

Overview

[The Global Health Education and Learning Incubator at Harvard University](#) (GHELI) supports interdisciplinary education about world health through the production, curation, and dissemination of educational public goods. This exemplar work was a final project for “World Health: Challenges and Opportunities,” a General Education course at Harvard College taught by GHELI Faculty Director Sue J. Goldie. For this creative assessment designed with support from GHELI, students systematically analyze a societal health challenge they care about and create a “real world” product intended to influence policy or motivate change.

Abstract

A video of a drive that sheds light on the diminishing health and wellbeing of rural Americans.

Artist

Amanda Litka (2020)

Caption

Prior to this course, I knew little to nothing about the mortality penalty that exists in rural America. Sure, I knew that lack of access to healthcare because of location challenges (lack of access to specialty care, problems with continuity of care, etc.) most likely resulted in worse health outcomes for rural Americans, but I did not understand the depth of the issue before diving into it for my policy brief in this course. A steady decline in all-cause, age-adjusted mortality rates in the U.S. has masked an ever-widening gap among rural Americans and their urban counterparts for over 20 years. As I mentioned in the video, in 2016, the difference in these rates of decline produced nearly 61,000 excess deaths in rural America—approximately 15% of all rural deaths. As the goal of the short video was to serve as an educational tool, I did not dive into the policy implications that this issue brings to the table. However, state and federal policymakers must look beyond access to healthcare and look to social determinants such as poverty levels, education, race, physician shortages, uninsurance levels, and more in order to better understand and produce solutions to mitigate the complex issue of mortality rates in rural America.

Artist Lens

Each morning as I drive to work, I am amazed at the scenes around me. Out here in middle America, I take each day as a blessing and wish more people were able to experience the serenity and simplicity of a morning drive through rural America. One morning, I decided to videotape my 10-minute drive to work to show my friends from Harvard. That same video is the backdrop to my short film “A Roadtrip Through Rural America(n Mortality).” The narration is a combination of facts that I employed in my policy brief and personal touches from my own experience growing up in a town with less than 600 people. The purpose of the short film is to draw attention to the growing mortality penalty in rural America. I believe my own narration of the problem provides an emotional backing to the issue and allows a voice to be put to the issue. I wanted viewers to come away with the knowledge that rural Americans are silently suffering, some even without their knowledge, and to understand that it is on all of us to erase the excess deaths by pushing for answers to these problems.

Note: Not included at the end of the video was the proper citation for Little Big Town's "Boondocks," which I utilized throughout the video. I have included the proper citation here:

Little Big Town. (2005). Boondocks [Song]. On The Road to Here [Album]. Equity.

Media

Video



[Watch A Road Trip Through Rural America\(n Mortality\)](#)