Public Health Law Research: Making the Case for Laws that Improve Health

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## Program leadership

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<td>Michelle Mello, Jeffrey Swanson, Jennifer Wood</td>
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<td>Key Consultants</td>
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DRIVEN TO DISTRACTION
Drivers and Legislators Dismiss Cellphone Risks

At 60 miles an hour on a Missouri highway, a 16-year-old driver texts with a friend as a 17-year-old takes the wheel.
“Extensive research shows the dangers of distracted driving ... Yet Americans have largely ignored that research.”

An Oklahoma legislator said “he and his colleagues needed more evidence of the dangers before they considered restricting the freedom to talk while driving.”

“’To me, the death of freedom is far worse than the risk of talking on the phone while driving,’ said a state representative in Salt Lake City...”
Definition

• “Public Health Law Research” is *the scientific study of the relation of law and legal practices to population health.*

  – “Scientific” connotes that PHLR deploys recognized research methodologies within an explicit theoretical framework to collect and analyze data
  
  – “Population health,” not individual outcomes, is the focus
  
  – Law is not just what’s on the books, but what happens “on the streets
    *• Implementation practices and regulatory techniques*
    *• How people think about and respond to law*
Definition

• More than just “health” laws:
  – “Interventional Public Health Law” – laws intended to influence health outcomes or mediators
  – “Infrastructural Public Health Law” – laws establishing powers, duties, institutions of public health
  – “Accidental Public Health Law” – laws, regardless of topic or purpose, that are studied for their impact on public health
Definition

• PHLR does not encompass all scholarship on public health law
  – Commentary on legal, ethical or doctrinal issues
  – Development of new doctrinal theories
  – Analysis of law and practice against normative standards (e.g., compliance with human rights norms)
Logic model of PHLR

**Inputs**
- Laws
  - Interventional
  - Infrastructural
  - Accidental
- Law-making

**Mediators**
- Legal Practices
- Changes in environments
- Changes in behavior

**Outcomes**
- Population health
Some PHLR directly tests law’s impact on health

Inputs Mediators Outcomes

Graduated drivers license laws

Reduction in fatal crashes, injury crashes, all crashes

Or a well-established mediator of health outcomes

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**Inputs**

Seat belt laws

**Mediators**

Seat belt use

**Outcomes**

E.g., Effectiveness of primary and secondary enforced seat belt laws
Some PHLR investigates how law is developed

<table>
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Or put into practice

Inputs  | Mediators  | Outcomes

Law → Legal practices

Some PHLR looks at how implementation affects outcomes

Inputs
- Hard drug arrests per capita
- Police employees per capita
- Corrections expenditures per capita

Mediators

Outcomes
- HIV sero-prevalence among injectors in 89 large US metropolitan areas

Some research focuses on mediators themselves

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<th>Inputs</th>
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<tr>
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<td>How law influences behavior</td>
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<td>How law influences environments</td>
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<td>How to effectively implement law</td>
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Finally, some PHLR simply examines the distribution, characteristics and variations in laws

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<td>Quarantine laws</td>
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Our goals

• Building the PHL evidence base
  • What works
  • What doesn’t
  • How

• Strengthening scholarship in PHLR
  • Improved methods
  • More and better researchers working in the field
  • More interdisciplinary and research-practice collaboration
  • More research funding for PHLR

• Supporting practice
  • Communicating the evidence
  • Supporting PHLR by agencies and practitioners
Our activities

- **Funding research**
  - Three rounds of funding in next five years
  - Rapid response mechanism to be implemented

- **Conducting research**
  - Effect of anti-obesity legislation
  - Policing and health
  - Food safety
  - Cell phone – driving laws

- **Support for better research**
  - Methodological guidance
  - TA for grantees (& as demand & resources warrant, for the field)

- **Dissemination of evidence**
How Can You Help the PHLR Team?

• Provide input on policy-relevant topics for future calls for proposals
  – Researchers benefit from understanding the policy context and concepts related to their work
  – In future CFPs, we will look to generate results that have a high degree of policy relevancy
How Can You Help the PHLR Team?

• Join in research
  – Form your own interdisciplinary research-practice collaborations
  – Help researchers to design studies and utilize methodology that will best inform policy debates
How Can You Help the PHLR Team?

- Advise on dissemination of research results to ensure that stakeholders are reached
- Help to disseminate research findings
- Use PHLR results in your work as decision-makers.
Our expectations

- Even the best evidence can be ignored
  - Medical malpractice
- And often researchers have to be patient as evidence gradually accumulates and even more gradually influences policy
  - Needle exchange
- But better evidence can foster a cycle of good – and life-saving – policy diffusion
  - Seat-belt laws
  - Graduated driver’s licenses

Researchers to policy-makers: “Keep your eyes on the road!”
Thank you!

Sign up for news, and offer your advice, at http://www.PublicHealthLawResearch.org

Contact us: phlr@temple.edu
Thank you