

FORDHAM
UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF SOCIAL SERVICE

2021 DOCTORAL CANDIDATES

STEPHANIE BOSCO-RUGGIERO
JESSICA COSTEINES
AMANDA DE JESÚS,
PHILIP ELIKE
LORI HURLEY
MARGARET KELLY
HANS MENOS
XIAORAN WANG

Congratulations GSS Doctoral Graduate!

The GSS Class of 2021 will forever hold a unique place in the history of Fordham and our hearts. Over the past fourteen months a global pandemic and global demand for racial justice have defined the context of your GSS journey. Your resilience has been remarkable and your commitment to justice and positive change fuel my optimism for the future of social work education and our profession.

I sincerely wish we could have come together to celebrate your outstanding accomplishment. Please know the gratitude and pride of the entire GSS community are with you and your family. We're all very excited to watch the amazing difference you will make in the world!

Congratulations again! I look forward to welcoming you home to Fordham as a GSS Alum as often as possible.

All the best,

Debra M. McPhee, Ph.D.
Dean

Congratulations on your transition to another level of leadership in the social work profession. Your success in obtaining your doctoral degree has involved many personal sacrifices. At times balancing your education, family, and work-life seemed an impossible task. The COVID-19 pandemic did not make the last few yards to the finishing line easy, but you did it. I would recommend that you not see this as the end of your growth as a social work scholar and educator but as the beginning of a new phase in those areas of your professional life. I want to leave you with a quote from Marcus Garvey, “Never forget that intelligence rules the world and ignorance carries the burden. Therefore, remove yourself as far as possible from ignorance and seek as far as possible to be intelligent.”

Best wishes,

G. Lawrence Farmer, Ph.D.
Doctoral Program Director

STEPHANIE BOSCO-RUGGIERO



Stephanie Bosco-Ruggiero holds a B.A. in Political Science from Vassar College and an M.A. in Urban Affairs and Public Policy from the Biden School of Public Policy and Administration at the University of Delaware. As an adjunct instructor, Stephanie teaches social policy for Fordham University GSS, Adelphi University SSW, and Wurzweiler SSW at Yeshiva University. She also has taught Sociology 101 at the undergraduate level. Stephanie has worked with Fordham GSS faculty on federally funded grant projects

including the National Center for Social Work Trauma Education and Workforce Development, and the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute. Previously, she worked in government and for Neighborhood Housing Services of New York City. Currently Ms. Bosco-Ruggiero has a freelance and consulting business focused on her main interests which include social policy, child welfare, spirituality in social work, and child and adolescent mental health. Stephanie is the co-author/author of seven peer reviewed journal articles and a book entitled *Adopting older children: A practical guide to adopting and parenting children over age four*.

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

Fuhua Zhai Ph.D., Chair
Dana Marlowe Ph.D., Second Reader
Sharon Kollar, LMSW, External Reader

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Risk Factors and Preventive Services: Associations with Repeat Child Maltreatment in the State of Connecticut

Repeat child maltreatment is a problem in the state of Connecticut as well as other states such as New York. Although most children will not be victims of repeat maltreatment in Connecticut, a substantial percentage will be. Several family and child variables have been found to be associated with child maltreatment recidivism in previous studies. It was expected similar factors would predict higher risk in Connecticut as well. This study used National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) data for Connecticut for the years 2016 to 2018 to examine whether any child or family variables and risk factors, case characteristics, or services were associated with repeat reports, substantiation, or recidivism. There was a difference in repeat reports, substantiation, and recidivism by most of the hypothesized children and caregiver risk factors (e.g., mental health, disability). Family and child variables, family risk factors, and case characteristics associated with repeat reports, substantiation, and recidivism included child is multiracial, financial problem, housing problem, domestic violence, and unmarried parent household. Case characteristics associated with recidivism included having a report of neglect, a substantiated report the previous year, a shorter length of time between reports, and multiple investigation response counties over 36 months. Those who received more services had more reports and substantiations, most likely reflecting that the agency generally provides more services in families with substantiated cases; however, certain services are provided to most families with unsubstantiated cases as well. Education and training appeared to be particularly effective in lowering risk for families with financial problems. The Connecticut Department of Children and Families can use results from this study to cross validate and/or improve their risk assessments for recidivism.

