



Profiles

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Social Work

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Dr. Shaun Eack

Welcome as we reflect on and review the research accomplishments of the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work for 2020. Advancing knowledge for impact is core to our mission at the School. Our goal as Social Work scholars is to engage and partner with communities to conduct applied research that will address the pressing social problems of today and improve the conditions of underserved and vulnerable populations. Faculty, students, and staff have all made significant strides in advancing this goal during a time when research that is as socially impactful as our determinations is paramount.

In this profile you will read about innovative new studies that break ground on addressing barriers to HIV care in racial and sexual minorities, engaging elderly immigrants in community volunteerism to prevent dementia, and integrating social workers into health care teams to combat the opioid epidemic. You will also find that our faculty and students are at the forefront of community-engaged research, such as developing novel mobile technologies to identify risky neighborhood spaces for youth and partnering with ministries to support the mental health needs of African Americans through pastoral routes to care.

Our faculty are also being recognized for their leadership and accomplishments in research. Drs. Goodkind and Shook have both been accepted into the Interdisciplinary Research Leaders Program at Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to advance health promotion strategies for African American girls and improve legal defense representation for at-risk youth involved in the criminal justice system, respectively. In addition, Dr. Huguley was awarded the 2021 Excellence in Research Award by the Society for Social Work and Research for his high-impact article, "Parental ethnic-racial socialization practices and the construction of children of color's ethnic-racial identity: A research synthesis and meta-analysis" (*Psychological Bulletin* 2019:145:437-458).

The three research Centers at the School focused on race (Center on Race and Social Problems), mental health (Center for Interventions to Enhance Community Health), and child welfare (Child Welfare Research and Education Programs) have supported faculty in competing for nearly \$10 million in new research grants this year and over \$24 million in training and evaluation projects.

Finally, the future of our profession — our social work students — are learning to lead and establishing themselves as scholars with their first funded projects on topics including workplace discrimination and the maternal health of Black women (supported by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute), and improving the dissemination of strategies to manage chronic pain to primary care settings (supported by the Clinical and Translational Science Institute). We are proud of all that our research faculty, students, and staff were able to accomplish in 2020, and look forward to the impact their efforts will have on the world.

Sincerely,

Shaun M. Eack, Ph.D.
*James and Noel Browne Endowed Chair
Associate Dean for Research
Professor, School of Social Work
Professor, Department of Psychiatry
University of Pittsburgh*



New Research



Jaime Booth

*Associate Professor,
School of Social Work*

Funding: National Institute of Health (NIH) & National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA)

Title: Spaces and People in Neighborhoods Project (SPIN)

Youth of color disproportionately live in neighborhoods with stressors that contribute to lifelong health disparities. This study uses mobile technology to allow youth to communicate their experiences in their neighborhood in real time. The goal is to engage youth to recognize the relationship between safe and risky spaces; stress and substance abuse; to assess potential risk and to increase youth access to safe spaces. The study created the youth research advisory board (YRAB), conducted a pilot study to fine tune measures and methods, and recruited 78 youth to participate in a larger study.

Study activities are situated in the Pittsburgh neighborhood of Homewood, Pennsylvania, and all participants either live in the neighborhood or attend the neighborhood school. The YRAB meets once a week to discuss all aspects of the study including: measures, branding, recruitment and retention and data analysis. In the main study that began in July 2019, youth are given a cellphone, were asked to carry them for a month and answered questions about their mood and their current location 3 times day. In addition to completing surveys during the day, study participants completed brief surveys at the end of each day reporting on their overall mood and substance use that day and completed a baseline, immediate follow up and 6 months follow up surveys. The SPIN project is currently engaging participants in the 6 month follow-up surveys, analyzing the data collected to date, preparing for a set of community forums where the data will be presented and discussed, and developing and piloting (Homewood • Youth • Power • Engaged) ([HYPE Media](#)), a youth-led critical literacy program where youth are taught how to engage new media to rewrite neighborhood narratives for community change. ■

Funding Sources: National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)

Title: Project Adhere: Assessing Psychosocial Predictors of PrEP Adherence and Persistence Among Young Black Men who have sex with Men (MSM)

Young Black MSM experience a disproportionate rate of HIV infections in United States. HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is a biomedical prevention intervention shown to reduce risk of HIV infection; however, studies suggest Black MSM have significantly lower levels of adherence to PrEP compared to white MSM. Preliminary evidence suggests a relationship between PrEP adherence among Black MSM and psychosocial factors.

