GRAND CHALLENGES FOR SOCIAL WORK

2024 DOCTORAL AWARDEES

Project titles and Grand Challenges addressed

The Grand Challenges for Social Work is pleased to present our second cohort of doctoral awardees. The initiative — part of GCSW efforts to **Go•Grander** — has awarded these fellowships to social work doctoral students to bolster their commitment to careers tackling some of our biggest societal challenges.

Each graduate student will benefit from networking and mentoring, and was awarded a $3,000 stipend to support research that better connects their dissertation or capstone project to the people and communities they are studying.

These awards, funded with a $100,000 grant from The New York Community Trust, are part of a two-year effort to enable 26 doctoral students to turn their research findings into proposals for policy and practice changes addressing one or more of the identified 13 Grand Challenges. (The 14th Grand Challenge, Prevent Gun Violence, was announced after the launch of this awards program.) The Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education in Social Work (GADE) generously provided additional funding to provide $500 stipends for six honorable mentions this year (listed on page 14).

YESENIA ALVAREZ PADILLA

Harvesting the Fruits of Their Labor: Understanding the Role of Mixed Legal Statuses in Family Financial Socialization

(Build Financial Capability and Assets for All)

Yesenia (she/her) is a PhD candidate at The Ohio State University, from which she has an MSW. Her research focuses on promoting the financial well-being of immigrant communities, and she is particularly interested in understanding financial socialization processes in immigrant communities. Yesenia is a program coordinator at the Ohio Statewide Family Engagement Center, where she creates resources to promote family and school partnerships and financial literacy for immigrant and multilingual families.

ABSTRACT

More than 11.5 million undocumented immigrants were living in the United States in 2022, with an estimated 4 million living in mixed-legal status families. Since then, researchers have begun to examine the socialization messages Latine families of mixed legal status employ to prepare their children to confront issues of race, immigration, documentation status, and deportation. Although findings illustrate a unique process of socialization when discussing legal documentation status — including messages about the economic implications of family separation due to the deportation of a family member — no studies have explicitly examined the day-to-day purposeful and unintentional messaging children receive about money and finances. Therefore, the unique financial needs related to these distinct family dynamics and financial goals remain largely unexamined. Additionally, the family financial socialization literature lacks studies that employ qualitative research methods to simultaneously examine young adult and parents/caregiver perspectives. This dissertation employs a rigorous qualitative approach using individual semi-structured interviews to examine the financial socialization experiences of Latine mixed-legal status families with dyads of young adults and their parents. The central aim is to examine the family financial socialization experiences of members of Latine, mixed-status families to understand the role immigration status and race can play in these processes.

NICOLE CAPOZZIELLO

Exploring Buffalo East Side Residents' Visions of Nature: A Community-Based Case Study

(Create Social Responses to a Changing Environment)

Nicole (she/her) is a PhD candidate at the University at Buffalo, from which she has an MSW. She has a BA in English from Lawrence University. Her research and work focus on the benefits of nature access and experience for oppressed and underserved individuals and communities, including those in the criminal legal system. She is dedicated to using community-based research methods to work with people to reimagine and change their environment, through action and policy. In addition to her work in academia, Nicole is an activist and writer. She is the therapeutic gardening coordinator for the Buffalo non-profit Grassroots Gardens of Western New York and the co-director of Social Workers & Allies Against Solitary Confinement.

ABSTRACT

Inequity abounds in urban environments across the United States, manifesting as food apartheid, poor schools, lack of affordable quality housing, and disparities in healthcare and health outcomes. What is often ignored is how inequity extends to the ground beneath our feet and the trees above our heads; residents in some city neighborhoods are more likely to suffer the effects of pollution and industrial contamination, as well as lack access to nature including parks, community gardens, and trees. While some research has investigated urban natural environments, connected to issues such as housing and mental health, little has explored how community members living in these environments experience nature, and even less has inquired about their vision for the potential of the spaces around them. Drawing on arts-based and community-based methods, as well as a design thinking approach, this study explores the perspectives of community members living on the East Side of Buffalo using interviews, walking tours, a design studio (a participatory, arts-based activity), and ethnographic fieldnotes. This project will culminate in a site installation on a vacant lot on Buffalo's East Side, co-created with research participants and local organizations. This study has the potential to empower individuals and communities and influence policy in areas including urban planning, climate change, and food sovereignty.

