

SmartCAT: Smartphone Enhanced Child Anxiety Treatment

Social Work Internship

Location: University of Pittsburgh (Sennott Square) & Steel Valley Middle School

Director: Jennifer S. Ph.D. (jss4@pitt.edu)

Population: Middle school children and adolescents with social anxiety disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and separation anxiety disorder.

Experience: Interns will receive training and supervision in Brief Coping Cat, an evidence-based cognitive behavioral treatment for childhood anxiety disorders. They will implement this 8-week manualized CBT intervention with individual child clients in Steel Valley Middle School as part of a study funded by the University of Pittsburgh's Social Science Research Initiative. Therapists will learn to help youth build problem-solving and cognitive reframing skills, develop a hierarchy of fears and anxieties, then tackle these fears using exposure therapy. Youth will also use a novel interactive smartphone app called SmartCAT. SmartCAT includes a therapist portal that therapists can use to track patient progress and communicate outside of session. In addition to providing therapy, interns will assist with other aspects of the project, such as recruitment, assessment (structured clinical interviewing) and referral of students. Interns will receive training in conducting structured clinical interviews and may be asked to complete interviews for other studies of children and adolescents with anxiety and depression. If interested, interns may become involved in data analysis and research presentations.

Supervision: Supervision will be provided by Dr. Silk, a licensed child clinical psychologist. Interns will participate in training and weekly group supervision sessions in Sennott Square.

Requirements: Students must be 2nd year MSW students and have some coursework or training in cognitive behavioral therapy (can be taking the class during the first semester). Previous experience working with middle school age children is preferred. Must have transportation and be willing to drive to Steel Valley Middle School. Must commit to both Fall and Spring Terms. Act 33/34 Clearances required.

Compensation: \$6,000 stipend provided

About SmartCAT

Pitt Professors Jennifer Silk and Bambang Parmanto developed SmartCAT (Smartphone-Enhanced Child Anxiety Treatment) as a mobile health solution that leverages technology to improve and shorten treatment for childhood anxiety disorders. SmartCAT includes a smartphone app for youth and a clinician portal that integrates care with the treating therapist or counselor. The app is designed to get kids practicing CBT skills (i.e. coping, relaxation, problem-solving) in their day-to-day life, in a way that is fun and engaging, using interactive games, multi-media activities, and a skills coach for real-time help tackling anxiety. Unlike existing anxiety apps, the activities on the app are coordinated with therapy. Using the HIPAA-compliant clinician portal, therapists or counselors can assign "challenges" for youth to tackle real-world fears, schedule time-based and GPS-based reminders, and gain insight into the youth's progress by viewing data from the app. These features serve to increase engagement, motivation, and learning, which will help therapists do their jobs more effectively, provide faster relief for youth and families, and reduce costs to health-care payers and schools.



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Notable Mentions

- SmartCAT 1.0 recognized at the White House in 2014 as a winner in the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology's *Behavioral Health Patient Empowerment Challenge*
- SmartCAT 2.0 development and open trial funded by \$675,000 grant from National Institute of Mental Health
- Results suggested that by adding SmartCAT, **treatment can be reduced from 16 to 8 sessions while boosting recovery rates by 38%** compared to published brief CBT trial for youth anxiety

