

# Taylor Carty

M.P.H. Candidate, Global Health Track

[taylor.carty@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:taylor.carty@vanderbilt.edu)

**Practicum Site:** Curamericas Global

**Practicum Site Supervisor:** Barbara Muffoletto, M.P.H.

## ***Empowerment Among Rural Indigenous Women in the Guatemalan Highlands***



**Introduction:** Curamericas Global's Casa Materna clinics, located in the rural highlands of Guatemala, work to promote maternal health and institutional birth through a community-based care model. Women in this region face several social and cultural barriers to community participation and leadership, including a history of machismo, traditional gender roles, and religious influences. Poverty and isolation in rural areas often limit women's reproductive autonomy. The objectives for this practicum were to develop a survey tool to measure empowerment among indigenous women across 4 domains: social independence, household decision-making, community participation and leadership, and normative beliefs.

**Methods:** Prior literature on women's empowerment in low-income, rural settings was reviewed, and staff interviews were conducted to inform survey scale, feasibility, and cultural context. A 32-item survey instrument was developed and will be administered in the spring of 2023 to indigenous women living within the Curamericas Guatemala catchment area. Ten households from each sector will be recruited via stratified random sampling from a census-based registry. Staff will conduct visits to the selected households to administer the survey verbally in the local language due to low levels of literacy and Spanish fluency.

**Results:** These quantitative empowerment indicators will not only provide age and region-specific baseline measures of gender-related attitudes, but also inform more targeted Casa Materna programming. Curamericas Guatemala has previously included women's empowerment in their evaluation of the Census-Based, Impact-Oriented (CBIO) approach; however, this study will be expanded to assess empowerment outside of the birthing process.

**Conclusions:** Female subjugation and lack of autonomy in this area takes a huge toll on indigenous women, manifesting through domestic violence and high maternal and neonatal mortality rates that earned this region the nickname "the Triangle of Death." This project will better inform the Casa Materna of how to recognize and address these socially derived health hazards before women reach the clinic.