JOONYOUNG CHO

Contact Frequency with Children Following Relocation Later in Life: Do Contact Modes And Proximity to a Child Matter?

(Eradicate Social Isolation)

Joonyoung (he/him) is a PhD candidate at the University of Michigan. He has an MSW and an MPH from Washington University. His research interests include aging-in-place, relocation, social relations, loneliness, and internet communication and technologies. The intersection of these interests shaped his research agenda. He is currently investigating the effects of housing transition on contact frequency with children and psychological well-being, using large population-based datasets such as the Health and Retirement Study and the National Health and Aging Trend Study. Joonyoung hopes his findings contribute to reducing social isolation and loneliness.

ABSTRACT

Maintaining regular contact with their children can help prevent social isolation in older parents, providing them essential emotional and instrumental support. While frequent contact with their children is beneficial for older adults, intergenerational proximity, which influences contact frequency, often changes in the process of relocation. This study will examine if relocation and proximity to a child affect in-person communication — as well as the effects of telephone, email, and social media contact. Using data from the Health and Retirement Study, it will examine changes in communication frequency between parents who either stayed or relocated in the last four years and potentially changed their close proximity to a child. The Convoy Model of Social Relations and Intergenerational Solidarity Theories will be used as a conceptual framework. By distinguishing proximity to a child and four types of contact modes, this study will provide data informing whether older adults are vulnerable to physical isolation and digital isolation after relocating in later life. Given the increasing number of older adults in the United States who experience housing transition, the hope is the findings will contribute to reducing their social isolation.

ANTHONY GOMEZ

Bringing Development to the Forefront: An Investigation of Foster Care Trajectories and Placement Instability in a Sample of California Adolescents

(Ensure Healthy Development for Youth)

Anthony (he/him) is a PhD candidate at the University of California- Berkeley and a graduate student researcher at the Transition-Age Youth Research and Evaluation Hub. He has a BA in psychology from Pomona College and an MSW from UCLA. Leveraging developmental frameworks, his research focuses on identifying opportunities for policy-level change in child welfare and other systems serving youth and their families. His research is driven by professional experiences working in residential youth treatment, early education, and child welfare policy.

ABSTRACT

Leveraging the life course perspective, this dissertation will explore three distinct child welfare phenomena with developmental and service implications for adolescents. The first paper will examine the characteristics, case histories, and child welfare trajectories of those who enter care during adolescence. It seeks to understand which youth experience out-of-home foster care placements during adolescence, using sequence analysis to map the chronological trajectories of their child welfare involvement. The second paper will contribute to an ongoing discourse about heightened rates of placement instability among adolescents in foster care, using sequence analysis to map the placement trajectories of adolescents in out-of-home care. The paper will also examine whether kinship care preceding or during adolescent foster care episodes produces a meaningful difference in placement trajectories. The objective is to facilitate a greater understanding of how adolescents fare in a placement type that is preferred and known for relative stability, as compared with other forms of out-of-home care. The final paper will examine placement in congregate care throughout California's Continuum of Care Reform implementation. Using Cox Proportional Hazard and multivariate linear regression, this paper will search for measurable changes in adolescents' risk of congregate placement, time spent in residential treatment, and risk of out-of-county congregate care placement. Together, this work will elucidate common adolescent pathways through California's child welfare system by combining the analytic potential of administrative data with advanced longitudinal and multivariate methods.

YOUNGJIN STEPHANIE HONG

Role of Income Support Policies in Reducing Child Development Gaps: Evidence from EITC and SNAP.

(Reduce Extreme Economic Inequality)

Youngjin (she/her) is a PhD candidate at the University of Chicago. She studies how public policies influence family wellbeing and child development in marginalized populations, including low-income families, families of color, and mixed-status families. Her work focuses on anti-poverty policies and work-family policies, such as childcare subsidy programs.

