

A CONVERSATION WITH CATHERINE GARCÍA



As a first-generation college graduate, I have always been interested in how people's lives are shaped by the communities they grow up in, the opportunities available to them, and the broader social conditions around them. While studying sociology as an undergraduate at UCLA, I became fascinated by the idea that health is not determined solely by biology or individual choices.



That curiosity led me to earn graduate degrees in sociology and gerontology, and ultimately to a career studying health and aging. Today, I am an Assistant Professor at Syracuse University, where I study how social and environmental conditions influence chronic disease, disability, cognitive health, and healthy aging over the life course.

Much of my current research focuses on Latina/o/x populations in the United States and Puerto Rico. One question that drives my work is: How do the experiences and opportunities people have throughout their lives become "written" into their health as they age? To answer this question, I use information from long-term studies of aging and combine it with data about neighborhoods, communities, and social conditions.



One of my greatest professional accomplishments has been developing the Puerto Rico Contextual Data Resource, a research tool that links information about neighborhoods and communities across Puerto Rico to long-term studies of aging. This project brought together data from many different sources to help researchers better understand how factors such as economic conditions, access to healthcare, and neighborhood environments influence health as people age.

As a professor and researcher, I also see outreach as an important part of my role. I enjoy spending time with students, helping them build confidence in their reading skills, and encouraging curiosity about learning. As a first-generation college graduate, I am also passionate about mentoring and supporting students from diverse backgrounds. I believe everyone should have the opportunity to explore science, ask questions, and discover their potential, regardless of where they come from.

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CATHERINE GARCÍA
AND HER WORK