A NOTE FROM DR. ZHAI

Stephanie Bosco-Ruggiero has been working on child welfare related research for nearly 15 years and is always passionate about understanding how we can better help children and families involved in the child welfare system. She is also enthusiastic about delving deeper into other research interests, including spirituality and human development, spirituality and social work, and child and adult mental health treatment and policy. During her study in the doctoral program, Stephanie worked with GSS faculty members as a research assistant or program coordinator of multiple research institutes and projects, including the Beck Institute on Religion and Poverty, the Building Management Capacity for Workforce Recruitment and Retention Project, the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, and the National Center for Social Work Trauma Education and Workforce Development. She has authored and co-authored several publications, including a book on adopting and parenting older children.

In line with her research interests in child welfare, in her dissertation, Stephanie used data from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) to examine the risk factors and preventive services that were associated with repeat reports, substantiation, and repeat substantiation of child maltreatment in Connecticut. She conducted sophisticated and extensive multivariate analyses using three waves of data (more than 57,000 cases from NCANDS 2016, 2017, and 2018) with binary logistic regressions and moderation analyses, controlling for demographics and case characteristics. The findings in general confirmed the previously identified risk factors for child maltreatment recidivism but called for more appropriate preventive services, for example, for families with more severe cases of neglect that did not receive alternative response, for caregivers with medical problems, and more mental health services for unsubstantiated cases.

I was honored to have the opportunity to work with Stephanie on her dissertation. It was not an easy journey, especially given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. As she told me, getting the dissertation done was like moving toward a bright light at the end of a dark tunnel. I am very proud of her that she got it done and got it done well!

JESSICA COSTEINES



Recognizing that the role of the gut-brain connection was largely missing from social work literature, Jessica's dissertation explored the relationship between nutrition and mental health in adolescents. This was sparked by her own experiences in health and wellness, as well as her long-standing commitment to improving adolescent health and well-being.

She works full time in research at the Yale School of Medicine and Psychiatry for the last 13 years and counting. She is currently the Program Manager of the Clinical Neuroscience Research Unit at the Connecticut Mental Health Center and of the Yale Psychedelic Science Center. Her work focuses on understanding the neurobiology of addiction and mental illness through fMRI and PET scans.

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

Amy Horowitz, Ph.D., Chair

Fuhua Zhai, Ph.D., Second Reader

Andrea Adimando, DNP, External Reader

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

A Gut Feeling: Exploring the Relationship Between Mental Health and Nutrition in Adolescents

Mental illness in adolescence is associated with a multitude of adverse outcomes throughout an individual's life span. Exploring and improving upon young adult's diets and nutritional habits can be a beneficial compliment and/or an inexpensive alternative to current standards of treatment. While research suggests that diet affects mental health, recent revelations have been able to expound upon the intricate process of communication between the gut-brain axis. These technologically driven advances have been essential to further understanding the role of food and its potential to greatly reduce the prevalence and severity of mental illness over time. The majority of previous literature has focused on the dietary habits and mental health of either young children or adults, while investigation of these same problems in the teenage population is lacking. The following analysis utilized Year 15 of the Fragile Family and Child Wellbeing Study data aimed to investigate the relationship between nutrition, mental health and wellbeing in a nationally representative sample of 15-year-olds in the United States. After controlling for gender, race, body mass index, and social support to exercise and eat well, statistically significant relationships were found between nutrition and mental health, such as depression and anxiety symptomology, and child behavioral outcomes, such as aggression and attention problems. Although effect sizes were small, they indicate that it is important to consider the role that diet can play on improving on mental health and wellbeing outcomes in adolescents. Study findings can be used to explore how the field of social work can educate and intervene at a critical time of gut and brain development within this population.