ABSTRACT

This project examines the role income support policies play in reducing gaps in child development, across socioeconomic status, during preschool and kindergarten years. The first two papers investigate the individual causal effects of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) generosity and Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) generosity on the cognitive and socioemotional development of children in socioeconomically disadvantaged families. The third paper examines the causal interaction effects between EITC and SNAP benefit generosity on these outcomes. Despite high multiple program participation rates, research has not yet examined whether receiving greater EITC as well as SNAP benefits improves child development in families participating in both programs. EITC and SNAP may serve as complements or substitutes, or additives in their effects on child development. Using quasi-experimental methods, this project finds that EITC and SNAP — when examined individually — have positive effects on cognitive and socioemotional outcomes. In addition, this project leads to a novel insight: When examined jointly, EITC and SNAP benefits have complementary effects, meaning the effect of larger EITC benefits on cognitive and socioemotional development increases as the level of SNAP benefits increases. So this project shows the importance of increasing the generosity of both programs. Also, given the complementary effects of EITC and SNAP, the study suggests it is crucial to reduce the administrative burdens of enrolling in EITC and SNAP, because not all eligible children receive both programs.

BARBARA MENDEZ CAMPOS

Understanding Pathways and Impacts of Hispanic Health Disparities in Dementia

(Eliminate Racism)

Barbara (she/her) is a PhD candidate at Boston College and has an MSW from the University of Michigan. Born in Monterrey, Mexico, she moved to the U.S. in her mid-teens and cultivated an interest in her new Hispanic community. With more than five years of clinical experience in diverse settings, she has served communities of color, older adults, and their families as they navigate mental health, aging, and health challenges. Barbara has received fellowships from the Michigan Center for Urban African American and Latinx Aging Research and AGE-Social Work in recognition of her work addressing health disparities in African American and Hispanic communities and among older adults and those with dementia.

ABSTRACT

This study addresses the multifaceted influences that dementia and healthcare have on dementia care and caregiver outcomes within Hispanic populations. Employing mixed methodology through sequential explanatory designs, the research integrates longitudinal quantitative analysis, cross-sectional analysis, and qualitative data collection to explore gaps in research, theoretical frameworks, and healthcare experiences. The dissertation employs a three-paper structure. The aim of the first paper is to understand how health experiences, severity appraisal, and healthcare decision-making processes influence Hispanic health disparities in dementia outcomes. The second analyzes the effects of healthcare experiences and severity appraisal on caregiving outcomes. The third explores factors impacting dementia care-seeking outcomes and caregiving outcomes. The first paper utilizes longitudinal data from Puerto Rico's PREHCO project to identify and analyze factors influencing dementia severity, diagnosis, and treatment among Hispanic individuals. The second involves a cross-sectional analysis of California Health Interview Survey data to explore the effects of healthcare experiences and health behaviors on caregiving outcomes in Hispanic dementia caregivers. The third relies on qualitative interviews with a diverse group of Hispanic dementia caregivers to uncover factors influencing decision-making processes and experiences regarding dementia care within Hispanic families. The findings have the potential to provide crucial insights for tailoring healthcare approaches, reducing health disparities, informing policy, and improving dementia outcomes in Hispanic communities.

REGINA MILLER NADIR

Pieces to a Rose

(Achieve Equal Opportunity and Justice)

Regina (she/her) is a PhD candidate at the University of Southern California and has an MSW from Howard University and a BA from Morgan State University. She has been a social worker for 20 years and is motivated to assist people who may not be operating at their highest and fullest potential as a result of complex trauma and other obstacles. She is humbled to help people grow beyond what they thought they could imagine. Regina has extensive knowledge of leading clinical, behavioral, and other types of academic teams and using behavior modification to foster behavioral change. She is an expert in special education, general education, and mental health.

Regina is a certified trauma specialist and an expert in conducting functional behavior assessments and social histories. She provides individual and group therapy and consultation, uses evidence-based treatment practices, and has knowledge of foster care and adoption practices. She is an appointed Housing Commissioner in Prince Georges County, Md., works full-time as a school social worker in Washington, D.C., and is a clinical social worker in private practice.

