANDS MISSILE RANGE — Navy blue and yellow are the colors the White Sands Missile Range Police Department is now sporting after receiving an upgraded design for their new vehicles, which are equipped with state-of-the-art features.

Chief of Transportation Di-



swap out with (U.S. General Services Administration) to allow us to order the vehicles," Moore said.

The new vehicles were ordered sooner than originally intended due to the amount of issues the department was having with the older vehicles. A total of 21 Ford F-150s

brighter "wig-wag" — or flashing — lights both in the front and back of the vehicle.

The new features have proven to be safer and more convenient for the officers on duty, according to police.

"It does give adequate lighting. I think that's a huge benefit for pulling traffic stops," said WSMR police officer Joseph Thatcher. "I like it. You can get up and go when you need it. I like the new spotlight and not having to



PHOTO BY ADRIANA SALAS

WHITE SANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT officer Joseph Thatcher stands beside one of 21 new police vehicles that have replaced the department's older model trucks and SUVs. The new trucks offer brighter "Wig-wag" lights, a higher ground clearance and a steel fence separating the front and back seats, providing the safety necessary for officers on the field.