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Understanding and Assessing Impact of U.S. Short-Term Missions

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## Abstract

### Understanding and Assessing Impact of U.S. Short Term Missions

By Elisha Bronner

**Background:** Short term missions are rooted in the 17th century colonial quest to spread Christianity. As the field of short term missions emerged in the mid-1900s, it became a growing phenomenon. Today, over 1.6 million Americans participate on short term missions annually. Because of the nature of travel from high income countries to low income countries to “do good”, short term missions have implications for global health, but a gap exists in measuring impact.

**Methods:** An interdisciplinary literature review was conducted to understand the field of short term missions, understand the way and extent that short term missions are evaluated, and to provide a basis for recommendations of resources that can be used for assessing and evaluating the impact of short term missions.

**Results:** Short term missions are defined as intentionally limited, cross-cultural religiously motivated mission efforts for a predetermined length of time without participants making a residency based commitment of more than two years, with the majority of short term missions lasting for less than two weeks.

There is limited reporting on the impact of short term missions, but some researchers found that they have both positive and negative impacts. The three most common methods used for assessing impact are participant self-assessments, qualitative interviews, and anecdotes. Much of the focus was found to be on the impact the mission trip had on the participants, while the impact assessment for host communities captured more information about perceptions of impact rather than on the impacts themselves.

Based on findings from the literature review, the researcher developed an impact evaluation framework for short term missions and provided recommendations of tools and resources to use for conducting impact assessments.

**Conclusion:** Gaps in impact assessment make it impossible to know the scope of impact that short term missions have on global health. This special studies project demonstrates that there is a gap in measuring impact and provides recommendations that will benefit leaders in their ability to close the gap. By using the recommended resources and conducting impact evaluations, effective missions can take place to increase the positive and reduce the negative impacts.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Introduction and Rationale:**

Short term missions, or short term mission trips, are defined as “intentionally limited, organized cross cultural mission efforts for a predetermined length of time without participants making a residency-based commitment of more than 2 years” (Howell, 2012), however the majority of short term mission trips last for two weeks or less. For the purpose of this special studies project, short-term missions or mission trips are referring to those of Christian faith going to serve in low-income countries.

In a survey conducted by Wuthnow and Offutt in 2005, they found that annually, at least 1.6 million Americans participate on short term mission trips of a duration of two weeks or less (Wuthnow and Offutt, 2008). This number continues to grow as the field of short term missions and the attraction to this field expands. Though the field of short term missions is expanding, the level of impact evaluation in this field is not. Though there has been an emphasis placed on the impact that short term missions have, both positive and negative, emphasis has not been placed on how one understands this impact. While a few qualitative methods and self-assessments are used to understand impact of short term missions, the focus is often on the impact that the mission trip has on the participants rather than on the recipients of the mission team’s services. As a result, no conclusive statement can be made about whether or not short term missions are actually effective and accomplishing what they set out to accomplish: in general, some form of “helping the poor.” It is important for impact evaluation of short term missions to be considered due to a number of reasons, but primarily because there needs to be a way to understand the “good” that short term

missions aim to do and also because of the abundance of funds and resources that are donated towards short term missions annually. Without a way to measure the impact of short term missions, there is no way of knowing whether the quality and return on investment is worth the high cost of short term missions. By examining this gap further and recommending tools and resources for impact evaluation of short term missions, appropriate actions can be undertaken to assure positive impact of short term missions on both participants and recipient communities.

**Problem Statement:**

Over 1.6 million Americans participate in short term missions each year, and this number is continuing to increase. Despite the large number of short term mission trips each year, there is minimal recording of efforts to measure impact measuring the impact that these mission trips have on short term mission participants and the receiving communities. This lack of impact evaluation of short term mission trips makes it difficult to know how, or if, short term missions are actually helping those they are intending to help. Among the impact evaluations of short term missions that are accessible, there is a focus on the impacts that mission trips have on participants as well as a focus on the experiences that individual members in the recipient communities have with the mission team. A gap remains in measuring the impact that short term missions have on recipient communities as a whole.

**Purpose Statement:**

The purpose of this special studies project is to explore the extent to which short term missions are currently understood and evaluated. Additionally, this special studies project will discuss the role of evaluation in short term missions and provide a set of tools and sources of public health

evaluation resources that can be used by leaders, participants, supporters, and recipients of short term missions to measure and better understand the impact of short term missions on affected communities.

**Research Objectives:**

Objective 1: Describe the field of short term missions

Objective 2: Explain the gap that exists in measuring impact in this field

Objective 3: Provide a framework that explains how impact of short term missions can be assessed and compile a toolkit of public health resources that can be used to help measure and understand impact of short term missions

**Significance Statement:**

Short term missions are very popular among churches and para-church organizations in the United States. Because of the high prevalence of short term mission participants traveling to lower income nations and communities in hopes of bringing about positive change, it is necessary to ensure that their efforts are bringing about change that is beneficial to the communities on the receiving end of their efforts. Without being able to measure the impact of short term missions, it will remain unknown whether activities of short term missions are actually helping, wasting resources with no effect, or causing harm to communities.

As public health practitioners and individuals who care about the wellbeing of others, it is in everyone's interest to care that short term mission trips are being evaluated and that the impact of

these trips are being measured. It is recognized that the number of participants in short term missions will only continue to increase over time. Therefore, it is necessary to be able to evaluate and understand the impact of these mission trips to know how they are affecting recipient communities and to be sure that they are not exacerbating the existing public health problems in these communities. Additionally, the high cost of mission trips is another reason that it is vital to be able to measure the impacts of these trips. Without knowing what is exactly being accomplished on mission trips, it cannot be determined if short term missions are the most effective or beneficial use of the large amount of financial resources they require. One benefit of evaluating the impact of short term missions is being able to assess the use of resources and make proper adjustments according to what is found to be the best use of those funds.

Leaders, participants, supporters, and recipients of short term missions can all benefit from understanding the impact of these trips. Assessing and evaluating the impacts of short term missions will help to determine how short term mission trips affect both the participants as well as the recipients of these trips. This knowledge can be used to make decisions regarding potential changes that need to be made in order to increase the benefit of these short term mission trips and decrease their negative impacts. Understanding and evaluating the impacts of short term missions will help to decide which activities of short term missions should continue and which activities should be altered or discarded in order to create the most positive impact on all stakeholders of short term mission trips.

**Definition of Terms:**

Low income countries: As defined by the World Bank; for the purpose of this special studies project, understood as countries that typically receive mission trip participants

Para-church organization: Christian organization not affiliated with any church, but may organize mission trips and carry out mission activities

Participants: Individuals or groups who travel as a part of a mission trip from America to a low or middle income country

Recipient or host communities: Communities in low income countries who receive groups and/or individuals participating on short term mission trips

Short term missions (STM) or short term mission trip: intentionally limited, organized cross cultural mission efforts for a predetermined length of time without participants making a residency-based commitment of more than 2 years; most last two weeks or less; for the purpose of this special studies project, understood as those of Christian faith going to serve in a country outside of the United States.

## **Chapter 2: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this special studies project is to understand the field of short term missions, understand the way and extent that short term missions are currently being evaluated and to provide recommendations of public health tools that can be used in assessing and evaluating the impact of short term missions. To explore this topic and achieve the research objectives of this project, the researcher conducted a literature review of articles, books, and other studies of the field of short term missions. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of this project, sources were used from the fields of theology, public health, medicine, and nursing.

### **Procedures**

To begin this special studies project exploring the field of short term missions and the ways that their impacts are assessed, the initial step was to identify appropriate databases. Beginning with the Google Scholar database, the researcher used the search terms “short term missions” “impact of short term missions” “effectiveness of short term missions” and “mission trips” to identify journal articles and other publications that discussed short term missions. To allow for sources with a more explicit public health connection, the sub-theme of medical missions and therefore search term, “medical missions,” was added. This in turn led to the discovery of additional databases, including Sage Journals, Science Direct, and BioMedCentral. These search terms as well as “short term medical missions” “medical volunteer” “medical trip” and “global health experience,” were then used to continue searching these databases for sources pertaining to short term missions, short term medical missions, and the impact of these trips. The terms “impact assessment” and “impact evaluation” were also paired with the search terms “short term missions” and

“medical missions” when identifying methods used to measure and understand the impact of short term mission trips. To further explore the interdisciplinary nature of this special studies project, the researcher sought and received guidance from the research librarian at the Pitts Theological Library in the Emory University Candler School of Theology. The research librarian pointed the researcher to the ATLA religion database, and the researcher used the same search terms with this database to identify additional scholarly sources from the religion discipline that focus on short term missions.