ABSTRACT

This project focuses on the impact that staff-student relationships have on the mental health of Black high school students at a Washington, D.C., high school who have been identified with an emotional disability, contributing to their low academic performance and lack of social and emotional progress. The project will track 65 students in grades 9 through 12 at Ballou High School to examine differences in staff interaction and outcomes in each age group. The project will address the deficit mindsets of staff members who hold onto inequitable and racist practices that influence unfair and negative responses to the behaviors demonstrated by this group of students. It will include restorative justice practices and incorporate elements that promote a safe, welcoming, and positive learning environment. The use of best practices and evidence-based exemplars will foster positive relationships between staff and students. Theoretical frameworks that undergird educator practices and existing solutions will also be examined in order to thwart practices that have harmed this student population in the past. Lastly, the project will improve staff-student relationships with the expectation doing so will increase academic performance — while decreasing the negative behaviors by those students labeled emotionally disabled.

HANNAH SCHEUER

Individual, Family, and Social Work Perspectives to Disrupt the Foster Care to Prison Pipeline

(Promote Smart Decarceration)

Hannah (she/her) is a PhD candidate at the University of Washington and has a BA in psychology from Reed College and an MSW from Portland State University. She is also a licensed independent clinical social worker and has been actively engaged in clinical practice with children, youth and families in Oregon and Washington for seven years. Her research derives from her experiences in acute care settings and sits at the intersection of social work practice and social science research. Hannah's interests include identifying solutions so that dual-systems-involved youth in Washington move towards decarceration. Her work aims to empower individuals and families experiencing marginalization by partnering with them to develop alternatives to harmful and oppressive systems. She is committed to a career in translational research that yields tangible benefits for youth and families.

ABSTRACT

Children and youth involved in the child welfare system face inordinate risk of contact with the criminal legal system. Additionally, the child welfare and criminal legal systems are disproportionately populated by Black and Indigenous youth and families. Both foster care and youth incarceration are associated with long-term negative outcomes including physical and mental health concerns and lifelong economic instability. To promote health and well-being in historically and persistently marginalized youth and families in Washington, the foster-care-to-prison pipeline must be disrupted. This will require understanding — informed by those with lived expertise — the various points at which child welfare and law enforcement intersect, and calls for developing tangible improvements to the child welfare and criminal legal systems. The goal of this study is to examine the links between the state's child welfare and criminal legal systems and offer potential alternatives, informed by the perspectives of parents and young adults who have experienced child welfare involvement as well as social workers who work within these systems. Recommendations for alternatives — generated after conducting focus groups of young adults, parents, and social workers — will be utilized for program development and policy advocacy to promote decarceration and family health and well-being.

PETER SUN

Lifecourse Patterns of Productive Engagement Among Rural and Urban Older Adults

(Advance Long and Productive Lives)

Peter (he/him) is a PhD candidate at Brown University and has both a BA in psychology and an MSW from the University of Washington. Previously, he worked as a graduate student intern at Partners for Our Children at the University of Washington School of Social Work. His research interests include rural health disparities and the productive engagement of older adults.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation seeks to understand associations between productive engagement activities and rural-urban health outcomes. Life course patterns of productive engagement in working, volunteering, and caregiving activities have been identified from the 2008-2018 Health and Retirement Study using multichannel sequence analysis and cluster analysis. To understand the antecedents of these patterns, multinomial logistic regression will be used to estimate associations between social determinants of health and life course patterns. Finally, propensity score models will be used to assess the influence of life course patterns of productive engagement on cognitive functioning and general health — and the differences between rural and urban older adults. This dissertation introduces a new methodological approach for analyzing patterns of multiple productive engagement activities across the life course. These patterns could potentially serve as modifiable intervention targets to reduce rural health disparities in cognitive functioning and general health.