A NOTE FROM DR. HOROWITZ

Jessica Costeine's dissertation grew out of her long-standing interest in adolescent mental health and her own personal experience with the role of diet in contributing to both health and mental health. Recognizing that the relationship between diet and mental health has generally been ignored in social work practice and research, especially as it concerned adolescents, Jessica was committed to bringing attention to the "gut-brain connection." Her dissertation, *A Gut Feeling - Exploring the Relationship between Mental Health and Nutrition in Adolescents*, represents a major contribution to the field. Using data from Year 15 of the Fragile Families dataset with thousands of respondents, Jessica conducted multivariate analyses that were both extensive and sophisticated. Her findings provided consistent support for the role of nutrition in influencing both mental health and psychological wellbeing in adolescents. The implications of her findings point to the importance of training social workers to assess nutrition and to make appropriate referrals, needed policy changes regarding meals in schools, hospitals, and other institutional environments, and the importance of future longitudinal research.

During the time Jessica has been at Fordham, she has concurrently built her career at the Yale School of Medicine & Psychiatry starting as the Evaluation Coordinator in the Consultation Center to her current position as the Clinical Research Coordinator of the Clinical Neuroscience Research Unit at the Connecticut Mental Health Center. She has also had the honor of receiving the Social Work Research of the Year Award in 2015 from Yale University. Adding to her roles as doctoral candidate and university researcher, Jessica found time to further develop her skills as an educator, teaching research methods and human behavior courses at the Southern Connecticut State University Social Work program, as well as psychology at both Sacred Heart University and Gateway Community College.

It has been a pleasure to work with Jessica throughout her time at Fordham. She is a caring, thoughtful individual and valued colleague. Our relationship started when she was a student in my Observational Research class, following which I recruited her as my research assistant and then teaching assistant. I was grateful that she wanted to continue to work together and honored when she asked me to serve as Chair of her dissertation committee. I have seen her overcome obstacles that would have overwhelmed most other students in her position. It is a testament to her personal strength as well as her commitment to advancing the state of knowledge in social work regarding diet and mental health.

I know that as Dr. Costeines, Jessica will continue to make great contributions to the field, and I look forward to her publications disseminating her dissertation findings. I also look forward to continuing our relationship as colleagues.

AMANDA DE JESÚS,



Amanda de Jesús, PhD, LCSW-R, received a bachelor's degree in history from George Mason University, an MSW from CUNY Hunter College and a PhD from Fordham University. She is a Behavioral Health Therapist at Community Healthcare Network in Queens, and she has worked as a therapist in community health centers for over 10 years. She also serves as the social work consultant for the Foster Care Film and Community Engagement Project, a documentary film series that provides foster youth with an opportunity to share their stories in their own words. She has taught clinical social work courses at Fordham Graduate School of Social Service. Her research interests and clinical practice areas include social work with immigrants and refugees, human and labor trafficking, trauma, mental health, and foster care.

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

Daniel Coleman, Ph.D., Chair

Dana Alonzo, Ph.D., Second Reader

Thalia MacMillan, Ph.D., External Reader

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Immigration status and risk factors for suicidal ideation and attempts among Latinos in the United States.

Latinos in the United States are a growing, dynamic, and diverse group. This paper will highlight the immigration statuses of Latinos as it relates to their mental health and suicidal ideation. The groups include those who were born in the U.S. as citizens, those who migrated from another country and became U.S. citizens, those who have legal status (visa, Green Card, etc.), and those without legal immigration status (undocumented persons). Distinctions among these four groups will be examined in order to develop a better understanding of the strengths and challenges of each group. Latino immigrants face a number of challenges: acculturation difficulties, separation from their families when leaving their country of origin, and discrimination in the U.S. Latinos born in the U.S. face similar challenges, including discrimination and acculturation issues like feeling torn between their native cultural norms and U.S. cultural norms. Citizenship status will be examined in relation to suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. The history of Latino immigration to the U.S. and the history of an anti-immigrant climate in the U.S. will be discussed. The healthy migrant effect and perceived discrimination theory frame this study, and offer explanations of the dynamics and stressors of migration, and risk and protective effects on suicidal ideation and attempts. In the Latino subsample, individuals whose primary language spoken at home was not English ($p = .044$, OR = .21) and those who reported discrimination ($p = .021$, OR = 4.8) were more likely to have a history of suicide attempts. Non-citizens and those who became citizens in the whole sample were 1.4 times less likely to report suicidal ideation ($p = .024$, OR = 1.4) and 5 times less likely to make a suicide attempt ($p = .006$, OR = 4.9) than U.S.-born citizens. The study found that Latino non-citizens and non-Latino non-citizens who had a higher level of education were more at risk for suicidal ideation. Throughout the whole sample, having a bachelor's degree or higher ($p = .034$, OR = 0.61) and a higher income ($p = .009$, OR = 0.84) increased the likelihood of making a suicide attempt. Possible explanations for these findings are presented, and suggestions for future research and clinical implications are discussed.