The search results from these databases were mostly journal articles and case studies, however the ATLA database returned with a number of books in addition. Once these sources were identified, the next step entailed deciding which sources to include in the research and which sources to exclude. The inclusion criteria were sources that gave insight to the field of short term missions currently, explored the history of short term missions, and/or discussed the impact of short term missions in any capacity. Sources that were excluded from the research were those that did not meet one of the aforementioned criteria and those that focused on short term missions originating from a country other than the United States, since the focus of this special studies project is American short term missions.

The literature review provided data for each of the three research objectives. It provided an understanding of short term missions, including what short term missions are, the number of participants that are typically involved, and the different types of activities that can take place on a short term mission trip. It also provided data regarding the impact of short term missions. This

included data received from both participants of short term missions as well as recipient communities of short term missions. The data, however, was limited in discussing impact assessment of short term missions and this limitation was used to explain the gap that exists in understanding the impact of short term missions.

The data gathered from the literature review was used to create a conceptual framework to explain the way in which impact of short term missions is understood. This framework was used as a guide to understand the need for impact assessment resources and to develop recommendations to mission trip leaders. To develop this framework and set of recommendations, the researcher used findings from the literature review to determine where the major gaps were in understanding impact. Upon identifying the main gaps, the researcher then made recommendations and provided monitoring and evaluation resources that can be used to address the gaps. The resources were provided using prior monitoring and evaluation knowledge, and were also based on the following search terms: “monitoring and evaluation plan” “monitoring and evaluation” “monitoring and evaluation tool” “program evaluation” “project evaluation” “impact evaluation” “impact assessment” “CDC evaluation” “World Vision monitoring and evaluation” “community tool box” and “community based participatory research”. Resources were chosen based on their fit to address identified gaps, and were then sorted based on which gaps they were most applicable.

### **Plans for Data Analysis**

These recommendations of public health tools and resources can be used to help increase the understanding of what impact evaluation is, why it is important for short term missions, how to evaluate impact of short term missions, and what to do once the impact has been evaluated. Upon



receiving these recommendations, it is ideal that they be considered in order to make changes in the field of short term missions that will increase the positive impact of short term missions in both the visiting and host communities of these trips.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This special studies project is not “research” as defined by the IRB and no human subjects were involved and thus did not require IRB review.

### **Limitations**

The largest limitation of this special studies project is the minimal amount of research that has been done on the amount and impact of short term missions. Though the field of short term missions has continued to expand in recent years, there has been little research done to explore its impact. A similar limitation is the lack of literature that explains the method of assessing impact of short term missions. Of the small number of researchers who do study short term missions, the emphasis is often on the impacts of short term missions rather than on the methods they are using to measure and evaluate those impacts.

### **Delimitations**

This special studies project is focused on American short term missions for both adults and youth.

## **Chapter 3: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

This literature review explores the field of short term missions and seeks to provide an understanding of the need for impact evaluation in the field. It begins by looking at the history of missions in America, the emergence of short term missions, and the characterization of short term missions. Following that is a description of what is known about the positive and negative impact of short term missions, how the impact of short term missions is measured, and gaps in measurement. Inclusion criteria for this literature review, as described in the previous chapter, included books, articles, and case studies from the fields of theology and global health that had a focus on either short term missions or short term medical missions and related work. Strengths and limitations of the literature is also discussed.

### **History of American Missions**

#### *Roots of American Missions*

In the early 1600s, English Protestants arrived in the American colonies in hopes of starting a new life and having religious freedom. John Winthrop said that leaving England to establish a new society in Massachusetts gave them the opportunity to form a government based on Christian principles which they were unable to form in England (Blevins, 2018). Motivated by the notion of Manifest Destiny, their pursuit of new land enabled them to create a society for the purpose of awaiting the imminent return of Jesus (Blevins, 2018).

Though they were theologically inspired to settle in American colonies as a means of sharing the Gospel with Native Americans, this notion of Manifest Destiny is also what led to the violent

displacement of a myriad of Native American people. However, this was seen as a part of their divine duty to expand, so it continued. English Protestants viewed this new land as a “city on a hill” and “God’s instrument”, and thus they believed that America had a specific destiny in bringing about God’s kingdom on Earth (Blevins, 2018).

America was viewed as a region of the world where the saving light of the Gospel was shining. Because of this, and because of the belief that Jesus’ second coming could only happen after all nations heard the Gospel, the Protestants were motivated to participate in missions to the nations. They wanted to spread the message of Christ to those who had not yet heard it, so that Jesus’ return would come (Blevins, 2018). This belief that God was calling America to save the rest of the world is where the roots of American missions come from. In subsequent years, America became committed to foreign missions, and in the late 1700s into the early 1800s, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) became the second largest charity organization in the United States.

In addition to the theological commitments that started the missions movement, medical advancements during this time also began to play a role in taking the Gospel to other parts of the world. In 1798, the smallpox vaccination was created to address smallpox outbreaks in Canada. This, alongside the influx of other medical treatments being made available throughout the early 1800s, began to influence foreign missions as it was brought to the attention of religious leaders that a part of the Christian faith, and thus foreign missions, included caring for those who are sick. In 1842, ABCFM sent the first medical missions to the Sandwich Islands (later known as

Hawaii), and the doctors rotated between the mission activities of caring for patients and working in government facilities (Blevins, 2018). This is where one begins to see the potential influence and connection that Christianity and missions have on global health and development.

### *American Missions in the 20th Century*

During the missions era in the 19th century and leading into the 20th century, missions did not have a predetermined length of time and were typically seen to be a lifetime commitment. Individuals who desired to move to another country as a response to their personal conviction to spread the Gospel were expected to remain in that country for an extended period of time, if not the remainder of their lives. It was common for these individuals to pack all of their belongings and move abroad without knowing if or when they would ever return back home. This was the original form of missions. However, as the century continued and more advancements in society took place, another concept of missions surfaced, which became known as short term missions.

Several changes in social, economic, and political factors, including the increase in globalization, across the United States and the world in the 20th century began to contribute to the emergence of short term missions. For example, the establishment of the Peace Corps, with individuals serving for a set period of time, served as an influence on churches and other Christian organizations. Other influencing factors for short term missions include mass commercial air travel and paid vacation time for working adults. Both of these changes made it easier for Americans to travel to other parts of the world to serve on missions and gave them the time and flexibility to do it. Additionally, missions organizations, such as Operation Mobilization and Youth With a Mission,

started focusing on sending college age and single adults on short term mission trips, which served as the beginning stages of the short term missions movement seen today.

### *Emergence of Short Term Missions*

One of the reasons that short term mission trips came into being was out of a desire to see the youth in America return to Christ as well as potentially become full time missionaries themselves (Howell, 2012). In 1949, a program was approved by the Methodist Board of Missions that allowed recent college graduates to travel in groups of fifty for a three year appointment in a foreign country. In 1957, Operation Mobilization (OM) was founded as a missions organization with the purpose of mobilizing young people to share the Gospel in parts of the world where it has not yet been heard. OM began sending recent college graduates and other young adults on summer missions in 1958. Similarly, Youth With a Mission was founded in 1960 by Loren Cunningham, a recent college graduate, who wanted young people to be involved in the spread of the Gospel around the globe. Many students and graduates with YWAM served as summer short term volunteers in places like the West Indies, Hawaii, Mexico, and Central America (YWAM, 2017). Various institutions and organizations began joining the short term missions movement during this time period, including Wheaton College, InterVarsity, Adventures in Missions, and others, most of which are classified as Evangelical Christians. Due to this mobilization period of short term missions, there was a transition seen in the field of missions, where short term missions became a type of mission of their own, and were no longer seen as solely as recruitment for full-time missionaries.

### *Summary of History of American Missions*

Though short term missions did not become widespread in America until the mid 1900s, they are rooted in a long history of colonization and the desire to spread Christianity. During the colonization period, America was viewed as “God’s instrument” and this, along with the belief that Christ could not return until all nations were introduced to the Gospel, led to the start of the American missionary era. This era of missions consisted of individuals who felt called to pack up all of their belongings and move to another country with the purpose of spreading the Gospel. However, a shift in this missionary movement occurred around the mid 1900s as a result of social, political, and economic changes in America. Alongside these changes, organizations such as Operation Mobilization and Youth With a Mission, emerged and together they created a new kind of mission: short term missions. These short term mission trips made it possible for college students, recent graduates, and adults to participate in missions without having to commit to serving overseas for life.