The goal of this project is to investigate the relationship between psychosocial factors (depressive symptomatology, substance use, social support, perceived HIV risk) and adherence and persistence to HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) among young Black gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (MSM). Over the course of the study, Dr. Whitfield and his team will observe the patterns of PrEP use and adherence, explore the effects of psychosocial factors on their adherence, and develop potential intervention targets to increase PrEP adherence. This study is a collaboration between the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work and the Emory University Rollins School of Public Health. ■



Darren Whitfield

*Assistant Professor,
School of Social Work and
Department of Psychiatry
and Direct Practice Chair*





Brianna Lombardi

*Assistant Professor,
School of Social Work*

Funding Sources: Pitt Seed Projects; Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA); Behavioral Health Workforce Research Center (BHWRC) at the University of Michigan School of Public Health; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Research Topic or Title(s): School-based intervention to build social and cognitive resilience for youth exposed to trauma; Coalition for Opioid and Addiction Leadership (COAL); SAMHSA Practitioner Expansion Award; Use of and Workforce Financed by Psychiatric Collaborative Care Management Codes (CoCM); Social Workers Use of Tele-Behavioral Health During Covid-19

The Pitt Seed Project from the Chancellor's Office at the University of Pittsburgh is an innovative and community engaged research project that seeks to adapt a school-based intervention to build social and cognitive resilience for youth exposed to trauma.

The COAL Fellowship is a \$1.3 million grant funded by HRSA to train 70 social workers over the next three years to address the opioid epidemic and co-occurring disorders in Southwest PA. In addition, an interprofessional collaboration between social work and the Peru Center in the Pitt School of Pharmacy funded by SAMHSA provides social worker students with additional training on substance use disorders and interventions.

Funded by BHWRC and HRSA the examination of the use of and workforce financed by Psychiatric Collaborative Care Management (CoCM) aims to identify barriers and facilitators to behavioral health integration in traditional health settings.

The Covid-19 pandemic has increased the use of tele-medicine; Dr. Lombardi in collaboration with the Michigan BHWRC and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) conducted a national survey with practicing social work clinicians on their tele-behavioral health use since COVID-19 to provide care to clients. ■

Funding Source: National Institute on Aging (NIA)

Title: Preventing Cognitive Decline and Dementia Among Older Chinese Immigrants: The Role of Activity, Engagement, Immigration Experience, and Neighborhood Environments

With a fast growth rate, the U.S. Chinese population increased from 2.9 to 4.9 million between 2000 and 2015, with 14% of them aged 65+ years. The lifetime risk of developing Alzheimer's and related dementias in this population is comparable to that of non-Hispanic Whites.

This study, funded by a \$2,223,556 grant from the NIA, will inform how active engagement with life, and maintenance of cognitive function, are interrelated to define and shape the aging process, which is especially important to older Chinese immigrants facing linguistic and social isolation.

The project focuses on the preventive effect of activity engagement profiles (AEP on cognitive decline and examine whether AEP mitigate immigration-related and neighborhood-related risks for dementia among community-dwelling U.S. Chinese immigrants.

The research aims to address health disparities and advance social justice through investigation of the intersection of race, ethnicity, gender, social class, and immigration, which constitute the social contexts of inequality over the life course and have profound impacts on the well-being and engagement with life in old age. ■



Fengyan Tang

*Professor,
School of Social Work*

Research Leadership Grants



Jeffrey Shook

*Associate Professor,
School of Social Work*

Funding Sources: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Heinz Endowments, the Pittsburgh Foundation and the FISA Foundation.