A NOTE FROM DR. COLEMAN

A social work dissertation often reflects years of immersion in the experience of specific communities and a lived understanding of the intersecting social, familial and individual influences. Amanda's dissertation examined the strengths and vulnerabilities of immigrants in the U.S., taking into account the impact of oppression and the effect of citizenship status. Looking back over Amanda's career trajectory, there is a clear pathway to her commitment to mental health services for the underserved and most at need, particularly in the Latino community. This trajectory was evident right after college as Amanda served as an Americorps member in the Southeastern US and California. In earning her MSW at Hunter College, she was quickly immersed in work with the Latino community and provided bilingual mental health services. Amanda has nearly 20 years of rich post-MSW practice experience, and much of it is bilingual mental health services to Latinos. Most recently, she works as part of an integrated health and behavioral health service in Queens, contributing to making mental health services more accessible in one of the most diverse and immigrant-rich urban areas in the world.

Amanda has taught several MSW courses, and she serves as a consultant for a documentary film series that focuses on the experiences of youth in foster care. She is interested in continuing in an advanced practice role and exploring opportunities in social work education. It was a pleasure to work with Amanda on her dissertation – she conducts statistical analysis with an impressive serenity and clarity, and I learned through discussing the many substantive issues raised by the project. I am glad that along with her commitment to advanced practice and teaching, she remains interested and engaged in scholarship.

PHILIP ELIKE



Philip Kwasi Elike is currently a licensed social worker at Selfhelp Community Services guardianship program, working with individuals with mental illness and other forms of incapacitation, and assists these individuals to function well in the community by guiding them to obtain all necessary benefits including housing, income, Medicaid, SNAP; and advocates for them in all matters including eviction and exploitation prevention. His work ensures a safe and meaningful living for this vulnerable population. He is also a Christian minister and the pastor of the Evangelical

Presbyterian Church, in the Bronx, NY. Philip Elike just obtained a PhD in social work, with concentration on mental health policy, from Fordham University. He also holds an MSW and B.Ed. Degrees. His plan is to use his expertise to advance the cause of persons diagnosed with mental illness through education and advocacy. Having taught for fourteen years in Ghana, he is passionate about teaching and research. His plans focus on policy, advocacy, teaching, and research careers in social work within the context of mental health, particularly on areas concerning the intersectionality between spirituality, religious and cultural beliefs, and mental health; and access to mental health services especially among immigrants and minority populations. He is currently working on a study of the attitude of Ghanaian Americans towards access to mental health services. Philip Elike resides in the Bronx, New York.

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

Fuhua Zhai, Ph.D., Chair
Rose Perez, Ph.D., Second Reader
Victoria M. Rizzo, Ph.D., External Reader

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Ghanaian American Clergy's Perceptions and Practice Experiences with Mental Illness and Its Treatment

Studies have suggested that religiously oriented individuals are most disposed to seeking help for their mental health conditions from religious leaders such as the clergy rather than mental health professionals. As a result, the clergy play very significant roles in mental health treatment, especially for religiously oriented individuals. This study employed descriptive phenomenological methods to explore Ghanaian American clergy's perceptions about mental illness and its treatment. Eight Ghanaian American clergy in New York City participated in the study. An open-ended interview guide was used to collect the data through face-to-face interviews with participants to explore their lived experiences with what they view as the causes of mental illness and its treatment; and possible changes in their perceptions as a result of their experiences in the United States. The study findings suggested that the Ghanaian American clergy assign multiple factors as the causes for mental illnesses, including spiritual influences, biological, and psychosocial factors. Most of the participants believed that persons diagnosed with mental health issues are capable of functioning normally with the support of medication and other behavioral interventions. The findings also suggested experiences from living in the United States positively changed the perception of the participants about mental illness. The study findings have implications for fostering collaboration between social work practitioners and the clergy for the provision of mental health services. Additionally, the findings can be informative in developing religious and spiritual content in the curriculum for social work education and training. The study findings can also inform the incorporation of spiritual models into mental health policies at the governmental and non-governmental levels.