### **Short Term Missions**

#### *What are Short Term Missions?*

Short-term missions are distinguished from the work of long term missions and long term missionaries in that short term missions are "intentionally limited, organized cross-cultural religiously motivated mission efforts for a predetermined length of time without participants making a residency-based commitment of more than two years” (Howell, 2012). Though any mission effort less than two years is considered to be a short term mission trip, Priest (2006) has found that the majority of short term missions or short term mission trips are for the duration of two weeks or less.

Primarily rooted in Christianity, short term missions can have several objectives, including sharing the Gospel with others and caring for the less fortunate. While established in theological convictions, the activities of short term missions expand beyond the religious activities of evangelizing, baptizing, passing out Bibles, and praying. The Christian foundation of short term missions points to these activities, but it also points to the responsibility of the Christian in serving and caring for the poor. The way short term mission groups implement this service varies from group to group and even from trip to trip, however, each short term mission trip aims to provide some sort of service and care to those they are reaching. The services provided during short term mission trips vary depending on the participants and the overall goal and purpose of the trip. Therefore, short term missions may include but are not limited to the following: teaching, children's vacation Bible school, medical/health services, construction, business training, sports, orphanage outreach, picking up trash, street evangelism, agriculture projects, disaster relief, and more.

Short term mission teams may work alongside a long-term missionary, local church, or local organization so as to provide the best and most appropriate form of care and/or outreach as possible. The relationships that short term mission teams have with their hosts are usually established before the arrival of the short term mission team. These relationships may be church-to-church relationships, church-to-missionary relationships, organization-to-church relationships, or organization-to-missionary relationships. Rarely, there is not already a current relationship established between the local host and the sending entity of the short term mission team. Short term mission teams provide aid, support, and encouragement to their local church and missionary partners who are living in the country the short term mission team is serving.

### *Short Term Missions Currently*

Wuthnow and Offutt conducted a survey in 2005 to try to capture the size of the short term missions movement. While quite difficult to measure and with survey limitations, they found that approximately 1.6 million Americans participate in short term missions each year (Wuthnow and Offutt, 2008). Because this number only includes church members who are over the age of eighteen, this is likely a lower end of short term missions participants per year in America, and Priest (2008) has found that the number of participants on short term missions is only continuing to increase over time. The structure of short term missions has made it easier for laypeople to get involved in the goal of providing care to people in different parts of the world. While long-term or career missionaries had a history of requiring much training before being sent off into different parts of the world, now interested individuals could participate in a short term mission trip of their choosing without much training (Priest, 2006). With not only churches offering missions opportunities, but also colleges, universities, and other organizations, the ability for an individual to go on a short term mission trip has increased tremendously. Though short term missions often require some form of pre-departure training, there is no set standard to the length of this training. Also, while some institutions go through a vetting process of who can and cannot participate in the short term mission trip of interest, there are others that do not go through this process which makes it easier for those with no experience in missions to be involved (Priest, 2006). The wide range of institutions offering missions opportunities contributes to the large and ever growing number of short term missions, making it near impossible to know the exact scope of this phenomenon.



### *Short Term Missions in Relation to Global Health*

The interactions between Americans and individuals in various countries where short term missions take place create unique connections that find their roots in globalization and impact both global health and development. Health is closely linked with development (Skolnik, 2012), as countries with a healthy population will likely have a thriving society and economy and vice versa. On the other hand, countries with a population that has an overwhelming burden of sickness and preventable diseases are more likely to suffer economically and will not have a thriving society due to varying levels of poverty. This is portrayed by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), which are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity (SDG, 2019). The SDGs posit that providing access to health care and other services is directly related to the well-being of the community and development of that nation. With short term missions providing these services and services similar to this, and with the vast scope of short term missions, one can see the importance of the role played by short term missions in relation to global health. While a variety of different types of short term missions work to achieve the SDGs, one type of short term mission in particular that is important to health around the globe is short term medical missions.

### *Short Term Medical Missions*

The National Library of Medicine (2019) defines medical missions as “Travel by a group for the purpose of undertaking a health-care related project of short-term duration.” The group can include health-care professionals, medical students, and students who are interested in pursuing a career in the broader field of healthcare, not just medicine. Individuals who participate in short term medical missions may do so from a spiritual conviction to use their skills and knowledge as

a means to provide physical healing while also sharing their religion in under-resourced communities in countries other than their own.

It is unknown what percentage of short term missions is made up of short term medical missions, but short term medical missions are reported as the most common type of short term mission (Malay, 2017) and the United States is the country that sends the most short term medical missions per year, at approximately 6,000 short term medical missions teams serving (Malay, 2017) and approximately 16,000 participants on short term medical mission trips annually (Bajkiewicz, 2009). Based on a 2010 survey, it has been estimated that over 220,000 surgeries are performed each year by a short term medical missions team (McQueen et al., 2010). However, those participating on short term medical missions do not solely provide surgeries, as they also provide preventative care, treatment, medicine, and other medical services. The total number of individuals who receive care from a short term medical missions team per year is unknown.

Medical missions fall into three different categories: relief care, surgical-dental care, and mobile clinics (Bajkiewicz, 2009). Relief care consists of short term medical mission teams that provide care in the midst of complex humanitarian emergencies. This type of mission is required where there is substantial lack of basic human necessities and require international resources, both human and material to mitigate the situation and provide life-saving services. The second type of care is surgical-dental care, which consists of teams providing surgeries and dental procedures that are oftentimes unavailable in the country and have a profound impact on the individuals being operated on. Lastly, mobile clinics are organized and run by physicians and nurses who travel to various countries and set up clinics in various locations. It is in these clinics that basic

preventative care or simple treatment would be provided to the individuals who come to be seen by the physicians and nurses operating the clinics. Nurses typically perform triage, vital signs, and some examination, with the doctors doing a more thorough examination. Treatment is then given based on data gathered during the physical examination, limited laboratory availability, and medicine that the team has brought to distribute (Dohn & Dohn, 2006; Bajkiewicz, 2009). Referrals may or may not be made depending on what services are available in the setting. It is typically reported that a high volume of patients are seen during these mobile clinics, but an estimate has not been documented (Bajkiewicz, 2009).

The number of annual short term medical mission trips is continually increasing. With more health professionals participating in short term medical missions and more of these opportunities being made available for students interested in the medical field, there is a greater need for impact assessment. There have been efforts made to understand the impact of short term missions and short term medical missions, however, there are still considerable limitations in the information that is available.

### *Summary of Short Term Missions*

Short term missions have been growing increasingly popular, with a conservative estimate of over 1.6 Americans participating in short term missions each year. Short term missions for some but not all religious traditions offer opportunities for Americans to not only share the Gospel overseas, but also to serve the poor by providing food, shelter, water, healthcare services, education, and more. Short term missions are connected to global health as they often seek to alleviate poverty and its consequences, which are key themes in the Sustainable Development Goals

(SDGs). The connection between short term missions and global health is seen especially clear in terms of short term medical missions, which is the most common type of short term mission. Despite this connection to global health, there is a lack of understanding of the global health impact of short term missions, and thus a need for more impact assessment.

## **Understanding Impact of Short Term Missions**

### *Overview of Impact of Short Term Missions*

Evaluation of any kind of program is imperative to understanding the type and extent of impact that the program has had on its targeted audience. When it comes to short term mission trips, there is often a gap in evaluating and assessing the impact that these trips have on the host communities that they are serving. When conducted there are a variety of methods involved in evaluations of mission trips, including participant self-assessments, interviews, and surveys. However, when impact of short term missions is assessed using one or more of these methods, the main focus is on the religiosity and personal experiences of the participants of the short term mission trip (Howell, 2012; Montgomery, 1993; Meidl, 2017). Montgomery (1993) also found that another focus of mission trip evaluations is on the logistical aspects of the mission trip. Few impact assessments focus on the impact that these trips have on the host communities.