Title: Improving Indigent Defense through Holistic Representation

Most youth who come into contact with the juvenile justice system have significant health, mental health, and substance use issues, have been excluded from school and other child-serving institutions, and/or are disconnected or excluded from necessary supports and resources in the community. For many, their defense attorney serves as their primary advocate to help them obtain medical and mental health services and to connect them with supports and resources. Most of these youth, however, are unable to afford an attorney and must rely on the indigent defense system, which provides the free legal defense services guaranteed in the Constitution.

The project works with the Youth Advocacy Clinic (YAC) at Duquesne University to examine the effectiveness of a Holistic Representation Model (HRM). The model features interdisciplinary teams of professionals working together on youths' cases. HRM unites legal and clinical services, such that social workers, psychologists, and/or counselors are collaborating with attorneys.

The vast majority of youth served by the clinics are youth of color and all are unable to afford private attorneys. The clinics advocate for children in every aspect of delinquency and school cases, including meetings with youth and families, pretrial motions and litigation, investigation, admission or trial, disposition, and post-disposition motions, court and school hearings, meetings with school administrators and teachers, and meetings with service providers.

By training masters-level social work students, doctoral-level school psychology students, and law student attorneys and conducting research on the holistic model and other issues involving youth, this work has helped the clinics offer holistic representation to youth of color. ■

Funding: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Interdisciplinary Research Leaders Program

Title: Redefining Resilience and Reframing Resistance: Evaluation of a Violence Prevention and Health Promotion Empowerment Program for Black Girls

This study contributes to efforts to shift the narrative and focus from that of “fixing girls” to “fixing society” by working to make the systems that black girls encounter more equitable though engaging girls in empowerment and advocacy.

The study was developed and piloted with high school girls in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Weekly after-school sessions focused on various components of the empowerment model, including positive gendered racial identity, critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action. The study found that empowerment programming for Black girls based in critical consciousness theory and Black feminism is an effective way to develop resilience. In addition, participants critically reflected on their experiences, developed mutual support and positive gendered racial identity, and engaged in collective action.

The study, based in critical consciousness theory and Black feminism was designed to promote collective (rather than individual) resilience. ■



Sara Goodkind

*Associate Professor,
School of Social Work,
Department of Sociology,
and Gender, Sexuality,
and Women's Studies
Program*

Pilot Projects



Valire Copeland

*Professor,
School of Social Work*

Funding: University of Pittsburgh

Title: Addressing Autism in African American Families

Current autism literature attests that racial disparities exist in service delivery for Black children with autism, though this phenomenon is understudied. In particular, research examining the ways in which African American caregivers navigate their children's treatment needs and the efficacy of culturally relevant therapeutic interventions. The Autism in African American Families Study seeks to: (1) understand the challenges faced by parents when addressing treatment needs of their children; and (2) examine the effectiveness of an autism spectrum disorders (ASD) intervention to improve emotional self-regulation, interpersonal relationships, and academic achievements among African American children with autism. The multi-disciplinary research team includes family members of individuals with autism, autism and neurodivergent professionals, speech pathologists, and academic researchers from the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work, School of Education, and the Department of Communication Science and Disorders. ■