A NOTE FROM DR. ZHAI

Philip Kwasi Elike has strong research and practice interests in the intersectionality between spirituality and religious and cultural beliefs as well as its impact on mental health and access to mental health services, especially among immigrants and minority populations. He received his B.Ed. degree in psychology from the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, and worked for 14 years as a teacher in Ghana before moving to the U.S. As a licensed social worker at the Selfhelp Community Services guardianship program, Philip has been working with individuals who have mental health and other forms of incapacitation to help them function well in the community, including advocating for them and helping them obtain entitled benefits and services (e.g., housing, income, Medicaid, SNAP, and eviction and exploitation prevention). Philip is also a reverend minister and the pastor of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in the Bronx, New York.

The greatest passion of Philip is to help reduce the abuses against older adults due to the misunderstanding about mental illness in Ghana, where some people consider persons suffering from mental health issues as witches and wizards that deserve punishment, including physical assault. Guided by this passion, his dissertation used a phenomenological method to explore the perceptions regarding mental illness and treatment among Ghanaian American clergy in New York City. The results show that participants attributed mental illness to multiple spiritual, biological, and psychosocial factors and favored the combination of medical and spiritual approaches as the effective treatment of mental illness. These findings suggest the importance for social work practitioners and the clergy to work together and foster collaborative plans in mental health treatment and service provision, especially for religiously oriented individuals.

I really appreciate the opportunity to work with Philip on his dissertation and have learned a great deal from his research. His career plan focuses on social policy, advocacy, teaching, and research in social work, especially in the areas of mental health and services. I am proud of what he has achieved as a teacher, social worker, pastor, and policy advocate, and hope our paths cross again in the future.

LORI HURLEY



Lori Hurley is Program Director of the Ryan White Part A, HIV Care Coordination programs at both STAR Health Center campuses, Downstate Health Sciences University and Brookdale University Hospital Medical Center. She is the Program Evaluator for STAR's HRSA Project of National Significance on implementation of Rapid Anti-retroviral Therapy, as well as two SAMHSA grants: one that addresses risk for HIV infection and substance use among men who have sex with men, transgender individuals and those re-entering the commu-

nity after incarceration, and one that provides trauma-informed mental health counseling for BIPOC adults with serious mental illness or co-occurring disorders.

Dr. Hurley has worked for over 20 years in grassroots organizations and academic settings that provide care to people living with HIV/AIDS. She held a leadership role in the establishment of the first LGBTQ ambulatory clinic at Downstate Health Sciences University, STAR Health Center, and has served as staff liaison to STAR's Social Media Community Advisory group for MSM and Transgender individuals, the Brooklyn Community Pride Center's Workforce Development Initiative and the Brooklyn Better Business Bureau's LGBTQ sub-committee. Selected presentations include "Effective Field-based models of Primary & Secondary HIV Prevention" and "Improving Retention in HIV Care: Results of a Care Coordination Quality Improvement Project," in St. Petersburg, Russia AIDS Center; "Unraveling the Mystery: Interventions to reduce and maintain suppressed viral load among women over 50," and "Improving Uptake & Maintenance of Directly Observed Anti-retroviral Therapy," for NYC DOHMH. Dr. Hurley has taught Social Work at Adelphi University and served as an MSW Faculty Advisor at Fordham Graduate School of Social Service. She is an active member of the All Saints' Episcopal Church Racial Justice Committee in Brooklyn, where she co-facilitated story sharing narrative groups in 2021 to promote meaningful relationships within the congregation that will lead to actionable steps towards racial equity within and beyond the church walls.