### *Positive Impact of Short Term Missions*

Short term mission researchers, of which there are few relative to the number of mission trips, have identified a number of positive impacts of short term missions. In a study done by Brian Howell, he found that participants experience personal growth as a result of going on mission

trips. He also found that participants experienced satisfaction knowing that they were able to assist the long term missionaries, and that they had a new appreciation for material blessings, a greater admiration for the faith of the poor, and a renewed spiritual life (Howell, 2012). It was also found that short term mission trips resulted in the participants showing stronger support for long term missionaries, as well as having an increased financial commitment to development work. Additionally, as a result of participating on short term missions, participants indicated a desire to work against ethnocentrism after being exposed to other cultures (Howell, 2012; Priest, 2006; Park 2008). Howell also noted from his research that the positive impact that mission trips had on participants in their personal lives also created positive change in their churches and other sending agencies upon their return (Howell, 2012). Ver Beek also found from his research on the impact on participants on a mission trip to Honduras, that 45% experienced a slightly positive impact and 16% experienced a significant positive impact as a result of the trip (Ver Beek, 2008)

#### *Negative Impact of Short Term Missions*

Though there are positive impacts of short term missions, researchers and critics of short term missions have also identified a number of negative impacts. One area of criticism for short term missions is the high cost associated with these mission trips. Priest (2006) estimates that the amount of money spent on short term mission trips annually is around \$2.7 billion. Researchers and others claim that the money spent on short term mission trips would be better used by the country the team visited, rather than the team using that money to visit for a short period of time (Howell, 2012; Malay, 2017). Aside from the high cost that participants have to either pay for or fundraise, individuals who participate on short term mission trips may also have negative experiences, such as illness, homesickness, culture shock, and others (Howell, 2012). Upon returning

after a short term mission trip, participants can unintentionally perpetuate negative stereotypes about poverty and the country that they traveled to through the way they portray their mission trip narratives (Howell, 2012).

Not only is there a high cost of these trips to the participants, but the receiving communities also experience the cost of hosting short term mission teams and a burden to the hosting organization, missionary, or church (Howell, 2012; Berry 2014). Along with this, short term mission teams may serve as a distraction from the work that the hosting agency is already doing in the community and creates extra work for their hosts (Howell, 2012). In addition to the physical and financial burden that short term mission teams may create, the presence of short term mission teams may also create additional burdens by contributing to the power imbalances and social hierarchy that receiving community leaders feel they have to adhere (Howell, 2012; Nouvet et. al, 2018). This causes a strain on the relationship between the local host and the mission team, which may cause the voices of the leaders from the community to go unheard (Howell, 2012).

#### *Methods Used to Assess Impact of Short Term Missions*

In 2003, a Standards of Excellence in Short Term Mission was launched after a three year development process led by mission leaders in the United States and Canada (SOE, 2019). These seven standards were developed out of a need for a short term mission “code” or “standards of best practices” to be used by groups participating in short term mission trips. This code consists of the following seven standards that are believed to result in effective mission trips: (1) God centeredness (2) Empowering partnerships (3) Mutual design (4) Comprehensive administration (5) Qualified leadership (6) Appropriate training and (7) Thorough follow-through. The code

provides a description of each standard as well as indicators to use in measurement to make sure that each standard is being met and thus the mission trip is effective. The code also provides reflection questions for organizations to track the results of their mission trips and think about how to measure their impact. Though information is not available regarding the total number of mission organizations who adhere to this Standards of Excellence, there are over one hundred member organizations listed who have all agreed to use these standards to create and lead short term mission trips (SOE, 2019). While this is the number of organizations who have agreed to use these standards, there are approximately 350,000 religious congregations in the United States (Hartford Institute for Religious Research, 2010), not including other organizations and institutions that conduct mission trips. Though not every church in the U.S conducts or participates in mission trips, there is still a large majority of mission trip hosts (churches and other institutions) who have not become members of the Standards of Excellence. Therefore, they are not aware of and do not make any commitment to use the standards and indicators provided to measure the impact that their mission trips have on host communities.

Though churches and mission organizations may not be using the Standards of Excellence to measure impact of their short term missions, some of these institutions use other methods of measuring impact. Most of these methods are used to assess the impact from the perspective of the participants on the short term mission trip. Primarily, anecdotes, interviews, and focus group discussions (or debrief) are used to assess the impact of these trips (Howell, 2012). One example of such evaluation was conducted by Brian Howell, an associate professor of anthropology at Wheaton College (Howell, 2012). He evaluated the impact that a short term mission trip to the Dominican Republic had on the group of individuals who went. His study consisted of gathering

data from public presentations, conversations, and interviews to discover, through narratives, the impact of the trip on participants. In addition to this, Ver Beek conducted a study to determine the impact of short term missions on house construction in Honduras after Hurricane Mitch and used interviews to collect data (Ver Beek, 2006). Blumhofer and Crouch also conducted interviews with African church leaders regarding impact of short term mission teams and found the leaders believe the best way to create impact is by listening, rather than conducting projects and activities. In an interview regarding the matter, a Ugandan Bishop responded by saying “Come and be with us, with no agenda other than to be with us.” (Blumhofer and Crouch, 2008)

Furthermore, some individual church-based mission trips also evaluate the impact that the mission trip has had on participants by using questionnaires that the participants fill out at the end of the mission trip or once they arrive back home (First Presbyterian Church, n.d.; Harvest International, 2012; LEAP Global Missions, 2019; Third Church, n.d.; Hope Missions, n.d.; Fishhawk Fellowship Church, n.d.; Hoffmantown Church, 2016; Victory World Church, n.d.). These questionnaires focus on participants’ spiritual and lifestyle changes as a result of the trip, as well as attitudes on how the trip glorified God, changed participants’ view of world missions, and affected the spiritual lives of those they served. Some questionnaires used by these individual church-based missions also explored the way that the mission trip influenced attitudes about further mission work.

### *Gaps in Assessing Impact of Short Term Missions*

Though these tools exist, evaluating the impact of short term mission trips has still been considered a challenge. Gordon Doss (2010) explains that contextually appropriate modes need to be



used because assessing impact of short term mission trips “consists of more than counting the number of attendees during meetings or individuals being baptized”. He identifies a set of questions that help to reflect on the impact of short term missions on hosts, including but not limited to: (1) How is God working among and through the people we wish to visit? (2) How can we best join and enhance their ministry? (3) What needs have been identified by the hosts? And (4) Which of those needs can our group address, at least in part? Doss uses these questions to create a shift that empowers the community and allows them to decide their own needs. These questions also create a shift that focuses on the impact that the mission trip has on the recipient community and not only on the participants. He makes the conclusion that “the missional value of short term missions is enhanced when its primary purpose is service to the hosts” (Doss, 2010).

While the focus on impact on host communities is viewed to increase effectiveness of short term missions, Montgomery (1993) states that groups often do not undertake systemic evaluation to assess impact upon local communities. She writes, “that this evaluation is not being done is significant, since the projects represent size-able investments of financial and personnel resources” (Montgomery, 1993). Short term missions are done with the purpose and intent of serving communities abroad, yet there is a considerable gap in measuring the impact that short term missions have on recipient communities. Ver Beek did a review of fourteen studies of short term missions and found that only his study (*The Impact of Short-Term Missions: A Case Study of House Construction in Honduras after Hurricane Mitch*) considered the impact of the short term mission trip on the receiving community (Ver Beek, 2008).

There are both critics and supporters of short term missions and their perceived impacts. However, impact evaluations of short term missions rarely take place, and when they do take place, they typically do not focus on the impact that short term missions have on host communities. Therefore, due to the limited information regarding impact assessment on host communities, neither a positive nor a negative impact of short term missions can be assumed.

#### *Overview of Impact of Short Term Medical Missions*

While various forms of evaluations are used to assess short term medical missions, there is also a gap in assessing the health impacts of these kinds of mission trips. Data has been gathered from conversations with local community leaders and health care providers, anecdotes from patients and caregivers of patients, as well as with surveys to determine the influence that the short term medical mission trip has in their communities. However, health outcomes, incidence and prevalence of disease, and other public health indicators are typically not measured in these assessments and thus conclusions regarding the impact on the health of the community cannot be made.