Leah Jacobs

*Assistant Professor,
School of Social Work*

Funding: University of Pittsburgh

Topic: Neighborhoods, Housing, Social Circumstances and Criminal Recidivism

The vast majority of people released from jail and prison will one day be rearrested or reincarcerated, making criminal recidivism a major challenge to reducing the United States' bloated incarceration rate. Dr. Leah Jacobs' new research focuses on sociostructural risk factors for recidivism. As part of this work, Jacobs has conducted the first known study on the relationship between housing circumstances—i.e., living situation, homelessness, and residential instability—and recidivism among probationers. Using a unique dataset of 2,453 people on probation and longitudinal analyses, she finds that housing insecurity is common among people on probation and is associated with an increased risk of recidivism. Most striking is that, above and beyond an extensive array of control variables, lacking a stable address at probation start or experiencing homelessness during probation is associated with a 35% and 44% increase in the risk of recidivism. In a separate paper, Dr. Jacobs assessed the relationship between neighborhood-level risk factors and recidivism among 2,218 people on probation. In this longitudinal study, she combines administrative and observational data on neighborhood conditions. Findings indicate that neighborhood risk interacts with individual risk, raising the possibility that some people classified as low risk might not recidivate but for placement in disadvantaged and disorganized neighborhoods. ■

New Tenure Stream Faculty



Deborah Moon

*Assistant Professor,
School of Social Work*

Funding: Ohio Children’s Trust Fund, Administration for Children and Families, and Children’s Bureau & Center for Interventions to Enhance Community Health (CITECH) and the Center of Race and Social Problems (CRSP)

Titles: Enhancing Safety and Well-Being for Ohio’s Children and Families;
Congregations as Healers Uniting to Restore Community Health (CHURCH)

Enhancing Safety and Well-Being for Ohio’s Children and Families is a multi-year federally funded collaboration with researchers at the Ohio State University and Case Western Reserve University to evaluate a community-based maltreatment prevention model in three rural counties in the state of Ohio.

The CHURCH study is a collaboration with Pitt researchers in the department of social work and psychiatry as well as the pastors affiliated with the Homewood Community Ministry to develop and pilot-test a church-based mental health intervention for African American populations in under-resourced communities. ■

■ **Topic:** Serious mental illness in adults, family interactions, and money management.

One study examines incidents between adult children and their parents, to which Philadelphia police officers responded. Notable findings are that persons with serious mental illness are not more likely to use a gun or weapon in incidents and that conflict was often focused on mental health related concerns (such as the use of prescribed medications). Another study examines family members managing the money of persons with serious mental illness as their representative payee. While most persons with serious mental illness are satisfied with how their money is managed, this study finds that they are less satisfied when their representative payee withholds funds to motivate them to change their behaviors. ■



Travis Labrum

*Assistant Professor,
School of Social Work*

Funding: Two-year Pitt Seed Special Cycle to Prevent Sexual Misconduct

Topic: Translating Transgender, Genderqueer, and Nonbinary (TGQN) Campus Climate Findings into Practice

TGQN university students experience sexual violence at higher rates than the general student population and are less likely to feel connected to campus or have trust in campus sexual violence resources. This project seeks to understand these trends by examining the structural barriers to service utilization, resource needs, and programmatic opportunities to improve campus sexual violence prevention and response infrastructure for TGQN students. The study employs listening sessions with TGQN students, a survey of university sexual violence prevention and response practices, and community feedback sessions. The project engages TGQN students as stakeholders to ensure that campus sexual violence prevention and response efforts meet their needs. ■



Rachel Gartner

*Assistant Professor,
School of Social Work*

Centers



James Huguley

*Interim Director,
Center on Race and
Social Problems*

Center on Race and Social Problems (CRSP)

The University of Pittsburgh's [Center on Race and Social Problems \(CRSP\)](#) conducts and disseminates rigorous applied social science research on race, ethnicity, and color and their influence on the quality of life in the United States. CRSP's areas of research focus include: economics, education, health, mental health, law, older adults, race relations, and youth and families. CRSP also facilitates mentoring for scholars who focus on race-related research through efforts like pilot study funding, race research groups, and opportunities for feedback on writing efforts.

CRSP's core faculty are highly accomplished in both procuring research funding and in producing publications for academic and public audiences. Currently CRSP faculty are overseeing more than \$10 million in external research funding. In addition, their pilot grant program has invested over \$200,000 in University of Pittsburgh race scholars since 2014, which in turn has generated more than \$6 million dollars in external grants for awardees. CRSP faculty continually publishes prolifically in high profile journals across the fields of education, health, psychiatry, psychology, social work, and sociology.

