PFAS community engagement: Methodological Insights from Pilot Interviews

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1.Abstract

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) pose environmental and health risks, particularly in coastal communities reliant on seafood. This practicum, part of the Guiding Advancements in Toxicants and Oceans Research GATOR project, aimed to enhance community engagement and awareness through pilot interviews. Key findings included limited PFAS awareness, health concerns, barriers to education, economic constraints, and the need for trusted communication. Insights refined the interview guide, improving clarity and engagement. The study supports the GATOR project's goal of strengthening public health education and community resilience, highlighting the importance of pilot testing in refining research methods and outreach strategies.

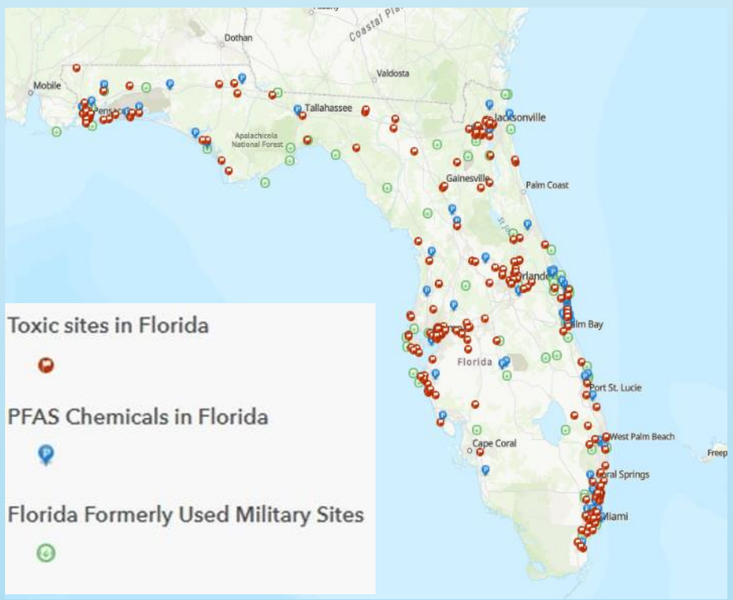
2.Objective

Objective 1: Perform comprehensive literature review on community awareness, knowledge, perceptions, and concerns regarding PFAS exposure and willingness to participate in academic research.

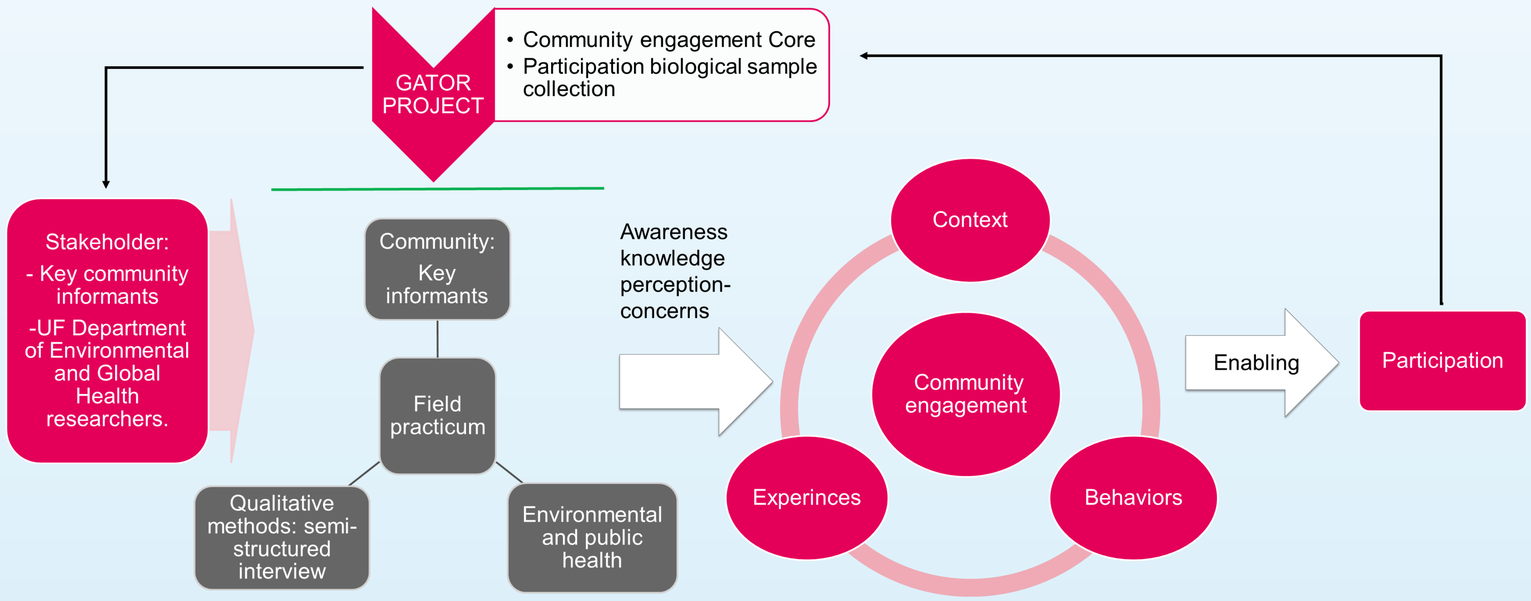
Objective 2: Develop interview guide to probe the awareness, knowledge, perceptions, and concerns of coastal populations (e.g. Tampa, Florida) about PFAS exposure through seafood and willingness to participate in academic research on the PFAS exposure.

Objective 3: Pilot interview guide with colleagues and key informants to further refine the interview guide and delivery. Perform qualitative theme analysis on interview data to gather preliminary themes.

3.Geographical context



4.Conceptual contextual Framework



Understanding PFAS community perception

5.Methodology

Literature Review: Identified themes related to community awareness, knowledge gaps, and public health concerns.

Interview Guide Development: Iterative refinement based on supervisory committee feedback.

Semi-Structured Interviews: Conducted via Zoom/in-person, lasting 60 minutes each.

Thematic Analysis: Used to identify patterns in community concerns, awareness, and engagement preferences.

6.Interview guide order

1.Socio-Demographic Data (contextualizing participant perspectives)

2.Community Awareness of Contaminants (general environmental knowledge)

3.PFAS-Specific Awareness (knowledge of contamination, exposure pathways, and concerns)

4.Seafood Consumption (frequency, sources, and perceived risks)

5.Community Engagement Preferences (best ways to communicate risks and increase awareness)

6.Willingness to Participate in Research (perceptions about biomonitoring and academic studies)

7.Partial results interviews

Limited Awareness of PFAS – Most participants had only a surface-level understanding of PFAS contamination.

Health Concerns – Strong concerns about seafood safety and long-term exposure risks.

Barriers to Education – Participants cited a lack of accessible information about PFAS.

Need for Clear Communication – Preference for **trusted sources** like universities and scientists over government agencies.

Economic Constraints – Limited financial resources hinder adoption of safety measures (e.g., water filters).

Community Trust and Engagement – Participants emphasized the importance of **interactive** and **localized** educational efforts.

8.Conclusion

This practicum laid the groundwork for a broader investigation of PFAS perceptions under the GATOR Project. Through literature review, committee guidance, and pilot interviews, the study refined an interview guide and identified key community concerns. Findings emphasized the need for clear communication, economic accessibility, and trusted information sources. Insights will guide future outreach efforts to improve public engagement and PFAS risk awareness. By refining research tools and fostering community trust, this study strengthens the GATOR Project's mission to empower coastal communities and enhance public health resilience.

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