#### *Positive Impact of Short Term Medical Missions*

One of the most frequently recorded positive impact on host communities as a result of short term medical missions is the provision of medical care to individuals who otherwise would not have access to such care, which is oftentimes much needed and potentially life saving (Nouvet et al., 2018; Esquivel, et al., 2016; Malay, 2017). In a qualitative study done in Nicaragua measuring the impact of one short term medical mission, local healthcare professionals and clinicians agreed with patients about the value of the services provided by short term medical mission

team, which would otherwise be inaccessible due to either location, cost, or availability (Nouvet et al., 2018). The patients in this study viewed the provision of free care from the short term medical mission team to be “God’s will” and were thankful that the medical mission team demonstrated their care for the Nicaraguans in this way (Nouvet et al., 2018). In a study done in Guatemala, the short term medical mission team did not provide services for free, however, the patients still found their services more affordable than the other options available to them. (Esquivel et al., 2016). These studies, as well as others, have also found that it is perceived among the recipients of the medical services that the quality of medical care provided by the American short term mission team exceeded the quality of care available in their own country (Nouvet et al., 2018; Esquivel, et al., 2016). This belief of the superior quality of care from the short term mission team served as motivation for some of the individuals in the study to seek care after being previously hesitant or afraid to do so (Nouvet et al., 2018).

In addition to providing accessible, quality care, it has also been found that short term medical mission teams help support the local partners, such as in-country non-governmental organizations, missionaries, and churches, by sharing knowledge, working together, and building relationships (Berry, 2014; Bajkiewicz, 2009).

### *Negative Impact of Short Term Medical Missions*

Medical missions generate many of the same negative impacts as short term mission trips in general. Negative impacts specific to medical missions were found in a study by Nouvet et al. (2018) in which they discuss how short term medical missions engender relationships of dependency.

This is defined as when an individual “cannot meet immediate basic needs in the absence of relief assistance”. With increased dependency on short term medical mission teams for care, local authorities are less likely to act urgently to address gaps in the health care system and work to decrease health inequities in their country (Nouvet et al., 2018). For example, this is seen in the way that individuals in Nicaragua and Guatemala have been found to wait for a medical mission team before being seeking healthcare services, rather than utilizing the local resources that are already available. This releases the pressure of the local health authorities to work to increase coverage and improve the healthcare system, knowing that they can simply rely on those coming on short term medical mission trips (Nouvet et al., 2018; Esquivel et al., 2016; Stone and Olsen, 2016). Additionally, donations and other medical supplies brought in with medical missions teams can lead to delays in the local leadership solving longterm health problems (Nouvet et al., 2018) and the World Health Organization states that these donations may even “constitute an added burden to the recipient health care system” (WHO, 2000). With individuals in these communities preferring to receive health care from short term medical mission teams rather than their local providers, they perpetuate negative perceptions of their own healthcare system, deeming the quality as unworthy (Berry, 2014).

Further negative impacts that short term medical missions can have on host communities include the consequences of not being able to address chronic health issues, provide follow up care, or engage with deeper public health issues stemming from the social determinants of health (including poverty and inequalities) and underfunded public health-care systems (Nouvet et al, 2018; Stone and Olsen, 2016). This can lead to participants on short term medical missions trips feeling

discouraged if they perceive their work to only offer a “quick fix” solution of treating illness, rather than addressing the social determinants of health in which illnesses are rooted. Additionally, despite good intentions, medical mission teams may not understand how their decisions and recommendations conflict with the values and plans of local providers, or with the community’s understanding of disease and its etiology (Stone and Olsen, 2016; Berry, 2014; Bajkiewicz, 2009). These conflicts and misunderstandings may cause unintended harm to communities that medical mission teams are striving to help (Stone and Olsen, 2016).

#### *Methods Used to Assess Impact of Short Term Medical Missions*

When impact assessments of short term medical missions are done, there are a number of different methods used in efforts to gain an understanding of the ways that these medical mission trips affect host communities. For example, Berry (2014) used interviews, field notes, and observations to gain an understanding of short term medical missions in Solola, Guatemala. Other researchers have tried to measure impact based on the number of patients seen and treated, successful surgeries, prescriptions filled, individual patient follow up, local doctor training, conversations with local community leaders and health care providers, anecdotes from patients and caregivers, and surveys (Montgomery 1993; Sykes, 2014; Berry, 2014; Maki et al., 2008; Malay, 2017; Nouvet et al., 2018). The Catholic Health Association (CHA) of the United States has used evaluations to understand the impact of short term medical missions done by Catholic hospitals and partners. The surveys conducted by the CHA were done to evaluate impact from both the perspective of U.S. based partners as well as those in low and middle income countries receiving mission teams (Catholic Health Association of the United States, 2015).

### *Gaps in Assessing Impact of Short Term Medical Missions*

Though these methods are used, Berry (2014) has found that the current evaluations of short term medical missions are often guided by what matters to U.S. providers, not necessarily what is of importance to individuals in host communities. This includes gathering data regarding wait times, staff treatment, professional skills, etc., which are seen as important among the health providers overseeing the trip, but may not be the priorities of the host communities. Therefore, even though there are efforts being made to assess impact of these trips and the efforts do incorporate to some extent the ways in which the communities are being affected by these trips, there is a gap in ensuring the priorities of the community members are being measured and not just the priorities of the healthcare professionals on the mission trip. Concurrently, assessment of impact of short term medical missions does still include the ways in which participants are impacted, either personally or professionally, from these trips (Alsharif et al., 2016).

Though individual services are often measured when assessing impact of short term medical missions, the impact in regards to change in incidence and/or prevalence of disease, prevention of disease, and long term access to medical services are often not considered (Montgomery, 1993). This can lead to inaccurate conclusions regarding impact because as Maki (2008) found, people tend to view doing “something” as having a positive impact, even though their contributions may not be the most effective or what is requested of them. Therefore, even if impact evaluation takes place, altruistic motivation behind the short term medical mission trip can skew the perception of the impact. This can lead to participants believing that they had a greater and more positive impact on the communities they served than what has actually been accomplished (Maki, 2008)

This can also lead to the false notion that any healthcare is good healthcare, without showing regard for any possible negative outcomes that can result from short term medical mission trips (Maki, 2008).

One difficulty that has been found in regards to measuring impact is the fact that the location and available resources largely determine the scope of what can happen during the medical mission trip (Schultz, 2010). The level of success in one location will often look different than the level of success in another, making it difficult to measure and determine the true impact of medical mission trips. Another difficulty when it comes to assessing impact of short term medical mission trips is that many published articles that focus on short term medical missions are descriptive with no contextual analysis or evaluation of these missions. Many of them also provide limited information regarding the goals, purposes, financing, and outcomes of these trips (Martiniuk et al, 2012). Furthermore, many of the articles make conclusions about impact by quantifying program delivery or by focusing on short-term patient outcomes (Walk et al., 2011; Sykes, 2014). Maki (2008) also states that most short term medical missions have no objective means of measuring their performance and Berry (2014) adds to that, saying “the silences that resound within the scholarly literature regarding how medical missions should be evaluated are alarming”. Leaving impact assessment to individual judgements motivated by altruism can pose a great concern in that it may overlook what is truly being accomplished (Berry, 2014).

Kevin Sykes (2014) attributes the limited focus on assessing the impact of short term medical mission trips to medical professionals and organizations not prioritizing research and treating it as a side project with little benefit and to the absence of a standardized evaluation tool for short

term medical missions. Because of these factors, medical service organizations do not regularly include research as a part of their goals which hinders regular assessment of medical mission trip activities (Sykes, 2014).

Maki (2008) developed a tool to assess the quality of care given on short term medical mission trips. However, of twenty-one articles citing the article about the tool, only one of them described actually using the tool (Sykes, 2014). Additionally, including this tool, no form of impact assessment of short term medical mission trips assesses any unintentional harm that may result from these trips. Johnson (2017) adds that there is considerable scope for improvement in planning, monitoring, and evaluating medical mission trips.

#### *Summary of Understanding Impact of Short Term Missions*

Researchers of short term missions have identified several impacts that these trips have, both positive and negative. Though the impacts of short term missions are discussed to varying extents, there is little information in the literature about actually assessing the impact of short term missions. This lack of literature surrounding impact assessment leads the researcher to understand that impact is rarely assessed, and when it is, there is no detailed information regarding methods used and in what capacity.