JULISA TINDALL

Judge Me Not: Exploring Black Mothers' Perceptions of Maternal Health Services and Structural Racism in South Carolina

(Close the Health Gap)

Julisa (she/her) is PhD candidate at the University of South Carolina. A licensed clinical social worker, she has a BA in psychology from the College of Charleston and an MSW from Tulane University. With a passion for addressing racial healthcare equity, particularly in Black maternal and mental health, Julisa's research focuses on identifying and bridging gaps in these areas. Her work aims to enhance access to high-quality maternal healthcare services and promote racial healthcare equity. In addition to her research, Julisa has served in various research and professional roles including social worker in the Psychiatry Department at Ochsner Health System, clinical counselor at Rock Hill Treatment Center, and graduate research assistant on Dr. Teri Browne's "The Role of Racism, Racial Prejudice, and Discrimination in South Carolina Kidney Transplant Disparities" and Dr. Tisha Felder's "It Takes a Village: Increasing Capacity for Breast/Chest Feeding Equity among African Americans." Julisa's work, recognized through various presentations, publications, and professional affiliations, underscores her deep commitment to social work focused on social justice, racial equity, and improving healthcare outcomes in marginalized communities.

ABSTRACT

The United States has the highest maternal mortality rate among developed nations, with significant racial disparities. Black women suffer disproportionately, facing two to three times higher risks of pregnancy-related complications and severe disability than White women. In South Carolina, Black women and women of other races or ethnicities experience 2.4 times higher mortality rates than White women. This project aims to address a crucial gap in understanding the lived experiences of Black mothers in the South, particularly the impact of structural racism on maternal health outcomes. Specifically, the study explores Black women's perceptions of maternal health services and structural racism in South Carolina. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of 20 Black mothers in South Carolina, focusing on their perinatal experiences. The study utilizes critical race theory and Black feminist thought to frame and analyze these experiences, with a focus on how structural racism shapes Black women's interactions with healthcare systems. This project hopes to inform future research on this public health crisis in the South and across the United States. Understanding the relationship between structural racism and maternal health outcomes is key to building collaborations between social work and other health-related disciplines working to reduce maternal morbidity and mortality. Furthermore, social workers can play a pivotal role in healthcare organizations to improve their typical practices and avoid the impacts of structural racism.

ANTHONY TRAVER

Evaluating the Capacity of Shallow Subsidies to Prevent Homelessness and Premature Nursing Home Admissions Among Older Adults with Worst Case Housing Needs

(End Homelessness)

Anthony (he/him) is a PhD candidate at The Ohio State University and a graduate research assistant at the Age-Friendly Innovation Center. He has a BA in clinical psychology from Boston College and an MSW from Syracuse University. He is a licensed clinical social worker whose practice in Portland, Ore., focused on delivering integrated housing and healthcare services to individuals experiencing chronic homelessness, disability, and social marginalization. His research examines the impact of housing allocation, access, and quality on health equity in later life.

ABSTRACT

Housing loss in later life is often driven by unaffordable housing costs, yet fewer than one-third of eligible older adults receive federal rental assistance. As the number of older adults with housing affordability challenges grows, Area Agencies on Aging are exploring innovative strategies to promote stable housing for their constituents. Shallow subsidies, a moderate yet recurring form of rental assistance, represent one such strategy. They have been used to address the housing needs of households at high risk of homelessness, yet their effectiveness among older adults has yet to be evaluated. This dissertation will evaluate the shallow subsidy pilot of the Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging. The agency provides community-based services to low-income adults older than 60 and living with a disability. The shallow subsidy program will target those with worst-case housing needs — meaning they rent, do not receive government housing assistance, have incomes below 50 percent of the area median, and have rent that's more than half their income. This evaluation will enroll 100 eligible clients and randomly assign 50 to receive a shallow subsidy. Housing insecurity, housing loss, premature nursing home admission, emergency service utilization, well-being, and person-place fit will be measured during the pilot program's first year. Comparing outcomes for those who do and don't receive the subsidy will provide early evidence of their ability to promote stable housing and quality of life among older adults with worst-case housing needs.

