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Eli Madden

Washington University in St. Louis

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EXAMINING PARENTAL INTERACTIONS WITH A CHILDHOOD COMMUNITY NUTRITION PROJECT IN NAIGOBYA, UGANDA

Eli Madden

Mentor: Bradley Stoner

The rural village of Naigobya, Uganda has a prominent, well-established non-governmental organization (NGO) known as Uganda Development Health Associates (UDHA). This NGO is a grassroots organization that works to improve the health of underserved communities. The main focus of the Naigobya branch of UDHA is a childhood nutrition program, incorporating education, community health workers, and a community garden to empower young Ugandans to improve their health by improving their nutrition. It is hoped that by fostering healthy lifestyles now, they will become routine for future generations. Preliminary research by a past intern for UDHA found that some parents, particularly fathers, seemed disinterested or unknowledgeable about the UDHA nutrition program. This intern spent some time interviewing the locals in the village about the programs at UDHA and found this common trend but did not learn the reasons behind this disinterest. This summer I engaged in participant observation in an attempt to understand this phenomenon. I lived in Naigobya, and worked with the project, while conducting semi-structured, open ended interviews with fathers and mothers of children in the village. Results showed extreme interest in the project, but structural issues that caused fathers to miss programs or community sensitizations. Additionally, women expressed an increase agency within the traditional family structure of Uganda when they participated in the program. The information gathered in this study has the potential for use in other initiatives that UDHA undertakes, and I hope to work with the NGO to maximize the benefit of the project in the future.