Some literature did discuss evaluation methods however, and using that data, the reviewer has identified three key methods of impact evaluation currently being used: first, participant self-assessments, which is the most common method used by churches and mission organizations; second, qualitative interviews with individuals in host communities; and third, anecdotes from host



communities. The use of participant self-assessments as the most frequently used form of impact assessment demonstrates the fact that conclusions about impact were often based on the participants of the mission trip rather than those in recipient communities. Furthermore, when the recipients were included in the impact assessments, health outcomes were not assessed. Therefore, due to the gap in the inclusion of recipients in impact assessments and the gap in assessing the overall health of communities, no strong conclusion can be made about the impact that short term missions have on recipient communities. This inability to draw conclusions about the impacts of short term missions further communicates the need for short term mission impact evaluation as well as appropriate methods and appropriate measures to be used when evaluating. Doing so will increase the understanding of the way in which short term missions impact global health.

### **Summary**

The realm of short term missions is continually expanding with more participants, recipient communities, and funds engaged each year since their inception in the mid-1900s. However, despite the growth of the field of short term missions, there has not been an adequate amount of impact assessment or evaluation of these trips. Without conducting evaluations to measure the impact that short term missions have, it is unknown whether short term missions are benefiting or harming communities who receive groups participating on short term mission trips. By using the available literature to identify the gaps in understanding the impact of short term missions, efforts can be made to provide necessary tools and resources that will aid in measuring the impact that short term missions have not only on their participants, but on host communities and global health as a whole.

One strength of the literature is that it adequately covered the history of short term missions and how that influences the field today. It discussed the changes in the field over time and also presented the large growth and expansion of short term missions. One limitation of this, however, is that it is difficult to get an accurate number of participants and number of short term mission trips occurring each year. This is because short term mission trips happen independently of one another, and though mission organizations and churches may keep track of how many short term mission trips they are conducting each year, there is no overarching agency keeping track of the aggregate number of mission trips occurring from the U.S. each year. This lack of data makes it difficult to know the exact scope of the field. The most recent estimate found in the literature pertaining to the number of U.S. participants in short term missions each year is from 2005, with 1.6 million (Wuthnow & Offutt, 2008). There has been no estimate of the exact size of the field since then, but many tracking and reporting on missions report that the field continues to grow.

An additional strength of the literature was the reporting of both positive and negative impact of short term missions. Because both dimensions of short term missions were captured by different authors, it limited the bias of the reviewer. However, researcher bias in interpreting these impacts was present which is one limitation of the literature. Because researchers were involved in the field of short term missions, the overall presentation of these trips was that they were an asset to their field of study or personal interest.

The main limitation found in this literature review was the minimal reporting on impact assessment of short term missions, which lends itself to the conclusion that short term missions and

their impacts are not being assessed as frequently as they should be. A possible explanation for this could be that there is a gap among mission trip leaders and sending churches and organizations regarding the knowledge of impact evaluations and the need for them. This gap can also be used to hypothesize that the reason that impacts of short term missions are primarily focused on the participants when they are measured is because those measuring don't have a full understanding of the usefulness of measuring the impact that short term missions have on the recipient communities.

The investigator of this special studies project will provide a framework to show how impact is currently being assessed and understood in the field of short term missions based on what has been found in the literature review. To make further contributions, the investigator, based on the identified gaps, will also provide recommendations of public health tools and resources that can be used to assess and evaluate the impact of short term missions on participants and host communities. With these tools and resources available and hopefully used, impact will be better understood, which will result in proper and appropriate actions taking place. This will help accomplish the overall goal of increasing the positive impacts and mitigating the negative impacts of short term missions. As a result, short term mission practitioners will be able to work towards improving the contribution of short term missions in global health.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

The following results represent the key findings found through a review of the literature. The objectives of this review were to: 1) Describe the field of short term missions, and 2) Explain the gap that exists in measuring the impacts of short term missions. These objectives were met, and the results are below.

### **History and Emergence of Short Term Missions**

Short term missions find their origin in the English Protestants who arrived in America and held the belief that it was a part of their Divine duty to bring God's Kingdom to earth. This belief initially resulted in missionaries setting out to live abroad and serve others in their countries for life. In the 20th century, technological advancements and societal changes took place. These, along with the founding of organizations such as Operation Mobilization and Youth With A Mission, contributed to the emergence of what is known today as the field of short term missions. Short term missions provided a way for individuals to be involved with missions, without having to commit their entire life to living abroad.

### **Defining the Current Field of Short Term Missions**

#### *What are Short Term Missions?*

Short-term missions are defined as intentionally limited, cross-cultural religiously motivated mission efforts for a predetermined length of time without participants making a residency based commitment of more than two years. While two years is considered the maximum length of time to still be considered a short term mission, it has been found that the majority of short term mis-

sion trips last for two weeks or less. Short term missions are done in a variety of ways, and activities done on short term mission trips can consist of things that meet both spiritual and physical needs. These activities can include but are not limited to: evangelizing, praying, distributing Bibles, baptizing, education, vacation Bible school, medical and health services, construction, sports, business training, and more. The activities of each trip depend on the overall goal and purpose of the trip, as well as the abilities and willingness of the participants.

#### *Scope of the Field of Short Term Missions*

In 2005 one study estimated that about 1.6 million Americans participated in short term mission trips annually. There is very limited data regarding the number of short term mission trips that take place each year because many mission trips are independent efforts and are not accounted for in the literature regarding short term missions. Therefore, it is not feasible to quantify the field of short term missions in regards to the amount of trips taking place. It is known, however, that the field is large and continuing to grow.

#### *Known Impact of Short Term Missions*

Though the literature and reporting on mission trips is limited, it has been reported that short term missions have both positive and negative impacts. Some of the positive impacts include participants experiencing personal and spiritual growth, participants showing stronger support of long term missionaries, and participants bringing a positive change to their church or sending organization. Some of the negative impacts include the burden of the high cost of the mission trip, ethical considerations of these costs, and mission trips creating a burden for long term missionar-

ies and host communities. Furthermore, due to a history of power imbalances between high income countries like the U.S. and low income countries, mission trips can unknowingly further contribute to this power imbalance. This results in strained relationships between the host community and the mission team, many times causing the voices of the community leaders to go unheard.

### **The Gap that Exists in Measuring Impact in This Field**

#### *The Extent to Which the Impact of Short Term Missions is Assessed*

No literature was found that reports studies on the frequency of evaluating or assessing the impact of short term missions, but a code of best practices in short term missions was identified, called the Standards of Excellence. This set of standards and associated indicators provides protocols and methods for measuring and assessing the impact of short term missions. There are reportedly over one hundred member organizations adhering to this Standards of Excellence that measure the impact of their mission trips. However, there are approximately 350,000 religious congregations in the U.S., 338,000 are either Protestant or Catholic congregations. While not all of these congregations are conducting short term missions, the number using this particular Standards of Excellence compared to the number of potential organizers of short term missions is very few. Furthermore, based on the reported literature review, the number of agencies conducting evaluations or assessments of the impact of short term missions in general is very limited in comparison to the number of agencies that are presumed to be conducting mission trips.

### *Methods Used to Assess the Impact of Short Term Missions*

From the available literature on short term missions, it was found that the three most common methods used to measure impact were participant self-assessments, qualitative interviews with individuals from host communities, and anecdotes from host communities. Out of thirty-five studies of short term missions that were reviewed, twelve of them used participant self-assessments to measure the impact of their short term missions. Seven of the studies used qualitative interviews of those in the host communities as a way to measure the impact of the short term missions in their communities, and five of the studies used informal anecdotes among individuals and leaders in host communities. The remaining studies used a variety of methods to measure the impact of short term missions, including surveys for individuals and leaders in host communities, written evaluations from community leaders, participant observations, and keeping track of the quantity of services provided.

The aforementioned methods were found to be the methods used for impact assessment of short term mission. Because the most common method was participant self-assessments, the researcher concluded that most short term mission trips that measured impact did so regarding the way that the mission trip affected the individual participating on the trip. In this way, participant self-assessments were used to identify several things including the likelihood of short term mission trip goers to become long term missionaries, their financial support of missions and other causes, their levels of ethnocentrism and materialism, as well as changes in their religiosity and other relevant personal changes. For mission trips that did measure the impact on the host communities, it was found that interviews, surveys, and anecdotes were mainly about the perception of short term missions and beliefs about their impacts, rather than on the impacts themselves.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **Need for Impact Assessment of Short Term Missions**

Given the size of this field, especially as it has continued to grow in recent years, there is more need than ever to assess its impact. More people are getting involved, both on the sending and receiving ends of short term mission trips, so impact evaluation is necessary in order to know how short term missions are impacting communities and how the positive impacts of these trips can be increased while simultaneously decreasing the negative impacts.

