

Women's health researchers explore pregnancy and postpartum muscle strength

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A decade-long partnership between the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa and the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN) has yielded significant advancements in global research and scholarship, particularly in women's health.

Catherine Pirkle from UH Mānoa's Thompson School of Social Work & Public Health and Saionara Câmara from UFRN's Department of Physical Therapy have been at the forefront of this collaboration, providing interdisciplinary and global health experiences to students and fellows from Northeast Brazil and Hawai'i.

"Our ongoing collaboration epitomizes UH Mānoa's dedication to fostering impactful global connections through robust partnerships, amplifying our collective efforts towards advancing [women's health research](#) on a global scale," said Pirkle, an associate professor in the Office of Public Health Studies at UH Mānoa.

Interventions for adolescent mothers

Their latest joint endeavor, a paper titled "Muscle strength during pregnancy and postpartum in adolescents and adults," [published](#) in *PLOS ONE*, adds to their growing body of work. The research offers compelling evidence advocating for interventions aimed at adolescent mothers, emphasizing the importance of lower-body resistance training to mitigate the risk of disability as these mothers age.

"Our research provides important insights into why adolescent mothers experience disability more frequently and at earlier ages than women who give birth as adults, and identifies ways to lower the disability risks," said Câmara, a professor at UFRN.

Student-involved research

Over the past decade, Pirkle and Câmara have co-authored 20 peer-reviewed scientific articles, all of which have involved students in the research process. Their studies have covered a wide range of topics, from exploring the links between teen pregnancy and obesity and heart

disease to investigating the impact of urinary incontinence on the health of older women.

Their collaboration has also extended beyond research publications. As [principal investigators](#) on two Fogarty International supported [research grants](#), they have facilitated bi-directional exchanges of students between UH Mānoa and UFRN. This exchange program has enabled trainees from Hawai'i to gain valuable experience in Northeast Brazil and vice versa, enriching their academic and professional development.

Both Pirkle and Câmara are Fulbright scholars, further highlighting the international recognition of their contributions to the field of women's health research.

More information: Maria Luiza da Silva Santos et al, Muscle strength during pregnancy and postpartum in adolescents and adults, *PLOS ONE* (2024). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0300062](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0300062)

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