2009-2010 Annual Report
Mission

The GEMMA Fund supports Emory University public health graduate students’ research and their collaborations with public health organizations, including the publishing and publicity of student research findings in order to contribute to the prevention of maternal deaths from abortion.

Background

Each year, about 19 million women in developing countries obtain unsafe abortions and 74,000 women die from related complications. If the 55 million women who have abortions each year worldwide were to obtain abortions as safely as women in the United States, they would have fewer than 100 abortion-related deaths. In response to reports of continuing high maternal mortality from abortion in many other countries that are often neglected in safe motherhood strategies, the GEMMA Fund believes that improved surveillance of maternal deaths and complications associated with abortion and monitoring and evaluation of appropriate interventions will help to eliminate these deaths. To encourage scholarship in this specific area in public health, Dr. Roger and Susan Rochat of the Rollins School of Public Health (RSPH) have established an endowed fund known as the Global Elimination of Maternal Mortality due to Abortion (GEMMA) Fund dedicated to the prevention of maternal deaths from abortion.

What follows is a report of the GEMMA Fund’s progress from 2009 to present.
GEMMA related activities during 2009 and 2010:

Teaching

GEMMA Seminar (Spring 2010)
Development and implementation of a one credit GEMMA Seminar taught by core faculty from RSPH, Emory Medical School and the CDC attracted 26 students from ten academic programs. At the unanimous request of the students, the course was expanded to two credits for Spring 2011.

Abortion Values Clarification Workshop (Oct 2010, 8 hours)
Through a grant from the Institute of Developing Nations at Emory and in collaboration with Ipas, Dr. Rochat and Meg Ivankovich hosted the first ever Abortion Values Clarification Workshop with Emory faculty and staff as well as leaders from the greater Atlanta area. Thirty were in attendance.

Abortion workshop for Law Faculty and Students (Oct 2010, 2 hours)

Diana Foster, PhD, UCSF faculty seminar (March 2010)
Dr. Foster presented the Turnaway Study, a longitudinal, prospective study investigating the physical and emotional outcomes of women who terminate their pregnancy compared to women who are denied the procedure.

Service

Post-Abortion Care (PAC) Consortium Task Force on Broadening the Scope of the Consortium (Fall 2009)
Emory students Roula AbiSamra and Briana Lozano interviewed 30 stakeholder organizations to explore whether the Consortium should expand its activities to encompass comprehensive abortion care. Results of these interviews were published in a report presented to a meeting of the Consortium in November 2009. Based in part on these findings, the Task Force and the PACC Steering Committee recommended that interested organizations create a second, parallel network on the prevention of unsafe abortion, whose mission would include comprehensive abortion care. This network is currently in its formative stages.

Essential Supplies for Abortion Services (Fall 2009)
Sarah Dickey, Sarah Fisher and Heidi Mock worked with Population Council and Ipas on several aspects of Essential Supplies for abortion services

Emory Law Students for Reproductive Justice (Dec 2010)
Emory Law students Ruth Dawson and Sarah Stein recently established the Emory chapter of Law Students for Reproductive Justice
GEMMA Website (Jan 2010)
Aimee Leidich designed and launched the first ever website for the GEMMA Fund:
http://www.sph.emory.edu/cms/academic_programs/research/gemma_home.html

Emory Reproductive Health Association (ERHA) (2010)
ERHA hosted the following GEMMA-related events:

- Two panels on Abortion in the Black Community co-sponsored by the Association of Black Public Health Students. The first panel invited speakers from Planned Parenthood Southeast, Sistersong and Emory professor, Dr. Roger Rochat. The second panel had representatives from Georgia Right to Life. Following these panels, Rollins students Aimee Leidich, Tamar Goldenberg, and Kaitlin Fincher lead a research group comprised of six public health students investigating demographics of abortion clients in Georgia. This research is intended to further investigate recent claims that abortion providers are coercing African American women to terminate an unwanted pregnancy as a form of eugenics.

- Abortion film series screening 12th & Delaware, If These Walls Could Talk and Abortion Democracy followed by Q&A with the director, Sarah Diehl

Research

First GEMMA-related publication (2010)
Trisha Moslin recently published findings from her MPH thesis investigating the use of contraception following abortion. The study surveyed 75 women at Atlanta’s Feminist Women's Health Center and found that 92% of those who were sexually active were also using some form of contraception [Moslin, TA, Rochat, RW (2010) Contraception use among clients of the Feminist Women’s Health Center at three to five weeks post-abortion. Maternal and Child Health Journal, Online First™, 4 July 2010]

Student Practicum Research—GEMMA AWARDS (initiated in summer 2009)
The GEMMA Fund supports students to investigate a complicated reality and contribute to modern-day solutions to prevent maternal deaths. To date, the GEMMA Selection Committee, has provided $500 awards to seven students (two in 2009, five in 2010) conducting GEMMA-related research around the world. Upon return to the US, all seven recipients presented their research and findings at Brown Bag lunch presentations at the Rollins School of Public Health. By addressing the controversial and often hidden topic of abortion, GEMMA Fund recipients bravely embark on an academic journey that has the potential to create momentum to eliminate maternal abortion deaths. All student recipients have shown great commitment to the aims of the GEMMA Fund and the ingenuity necessary to conduct such research.

What follows are descriptions of each individual project
Danielle Smith (2010) researched the impact of perceived gender and power norms on family planning decision-making in Siaya, Kenya. One aspect of the research was focused on decision-making in the case of unplanned pregnancies, both for young girls and married women. Danielle will be using this research for her thesis titled “The influence of gender norms on people's interpretations of questions from gender and power norm scales in Siaya, Kenya” which she will be presenting on at the Population Association of America 2011 Annual Meeting. Danielle plans to attend Medical School in Fall 2011.