Mission trip participants are typically filled with good intentions and strong desires to help the less fortunate. Thus it is necessary that impact evaluation takes place as intention does not always produce intended results. By conducting impact evaluations and assessments, it will help to determine whether the intention of “doing good” is actually resulting in “good” being done. This will also allow for unintended consequences of good intentions to be identified and therefore mitigated so that they are less likely to be repeated in the future. From the perspective that short term mission trips are supposed to help others, measuring the impact of them will allow one to see whether that overall goal is actually being accomplished and in what way.

Another reason to assess impact of short term mission trips is to understand what is being accomplished in terms of the high cost of participating on mission trips. The cost of short term mission trip varies depending on location, duration of the trip, and the organization that is orchestrating the trip. However, short term mission trips are often very costly for a two week experience.



Therefore, another reason that impact evaluation is important is to see what is being accomplished with the amount of money often being fundraised and spent on mission trips and to know what difference it is making in the community being served.

### **Common Principles and Practices**

The Standards of Excellence developed in 2003 with input from over four hundred U.S. mission leaders is one good source of best practices guidance for short term missions. While each mission trip will be different, having common principles and practices helps to ensure that core values and objectives are being met. By keeping these principles and practices central to the work being done on short term missions, it can help mission trip leaders and participants recognize whether or not their trips are accomplishing their goals and having the intended impacts. Having common principles and practices for short term missions provides a standard for mission trip leaders and participants to work towards to ensure that their work in various communities will result in increased positive impact.

### *Engagement of Decision Makers*

It is important to keep in mind that input from the community members and community leaders should be central to impact assessment. The Standards of Excellence lists “Empowering Partnerships” as the second standard of excellence, right after “Glorifying God” as the first. According to this standard, empowering partnerships are created by placing the primary focus on intended receptors (SOE, 2019). Existing evaluation methods for short term missions tend to place more of the focus on the experience and impact that the mission trip has on the participant rather than on the recipients of the services provided. While this should be measured to know the role that

short term mission trips play in the lives of the participants, it cannot be done in replacement or to the negligence of the impact that the mission trip has on the recipients. The SOE states, “If the primary purpose of an STM is for discipleship of the goer-guests (participants), or if the primary purpose is to provide an educational cross-cultural experience (important as these agendas are), that the STM partnership has failed in its primary focus on the intended receptors.” (Standards of Excellence, 2003). Because participants go on mission trips with the goal of helping recipient communities in some way, the needs and wants of the recipient communities should be incorporated and considered during the planning and preparation phase of the mission trip. By incorporating the priorities of the key stakeholders in these communities, the mission team will be able to have more targeted activities that can help them reach the communities’ desired impacts.

### **Public Health Implications**

By increasing the understanding of why it is important to know the impact of short term missions, there will ideally be an increase in impact assessments being done of short term missions. This would result in a better understanding of the field and would help to develop solutions that can be used to fix common negative impacts of short term missions as well as improve the positive impacts. This would ultimately result in fewer unintended negative consequences and a higher quality of life among those being reached by short term mission teams.

By involving key stakeholders from the community in the process of developing short term mission trips as well as evaluating them, it will help keep the priorities of the community at the forefront of the mission trip. As a result, the activities being done on the trip will be ones that are

seen to be beneficial to the community and things that they actually want done. Instead of prioritizing the mission team's wants and beliefs about the way the mission trip should take place, by adhering to the wants and needs of the community, it results in them recognizing their own power and in return working to dismantle the power imbalance that often accompanies mission trips. Additionally, this would allow the community members to feel more ownership of the mission trip, and would allow them to continue the work of the mission trip even after the team has left their community.

### **Recommendations**

Based on this discussion, the following recommendations are made:

1. Create a way to help increase the understanding of why knowing and measuring impact of short term missions is important
2. Allow community members and leaders to participate in identifying purpose, activities, and desired impact of the short term mission trip and include the key community stakeholders in the evaluation process
3. Provide tools to carry out impact assessment of short term mission trips (in support of recommendations 1 and 2)

## **Chapter 6: Recommendations**

Based on the results from the literature review and the findings pertaining to the gaps in understanding the impacts of short term missions, the researcher makes the following recommendations to be used by mission trip leaders. Prior chapters of this special studies project achieved the objectives of 1) describing the field of short term missions and 2) explaining the gap that exists in measuring the impacts of short term missions. This chapter achieves the third objective of the special studies project, which is to provide a framework that explains how impact of short term missions can be assessed and compile a toolkit of public health resources that can be used to help measure and understand impact of short term missions.

The following recommendations and resources have been compiled to advocate for the evaluation of short term missions. They are to be used as references and guides on how to conduct impact evaluations of short term missions and what to do once these evaluations have taken place. Each resource listed below includes a brief description of what the resource is and how it can be used.

### **Recommendation #1: Understand the need for impact evaluations, know what resources are available, and make a commitment to doing them**

The first step in conducting impact evaluations of short term missions is to understand what impact evaluations are and why they are necessary. Without the knowledge of impact evaluations and the necessity of conducting them, they will not be done. To gain understanding about what impact evaluations are, it is first necessary to know that there are resources available with ample

information about impact evaluations, their purpose, and how they are to be conducted. Secondly, it is necessary to not only be aware of these resources but to have access to them and utilize the information that is found in them. Because short term missions are typically unrelated and not connected with one another, the dissemination of the resources in this special studies project proves to be a challenge. While it is necessary that this information is disseminated and used among all parties involved in short term missions, the reach of this project is limited. While it may not be possible to share these resources with all agencies involved with short term missions, partnerships with larger organizations such as World Vision or Bread for the World should be established. By partnering with these organizations, mission trip leaders and organizers will have access to evaluation expertise and tools that will be beneficial in providing them with an understanding and the practical knowledge of how to develop and conduct impact evaluations of their short term mission trips.

*Resources that can be used for this include:*

- A Step by Step Guide to Monitoring and Evaluation: This guide offers an explanation of what monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is, why it should be done, and what decisions need to be considered when doing M&E. It offers a framework for developing an M&E plan and also provides an overview of methods and resources to use.

Hobson, K., Mayne, R., Hamilton, J. (2013). A Step by Step Guide to Monitoring and Evaluation. Retrieved from <https://www.geog.ox.ac.uk/research/technologies/projects/mesc/guide-to-monitoring-and-evaluation-v1-march2014.pdf>

- A Framework for Program Evaluation: A Gateway to Tools: This framework discusses the need for evaluation of community health and development programs, discusses how evaluation is done and provides a framework for evaluation, and offers guidance on how to apply the framework so that the evaluations conducted are well done.

Community Tool Box. (2018). Chapter 36. Introduction to Evaluation. Section 1. A Framework for Program Evaluation: A Gateway to Tools. Retrieved from <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/evaluate/evaluation/framework-for-evaluation/main>

Upon gaining the proper knowledge regarding impact evaluation, then one begins to see the need for them and realize the important role that they play in global health efforts, which includes short term missions. Ideally, this realization will then lead to the decision to make the time commitment to utilize the resources, learn how to conduct impact evaluations, and carry out those impact evaluations. However, it cannot be assumed that this will always take place because the realization for the need for impact assessment and measuring the “good” that is being done on mission trips is closely tied to the ethics of global health. This is in part why the Standards of Excellence were developed: to ensure that ethical work was being done during mission trips. Once mission trip leaders understand the need to ensure that “good” is done on mission trips, it will be a motivation to uphold the Standards of Excellence which involve Key Quality Indicators that can be used to help measure the mission trip activities and their impacts. Furthermore, the Maximum Impact of Short Term Missions (MISTM) grid was developed to help ensure that the mission trip is not only effective for the mission participants, but also supporters and recipients of

short term missions. This grid shows the ethical responsibility of each party involved with mission trips before, during, and after the trip takes place (SOE, 2019). By completing the grid and following it correctly, the intended result is for impactful missions to take place. Ideally, this should be done before participating on a mission trip, but if a mission trip has already taken place, it can occur before a sequential trip. This knowledge will help mission trip leaders understand how their work during a mission trip has lasting effects on everyone involved, even though the trip is short term.