Research dissemination efforts include the Center's own peer reviewed academic journal, *Race and Social Problems*, which is among the most highly rated interdisciplinary race research journals in the applied social sciences. The CRSP Speaker Series also has attracted more than 5,000 visitors in the past year, and the lecture archives feature more than one hundred talks from race research leaders across the country. Moreover, CRSP Area Reports on specific topics like educational or health inequities have been influential to local and national policy-makers. Overall, over its 18-year history CRSP has become a national resource for race-related social science information for both academic and public audiences. ■





**David Brent
and Shaun Eack**

Directors of CiTECH

Center for Interventions to Enhance Community Health (CiTECH)

Initiated in 2018, [CiTECH](#) is a unique collaboration between the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work and the Department of Psychiatry. The goal is to study, understand and improve community behavioral health services and the Center is directed by Shaun M. Eack, PhD and David A. Brent, MD. The mission is to enhance the quality and length of life of individuals living with behavioral health conditions through community interventions.

Since its founding, CiTECH has made significant progress in developing research projects, funding pilot awards to support new interventions, mentoring junior faculty and trainees across both departments. Community engagement and community based research are fundamental to its success.

Research productivity has been substantial including receipt of \$7 million in new extramural funding from sources such as the National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH), the Simons Foundation, Autism Speaks, and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). Over 30 peer-reviewed articles have been published in the last year.

CiTECH awarded four new practice innovation awards funding unique community-engaged projects such as:

- Partnering with African American churches to increase clergy and congregations' mental health awareness, knowledge, and skills;
- Expanding caseworker knowledge about Intensive Family Coaching;
- Expanding therapist knowledge about the Central Regional Office of the Allegheny County Office of Children, Youth, and Families (CYF);
- Adapting and piloting an evidence-based team training intervention for Child Advocacy Center multi-disciplinary teams;
- Building collective efficacy among youth and adult residents in several Pittsburgh neighborhoods in order to prevent violence and lessen the impact of exposure to violence on mental health. ■



Child Welfare Research and Education Programs (CWERP)

CWERP collaborates on multiple research and evaluation projects across the state of Pennsylvania. Current statewide efforts are focused on the annual evaluation of their Title IV-E education programs, as well as evaluation of their newly revised Foundations of Pennsylvania Child Welfare Practice training for new caseworkers and Foundations of Supervision training for new supervisors. In addition, CWERP will serve as the evaluator for the upcoming implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) in Pennsylvania.

Clinical Associate Professor and CWERP Principal Investigator, Helen Cahalane, was awarded a five-year workforce excellence grant through the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (NCWWI) and the U.S. Children's Bureau of the federal Administration for Children and Families. This award is in collaboration with the Allegheny County Department of Human Services. Within the School of Social Work, the project established the Child Welfare Workforce Excellence Fellows (CWWEF) program that is designed to prepare MSW students to enter practice in public child welfare. Targeted organizational interventions and workforce improvement initiatives within the Allegheny County Office of Children, Youth and Families are also components of the grant. CWWEF Project Coordinator, Edoukou Aka-Ezoua, is currently working on a project to better understand the impact of a statewide child welfare intervention on the child welfare outcomes of adolescent girls of color.

Research Assistant Professor Marlo Perry has recently taken on the role of Director of Research and Evaluation for CWERP. In this role, Dr. Perry oversees all research and evaluation projects across the CWERP continuum (Child Welfare Resource Center and Title IV-E programs), as well as facilitates opportunities for crossover between research faculty and staff in both locations (Oakland and



Helen Cahalane

Principal Investigator, Child Welfare Education and Research Programs

Mechanicsburg). After a brief hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Perry is finishing up data collection for her grant funded through the Steven Manners Faculty Development Award focused on emotional variability in child welfare caseworkers and how it relates to professional quality of life and commitment to the field. Additionally, Drs. Perry and Cahalane are leading a collaborative effort with Wesley Family Services and Allegheny County Office of Children, Youth, and Families. Funded through the Center for Interventions to Enhance Community Health (CiTECH), this collaboration is focused on increasing the accessibility of Intensive Family Coaching (IFC), which is a home-based adaptation of the evidence-based practice, Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), to children and families involved with the child welfare system.