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

Amy Horowitz, Ph.D., Chair
Dana Marlowe, Ph.D., Second Reader
Mary Irvine, DrPH, MPH, External Reader

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Voice, Influence and Belonging: HIV Community Health Workers' Lived Experience on the Interdisciplinary Health Team

The integration of Community Health Workers (CHWs) on HIV healthcare teams has been endorsed as a way to mitigate social determinants associated with poor health outcomes and, through the power of shared identity, engage persons living with HIV into care who have been harmed by stigma and racism. This phenomenological study was conducted to explore factors that constrain or facilitate meaningful integration of HIV CHWs within healthcare organizations. In individual interviews, ten CHWs employed by New York City HIV healthcare providers discussed their lived experience on the team. Several major themes emerged. First, a sense of mutual reliance on the team inspired CHWs, but created vulnerability to disillusionment and anxiety when the health system failed to live up to its promise. Second, failed communication between CHWs and other team members interfered with client care. Third, strong supervision grounded CHWs as they worked in the field. Fourth, duplicative documentation distorted CHW focus on client care. Fifth, CHWs enhanced their voice and credibility on the team through developing deep understanding of their clients' concerns. Sixth, CHWs felt inadequate to address deep-rooted social problems such as lack of safe permanent housing and chronic addiction. Finally, CHWs reported that they used creativity and perseverance to overcome fear generated by the risks and disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants in this study vividly expressed their desire for improved communication across professional hierarchies. Practice and research implications include the importance of developing initiatives to examine the best methods to provide team training, role clarity, team communication and evaluation where CHWs are employed on outpatient HIV care teams. CHWs' ability to address social determinants of health depend on their ability to participate in the development of health promotion policy efforts. In the field of HIV services, this should include funding CHWs to work in close partnership with non-medical organizations that provide legal or harm reduction advocacy, while at the same time remaining integrated with outpatient primary care practices. Future research should identify CHW programs where staff are charged with community organizing and HIV policy advocacy, and identify key outcomes such as permanent housing status.

A NOTE FROM DR. HOROWITZ

Lori Hurley began her career with a Master's degree in Public Health and then found her calling when she received her Master's in Social Work. She has devoted herself to practice in health and mental health, focusing on the most vulnerable of our citizens; persons living with HIV, those who are homeless, and those with mental health and substance abuse problems. She has also made her mark in academia, as both a field instructor and teacher of generalist practice theory and application. For the past ten years, while pursuing her doctorate at Fordham, she has overseen multiple initiatives at the STAR Health Center, SUNY Downstate Medical Center as the Assistant Director of the Care Coordination Program. It was here that her experience working with Community Health Care Workers (CHWs) served as the inspiration for her dissertation.

Lori observed the complex role that CHWs had on interdisciplinary teams working with persons living with HIV and residing in the community. Issues of communication and navigating the fine line between patient advocate and medical team member could be fraught with tension. Trying to address the social determinants of health was also a major challenge. All this was made worse by the limitations imposed by Covid 19. Lori observed the ways that the CHWs were affected by these circumstances and undertook a phenomenological study of the lived experience of the CHWs. Through qualitative interviews with 10 participants, this dissertation research has yielded rich findings that will be valuable to clinicians, policymakers, and researchers. Based on her findings, she developed a conceptual model of thematic relationships that points to the push/pull between strengths drawn from factors such as mutual reliance among team members and a deep understanding of the client, and of challenges which include communication failures and vulnerability to disillusionment. Thus, this research has also provided a foundation for future explorations within this conceptual framework.

I was so pleased and honored to be asked by Lori to be her dissertation Chair. It was a wonderful experience to work with Lori and with Dr. Dana Marlowe as the 2nd reader. Our combined mentorship made each of us, as well as Lori, better scholars. We were both awed with how hard Lori worked to reach the "finish line," and to produce a dissertation for which she can be most proud. It has been very rewarding to see the growth she made since entering the program and we wish her the very best as she continues to contribute as Dr. Hurley.