MISTM		PRE-FIELD	ON-FIELD	POST-FIELD
SENDERS	SENDING SUPPORTERS			
	SENDING ENTITIES			
GOER-GUESTS	GOER-GUEST LEADERS			
	GOER-GUEST FOLLOWERS			
HOST RECEIVERS	FIELD FACILITATORS			
	INTENDED RECEPTORS			

Sneed, W., & Peterson, R. (1999). Maximum Impact Short-Term Mission. Retrieved from [https://soe.org/wp-content/uploads/SOE\\_Booklet.pdf](https://soe.org/wp-content/uploads/SOE_Booklet.pdf)

### **Recommendation #2: Conduct impact evaluations with both participants and recipients of short term missions**

The second step in conducting an impact evaluation for short term missions is understanding what you are evaluating and who the evaluation is for. In short term missions, evaluations are often done for participants without involving those in recipient communities. To understand the full impact of short term missions, both parties should be involved so that impact on participants

can be assessed as well as impact on recipients. These impact evaluations can be done using qualitative or quantitative methods such as interviews, focus group discussions, and/or personal self-assessments. While conducting these evaluations, however, it is important to keep in mind the priorities of the host community and to make sure that those priorities are reflected in the questions asked during the evaluation. This involves working alongside the community members and leaders in the planning, implementation, and aftermath of the mission trip and evaluation.

*Resources that can be used for this include:*

- **The Seven Standards of Excellence:** This set of standards serves as a code of best practices for short term missions. It offers standards to follow while doing short term missions, as well as questions to consider to ensure that the standards are being met. The purpose of these standards is to have “greater Kingdom impact among the nations.”

Standards of Excellence. (2019). 7 Standards of Excellence. Retrieved from <https://soe.org/7-standards/>

- **A Framework for Program Evaluation:** This framework illustrates key components of program evaluation. It offers a description of what effective program evaluation is and also provides steps and standards that accompany the framework. The emphasis of this framework is for “practical, ongoing evaluation strategies that involve all program stakeholders, not just evaluation experts.”

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2017). A Framework for Program Evaluation. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/eval/framework/index.htm>



- Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR): This chapter on CBPR offers information regarding what it is, why it can be effective, who might use it, and how to set up and conduct it. CBPR keeps the community at the center of the programs and research, so that appropriate and context specific solutions can be developed. There are different forms of CBPR and this chapter discusses the uses of each.

Community Tool Box. (2018). Chapter 36. Introduction to Evaluation. Section 2. Community-based Participatory Research. Retrieved from <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/evaluate/evaluation/intervention-research/main>

**Recommendation #3: Use findings from impact assessments to make appropriate changes**

The final step in impact evaluation of short term missions is to use the data gathered from both the recipients and participants in order to make appropriate changes in the way that short term missions are conducted. The reason for this is so that mission trip leaders will be able to learn from previous trips, acknowledge what is beneficial and what isn't, and adjust in ways to make future trips more effective. By using data gathered from previous mission trips about their impacts, necessary changes can be made to reduce the negative impacts of these trips while increasing their positive impacts.

*Resources that can be used for this include:*

- **Evaluating the Initiative:** This resource helps to create an evaluation of a community program. It discusses how to identify key stakeholders and their priorities, how to develop a logic model, develop the evaluation, and outline and implement an evaluation plan.

Community Tool Box. (2018). Toolkit 12. Evaluating the Initiative. Retrieved from <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/evaluating-initiative>

- **Refining the Program or Intervention Based on Evaluation Research:** This resource discusses what it means to refine the intervention, why evaluation results should be used to refine the intervention, when the refining should take place, who should be involved and how it should be done.

Community Tool Box. (2018). Chapter 39. Using Evaluations to Understand and Improve the Initiative. Section 3. Refining the Program or Intervention Based on Evaluation Research. Retrieved from: <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/evaluate/evaluate-community-interventions/refine-intervention/main>

**Additional resources that can be useful in understanding and conducting impact evaluation of short term mission trips include:**

- **Developing an Evaluation Plan:** This chapter discusses when evaluations should be developed and used, how they should be developed, what the product of an evaluation should be, who the different stakeholders are and what their interest is in the evaluation, and what kind of standards should be followed.

Community Tool Box. (2018). Chapter 36. Introduction to Evaluation. Section 5. Developing an Evaluation Plan. Retrieved from: <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/evaluate/evaluation/evaluation-plan/main>

- **Developing an Effective Evaluation Plan:** This workbook discusses the stages of developing an evaluation plan including what an evaluation plan is, why one is needed, how to write one, and what the key steps are using CDC's Framework for Program Evaluation. Though this is targeted towards evaluating an obesity program, it can be applied to any program.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2011). Developing an Effective Evaluation Plan. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/downloads/CDC-Evaluation-Workbook-508.pdf>

- **How to Develop A Logic Model:** This How-To guide discusses what logic models are, why they should be developed, who should develop them, and when they should be developed. It also goes through a step-by-step process of how to develop a logic model.

USAID. (n.d.). How to Develop a Logic Model. What is a Logic Model? Retrieved from: <https://www.thecompassforsbc.org/how-to-guides/how-develop-logic-model-0>

- **Logic Models:** This chapter on logic models discusses the uses of logic models, their components, the ways to develop a logic model, and things to consider when creating and using a logic model. Though this resource is targeted for oral health, it can be applied to any program.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). Logic Models. Retrieved from:

[https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/state\\_programs/pdf/logic\\_models.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/state_programs/pdf/logic_models.pdf)

## **Conclusion**

Ideally evaluation plans would be developed before each mission trip and impact evaluations would take place at the end of each mission trip. However, doing so may not be feasible for every situation depending on human, financial, and evaluation resources available. Short term mission leaders should work alongside community leaders and stakeholders to determine how and to what extent impact evaluation of mission trips should happen.

Another limitation in conducting impact evaluations is the short term nature of mission trips. Mission trips typically do not last longer than two weeks, and global health programs often require a longer period of time to measure impacts as changes in health status occur over time. Therefore, impact evaluations of mission trips will be a challenge. One way to navigate this challenge is to partner with local community leaders and allow them to be involved with the mission trip and evaluation planning stages. Therefore, they would be able to conduct impact evaluations during the months and years after the mission trip, allowing them to measuring the long term impact of the short term mission trip. This will require commitment and potentially require training

of the host community leaders, however, making this investment will help to circumvent the challenge of the limited time available for impact evaluations during a mission trip.

A third consideration for using these recommendations is the commitment that it will take. Mission trip leaders will have to make the time commitment to learning about impact evaluation, as well as the ongoing commitments to planning for impact evaluations and actually conducting the evaluations. In addition, commitments will have to be made to using the findings from the evaluations to make alterations to mission trips to help increase their positive impacts. This is a large but worthwhile commitment that will benefit mission trip leaders, participants, supporters, and recipients.

The final challenge regarding this special studies project is the dissemination of the findings and recommendations. Due to the independent nature of short term mission trips, there is no way to know all agencies who are a part of this phenomenon. While short term mission platforms do exist for those conducting these trips, they do not include every church and mission organization in the U.S. Therefore, disseminating this body of work to every contributor to this field is not feasible. However, there are, as mentioned previously, platforms for short term missions as well as lists of partner organizations for some mission agencies. Utilizing those platforms to share this knowledge can be the start to what will hopefully result in more mission agencies becoming aware, seeking out the recommendations, and putting into practice what is discussed here.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

The field of short term missions is large and has continued to expand in recent years, but there is still more research that needs to be done. Additional studies need to be done on the impacts that short term missions have on recipient communities as well as the impacts that they have on participants. Conducting more research on the field of short term missions will provide evidence of the good that is done as a result of short term missions and reveal harm that can be reduced. In addition, evidence from evaluation research can potentially support a case for more funding and support towards these trips.

As more research is done regarding impact, and as appropriate impact evaluations are conducted more often, there can be changes made which will increase the positive and reduce the negative impacts of this field. By focusing on the impact that short term missions have on those in recipient communities, mission trip leaders will be able to alter these trips in order to perform the most good. This, in turn, will help mission trip leaders and participants to ultimately reach the overarching goal of Christian mission trip efforts, which is to serve others, demonstrating the love of Christ. Additionally, by measuring health impacts that occur as a result of short term missions, mission trip leaders, participants, and stakeholders in the community will be able to recognize the large role that short term missions play in promoting health and well-being. This, in turn, will contribute significantly to the many efforts being conducted to improve global health and decrease poverty around the globe. Short term missions have value to add to the field of global health. When their impact is assessed and proper improvements are made, their contributions to the field of global health could add even more value.

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