NARI YOO

Unraveling Ethnic Disparities: Spatial and Virtual Access to Mental Health Services among Immigrants with Language Barriers

(Harness Technology for Social Good)

Nari (she/her) is a PhD candidate at New York University and has BA and master's degrees in social welfare from Ewha Womans University. Her research is motivated by the desire to promote social justice and improve the mental health, behavioral health, and well-being of racial and ethnic minorities and immigrants in both the United States and Asia. Her questions are organized around systems-level, community-level, and technology-related factors in predicting behavioral health outcomes, service utilization, and access to care. Her long-term goal is to develop technology-assisted and community-based interventions to foster culturally and linguistically appropriate services. Her methodological interest is leveraging computational social science approaches to social work research, including using text-as-data and big data sources. At NYU, she was an inaugural predoctoral fellow at the Constance and Martin Silver Center on Data Science and Social Equity. She organized NYU's Summer Institute in Computational Social Science with the theme of data science for social good. Nari has worked as a data analyst for projects on the intersection of social work and data science. She is analyzing X (formerly Twitter) data based on machine learning algorithms to assess racism and anti-immigrant sentiment at state and county levels and examine the impact on mental health. In another project, Nari is using natural language processing techniques to analyze clinical notes to measure person-centered care in behavioral health settings. She has published first-authored papers in Psychiatric Services, Journal of Affective Disorders, and Digital Health.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims to assess the accessibility of linguistically appropriate mental health services for immigrants with limited English proficiency in the United States. It addresses the low service utilization rates among Hispanic and Asian Americans, focusing on structural barriers. The study addresses three objectives utilizing computational, experimental, and qualitative approaches.
The first section will assess the availability of mental health facilities offering services in languages commonly spoken in Hispanic and Asian communities. Machine learning and geospatial techniques will be used to analyze spatial, virtual, and financial access, as well as patterns in service availability. The research will also investigate the impact of structural xenophobia on accessibility. The second section will explore how practitioner biases and linguistic barriers affect access to mental health services. An email audit will be conducted with multilingual providers to assess preferential responsiveness based on client names and communication language, providing insights into potential biases. The third section will investigate the experiences of immigrants with limited proficiency in English have accessing telemental health services, considering the role of language, culture, and technology. Interviews with immigrants who have used telemental healthcare will provide valuable insights into their decision-making processes. The research aims to inform social policy by advocating for linguistically responsive mental health services and eliminating structural barriers. It also seeks to contribute to training and licensure reforms for mental health professionals, promoting health equity in the digital era.

QIHAO ZHAN

Promoting Healthy Adolescent Dating Relationships in the Post-Pandemic Era

(Build Healthy Relationships to End Violence)

Qihao (she/her) is a PhD student at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. She has a BA in psychology and family and human development and an MSW and a Master of Public Administration from Arizona State University. Inspired by her field experiences working with children and families, her research focuses on adolescent dating relationships, intimate partner violence among parents, and youth violence prevention. She is particularly interested in protective and promotive factors of adolescent dating violence and how to incorporate those factors into violence prevention work.

ABSTRACT

Adolescent dating violence is a pressing public health concern, leading to serious short- and long-term health and relationship issues. The Covid pandemic significantly altered various aspects of adolescents' lives. Now that students are back to school in person, it is critical to understand how the pandemic impacted the dynamics of adolescent relationships. Using a mixed-method research design that includes a survey and focus groups, this study aims to explore norms, experiences, and victimization within dating relationships among eighth graders. Additionally, it seeks to identify protective factors of dating violence at the family and school levels. Through close collaboration with a racially, ethnically, and economically diverse public middle school, the study seeks to inform and develop guidelines for educators and preventionists in the realm of healthy relationships programming and curriculum development. It also aims to advocate for changes in the school environment and policies to end relationship violence.

HONORABLE MENTIONS

KASANDRA DODD | University of Georgia: Sex Trafficking of African American Girls Within the U.S. Child Welfare System

FIONA DOHERTY | The Ohio State University: Multisolving for Climate Resilience and Social Connectedness in Appalachian Ohio

RITA HU | University of Michigan: The Role of Social Relationships in the Internalization and Consequence of Self-Perceptions of Aging Across the Life Span

ANNA O'DELL | The University of Tennessee Knoxville: Public Schools in Crisis: Predicting Teachers Intention to Leave and Implications for Students, Learning, and Healthy Development

JENNIFER TANIS | Michigan State University: State-level Paid Family Leave: An Attachment-based, Economical Approach to Child Maltreatment Prevention

MELANIE YU | Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey: Refugee Reciprocity as a Critical Apparatus for Reimagining Resettlement Work: A Qualitative Examination of Refugee Reciprocity and Solidarity

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