PEGGY KELLY



Peggy is happy to have achieved her long-time goal of receiving a PhD, after having spent years as a labor economist, employment policy analyst, and social work researcher. Peggy earned a BS in industrial and labor relations from Cornell University, an MPA in public policy from the University of Texas at Austin, and an MSW and PhD in social work from Fordham University. Her career has spanned working for the largest labor union in the U.S., the International Labor Office in Geneva, Switzerland, the United Nations Secretariat, and the Ravazzin Center in Fordham's Graduate School of Social

Service. Peggy recently rejoined the UN system, and is currently working on international education issues for UNICEF.

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

Janna Heyman, Ph.D., Chair
Fuhua Zhai, Ph.D., Second Reader
Mansoor Kazi, Ph.D., External Reader

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

The Social and Emotional Needs of Alumni of Foster Care Post-College

Attaining a college degree is an important milestone in anyone's life, and for alumni of foster care, it is an accomplishment that particularly highlights their strength and resilience, as well as their ability to overcome challenging circumstances. Little is known, however, about the achievements of alumni of foster care after they earn their college diploma. The present study sheds some light on this by examining the post-college experiences of a group of college graduates with foster care histories (N=241). More specifically, the study explores the role that social and emotional supports formed during their college years play in achieving successful outcomes, such as acquiring a full-time job, earning a living wage, not receiving public assistance, and maintaining general perceptions of financial satisfaction and happiness. Among the social and emotional supports analyzed are having supportive family and friends, relationships with caring adults, rapport with the college community, and greater social involvement at the college. The findings from the study are mixed, with some social and emotional supports showing to be predictors of post-college success. In particular, the odds of perceiving themselves as happy were greater for respondents who had higher levels of social support while they were in college, and the odds of receiving public assistance were lower for individuals who frequently socialized with other students during their college years. Having rapport with the college community also contributed to positive outcomes in terms of avoiding reliance on public assistance and being satisfied with the financial situation. These findings reaffirm the importance of social and emotional supports formed during college in achieving positive outcomes post-college, particularly as it relates to emotional well-being. Ongoing social and emotional supports for alumni of foster care college graduates are called to provide them assistance as they navigate their way to a successful future.

A NOTE FROM DR. HEYMAN

Peggy L. Kelly has extensive experience in policy and research and it has been a pleasure to work with her throughout her doctoral and Master of Social Work (MSW) studies at Fordham University. Peggy also has a Master of Public Affairs from the University of Texas at Austin, Lyndon B Johnson School of Public Affairs and her BS from Cornell University. Prior to coming to Fordham University she worked as a Social Affairs Officer for the United Nations (UN) where she supported the work of the UN Commission for Social Development on poverty, employment, and social inclusion issues. In addition, she worked on a number of UN publications on a wide range of economic and social policy issues, including population aging, economic and social well-being and rights of older persons, youth employment and climate change.

For the past seven years, Peggy has served as the Research Director for the Fordham University Ravazzin Center on Aging and Intergenerational Studies. She helped to lead a large research effort for a federal grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families. The initiative included development of the BraveLife Intervention program which serves youth in foster care. This federal grant was one of six in the country and has been recognized for its innovation in addressing the needs of youth and their families. This work was an inspiration to her dissertation.

Peggy's dissertation is entitled, "The Social and Emotional Needs of Alumni of Foster Care Post-College." Her research examined the post-college experiences of a group of college graduates with foster care histories. She explores the role of social and emotional supports formed during college and the factors that impacted their employment and financial and emotional well-being. The multivariable analyses that Peggy conducted were extensive. Her research is important to future policy initiatives for youth in foster care.

Peggy has written and co-authored a number of articles and has an impressive publication record. She always has a smile on her face and is a pleasure to work with. Peggy's commitment to addressing health and social well-being across the life span is to be commended. She started her new position as the Project Manager for the UNICEF initiative Education Analysis for Global Learning and Equity, which seeks to address gaps in key education indicators and improve data utilization by governments in 26 low-income countries in order to promote more equitable learning outcomes. We are proud of her accomplishments and know she will help to make a difference in the field.

HANS MENOS



Hans Menos, Ph.D. , LCSW, is the Vice President of Law Enforcement Initiatives for the Center for Policing Equity (CPE) the largest research and action think tank focused on Policing, in the country. In this role, Hans is responsible for the strategic vision for the Law Enforcement Initiatives team which is responsible for stewarding relationships with all NJD and C4J police partners and acquiring their data for analysis.