In addition, members of CWERP work with child-serving organizations across the state to help them with program evaluation efforts. Upcoming research for CWERP may include exploring access to technology of older youth in care and how that relates to the quantity and quality of their social supports, using content analyses of application materials to determine career trajectories of participants in our IV-E education programs, and incorporating evidence-based practices to improve self-care and well-being of child welfare professionals. ■

PhD students and Postdoctoral Fellows



Laura Ellen Ashcraft

MSW

Ms. Ashcraft is a third-year PhD Candidate and the first social worker to receive a predoctoral Clinical and Translational Science Fellowship funded by the NIH through the ICRE at Pitt in 2019. The fellowship was renewed for a second year in 2020. Ashcraft's research focuses on barriers and facilitators to evidence-based chronic pain management treatment by primary care providers. Chronic pain is a serious issue and effects millions of Americans every year causing disruptions not only physically but also in employment and social connections. In her first year, Ms. Ashcraft interviewed primary care providers to understand the difficulties they face when treating chronic pain. She also explored how PCPs get information about chronic pain. This research is the foundation for future work further exploring these barriers and strategies to effectively treat chronic pain. Ms. Ashcraft is mentored by Dr. Shaun Eack, PhD in Social Work and Dr. Jessica S. Merlin, MD, PhD, MBA in General Internal Medicine. ■

Ms. Omowale is a third-year joint Social Work doctoral and Public Health master's student focuses her research on the maternal health of Black women and adverse birth outcomes among this population. She is the recipient of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) diversity supplement grant under the mentorship of Dr. Dara Mendez, PhD, MPH, Pitt School of Public Health. This funding will support her research project studying the relationship between workplace stress and discrimination on adverse birth outcomes. Ms. Omowale is also working on a research project exploring how the work experiences of college-educated Black women influence their maternal health outcomes. This work is supported by her advisor, Dr. John Wallace, PhD, School of Social Work. ■



Serwaa S. Omowale

LMSW



Yan Yuan

Postdoctoral Fellow

Recent doctoral graduate and postdoctoral fellow Dr. Yan Yuan's research concerns the effects of early trauma on emotion, cognition, and behaviors, as well as the implications for practice, under a dynamic system of neurological, biological, psychological, and social factors. Specifically, she conducted projects spanning: trauma and borderline personality disorder (BPD), emotion dysregulation (ED), trauma affecting pain management via ED, trauma in relation to sleep disturbances and mental health outcomes, as well as examining interventions and services targeting individuals, families and communities affected by the aforementioned challenges, especially among historically understudied or underserved groups. Her dissertation was entitled *Trauma, emotion dysregulation, and borderline personality features in young women*. Her current research is rooted in and inspired by over five years of clinical practice experience working with individuals with mental illness with severe trauma histories. In recognition of the merits of Yan's study, she was selected to be a 2019-2020 Fahs-Beck Scholar by the Fahs-Beck Fund for Research and Experimentation. Dr. Christina Newhill, PhD, School of Social Work was her dissertation committee chair, and currently both Dr. Newhill and Dr. Shaun Eack, PhD, School of Social Work are her mentors for her postdoctoral work. ■

By The Numbers

* Scholarship & Research

3 research centers

Center on Race and Social Problems (CRSP)

Child Welfare Resource Center

Center for Interventions to Enhance Community Health (CiTECH)

over **\$2 million** 
in research expenditures



Child Welfare Education and Training programs support students and training across the state of PA, totaling

over **\$24 million** 
in annual expenses

55 active research projects



13 funded collaborative research projects with a community partner



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