Kellie Corcoran (2009) conducted a needs assessment of post-partum IUD insertion for pregnant women tested for HIV in Lusaka, Zambia with the Rwanda Zambia HIV Research Group (RZHRG). She interviewed pregnant women who had been tested with their partner for HIV about their knowledge of and experiences with abortion, as well as interviewed nurses and other service providers on their experiences with and perceptions of the legality, availability and acceptability of abortions. Kellie currently works as a Research Analyst at UCSF Global Health Sciences - Prevention and Public Health Group as a member of the Kenya HIV Surveillance team. She will be starting at University of California, Davis Medical School in the Fall.

Liz Corey (2009) conducted research for the Chikankata Child Survival Project (CCSP) on the availability of and attitudes towards family planning and Post-Abortion Care in Zambia. Her research assessed the impact that trained traditional birth attendants (TTBAs) had in reducing maternal mortality as well as identify intervention points where the TTBAs could be further trained. Liz is in her first year of Medical School at University of Wisconsin, Madison.
Brenna Rabel (2010) worked with SEARCH to analyze data from a clinic-based study on local women opting for medically terminated pregnancy. Although the results thus far are only preliminary, the findings are remarkable: almost 99% of women receiving a regimen of vaginally-inserted misoprostol successfully completed abortion without severe complication. The current abortion laws in India, which were written before reliable medical (as opposed to surgical) methods were available, stipulate that only government-licensed physicians in government-approved facilities can perform abortions, making it especially difficult to procure a legal abortion in rural areas. The results of this study may help to inform a shift in policy to expand access to MTP in rural areas. Brenna will be starting a Post-Baccalaureate program in the Fall with plans to attend Medical School soon after.

Amy Winter (2010) worked with the women's program team at SEARCH (Society for Education, Action, Research, and Community Health) to improve the women's health education curriculum. Additionally, she researched rural and tribal women's perceptions of sterilization and the factors associated with female rather than male sterilization within a couple. She plans to present her findings during the Psychosocial Workshop at the Population Association of America 2011 Annual meeting. Amy is in the process of applying to PhD programs in Demography and Epidemiology.
Shreya Rao (2010) conducted a qualitative study to identify the causes and consequences of unwanted pregnancy in Leticia, Colombia. The current abortion laws in Colombia are very restrictive, allowing abortions only in the case of rape, fetal malformation, or extreme risk to mother. Through a series of interviews, Shreya observed that unwanted pregnancies, along with large family sizes and early ages of sexual initiation, are common in Leticia. The primary explanations for these patterns included economic instability, barriers to access, and personal irresponsibility as well as the role of poverty in encouraging prostitution and abuse. Although estimations of the frequency of abortion were significantly varied, the subjects expressed an almost unanimous disapproval of the practice, particularly where it involved formal health care providers. Shreya will be using this research for her qualitative thesis titled “An Assessment of the Barriers and Facilitators of Emergency Contraception and Abortion Practices in the Amazon Region of Colombia.” She will be starting Emory Medical School in Fall 2011.

Ryan Woodson (2010) conducted a qualitative research study in the Amazon region of Colombia. Through her study, titled “A Qualitative Assessment of Unwanted Pregnancy and Induced Abortion among Women in the Amazon Region of Colombia,” Ryan aimed to examine and understand the socio-cultural perceptions and decision-making pathways of unwanted pregnancy and induced abortion among indigenous women of reproductive age. Ryan will be using this data for her thesis titled “Unwanted Pregnancy and Abortion among Indigenous Women in the Colombian Amazon.” She is in the process of applying to Medical School with plans to matriculate in Fall 2012.
With funding from the Emory Global Health Institute (GHI), Roula AbiSambra and Aimee Leidich (Rollins School of Public Health), Ruth Dawson (School of Law), and Maria Presley (Candler School of Theology) collaboratively worked at three member organizations of Mexico’s National Pro-Choice Alliance -- Population Council, Grupo de Información en Reproducción Elegida (Reproductive Choice Information Group, GIRE), and Católicas para el Derecho de Decidir (Catholics for Choice, CDD), respectively, to compile evidence-based recommendations for messaging to combat the stigma and isolation faced by women who have had or may need an abortion in Mexico. The two Public Health Scholars analyzed quantitative public opinion surveys and qualitative patient interviews, the Law Scholar researched state-specific policy and politics in relation to public opinion, and the Theology Scholar interviewed theological experts and interpreted biblical texts. The team presented their project at the Emory GHI Scholars Symposium as well as the 2010 APHA Annual Meeting. Roula continues to analyze qualitative abortion patient interviews as a consultant for Population Council. Aimee is using her quantitative research for her thesis analyzing the sexual and reproductive health opinions of Mexican Catholic men. Ruth will complete her MPH in Spring 2011 and will finish her Law degree in 2012. Maria has accepted a position as an Associate at International Relief and Development (IRD) in Washington, D.C.
The GEMMA endowment fund continues to grow with generous contributions from the Rochats and other donors. “GEMMA Shirt” sales continue to be a substantial source of revenue as well as publicity for the fund all over the world.

The auditorium of the recently constructed Claudia Nance Rollins building contains two rows totaling 16 seats with plaques donated to recognize abortion-related advocates and leaders. $215 from each plaque was donated directly to the GEMMA Fund.
Looking forward

GEMMA aims to disperse another five GEMMA awards for summer 2011 as well as support a second GHI GEMMA Team at the National Pro-Choice Alliance in Mexico City. Efforts are underway to expand awareness about the GEMMA Fund and the issue of maternal mortality from unsafe abortion in the greater Atlanta Community.