Prior to his work at CPE, Hans Menos served as the Executive Director of the Police

Advisory Commission for the City of Philadelphia. In this role, Hans led a team of investigators and policy analysts who sought to improve racial equity, transparency and accountability by reviewing the policy, practice, and customs of the Philadelphia Police Department.

Before his appointment as Executive Director, Hans served as the Senior Director of the Crime Victim Assistance Program. In this role, he helped to form and oversee a large-scale partnership between Safe Horizon(the largest victim services agency in the country) and the New York City Police Department (the largest police department in the country.)

Throughout his career, Hans has worked with a variety of vulnerable populations in settings that require crisis intervention, policy analysis, and clinical skills. These populations include marginalized youth, recent immigrants, victims of domestic violence, victims of police misconduct, and families in crisis. Hans' work is guided by a passion for human rights and social justice in the criminal justice system.

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

Tina Maschi, Ph.D., Chair
Gregory Acevedo, Ph.D., Second Reader
Douglas Evans, Ph.D., External Reader

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Understanding the Post-Charging Decision-Making Processes for Young Black Men Charged as Adults in New York City: A Phenomenological Study

After a young person is arrested and charged, the criminal justice system makes room for the accused to make certain decisions regarding how their criminal court case will proceed. These decisions include whether or not to plead guilty, to insist on a trial or to engage in the plea-bargaining process. Simultaneously, in municipalities around the country, including New York City, young people are tried as adults and any other adult would be are empowered by the law and actors within the justice system to make these decisions. The decisions made in this context have severe consequences for individuals, families, and communities. In the context of plea bargaining, the outcomes are typically recorded as guilty pleas, where a person voluntarily accepts responsibility and punishment for a crime.

This qualitative research begins to identify that this understanding of decision making and voluntary acceptance is far more complicated and involves many considerations which are not based on legal issues such as strength of evidence and risk. Rather, as this study illustrates the decision making is marred by the illegitimacy of the system, pressures from family and coercion from the systems players.

The findings of this study highlight that legal issues such as guilt or innocence are included amongst the many other extra-legal issues considered by young men tried as adults. The findings also suggest that many elements contained within the decision making which is thrust upon young men, coerces them into consequential decisions. These findings compel policy makers to reconsider policy and practice by social workers, prosecutors, judges and public defenders. Additionally, they add a complex layer to the national conversation on re-imaging public safety and reconsidering the nation's relationship with police and punitive responses to social problems.

A NOTE FROM DR. MASCHI

I want to recognize Dr. Hans Menos for successfully defending his dissertation, *Understanding the Post-Charging Decision-Making Processes for Young Black Men Charged as Adults in New York City: A Phenomenological Study* on March 24, 2021.

Hans was a Licensed Clinical Social Worker working in family court and integrated domestic violence court when he decided to pursue his Ph.D. in social work. Hans was drawn to the profession by a desire to help people. However, when he began practicing he concluded that the best way he could help people was to address systems which create or perpetuate poor social policy. Hans felt that the most glaring examples of oppressive and misguided policies were contained in the criminal and juvenile justice system. As a result, he focused his professional and academic efforts on this system. He has worked in the criminal justice system focusing on juvenile justice, criminal justice, victim services and police accountability and reform. His academic work focused on how various decision makers in the criminal justice system impact the lives of already marginalized young people.

The culmination of these lived and educational experiences, resulted in his qualitative (phenomenology) study on how young black men make decisions when entangled in the criminal justice system. His major findings are that a myriad of extra-legal factors such as longing for family, the length of the adjudication process and the behavior of judges and prosecutors affect the decision making. Additionally, his findings are that the plea-bargaining process is highly coercive and violate human rights. His findings have significant implications for social work practice, policy, and research. These implications include reconsidering the agency of young people in the criminal justice system, reimagining how the system can operate and, via a neo Marxist perspective, reevaluating the role of helping professions in criminal defense. Since his findings chart new scholarly territory, the implications for future research are vast from basic exploratory research to intervention, and implementation science studies. On behalf of GSS, we wish you the best in continuing to innovate new thought and cutting edge evidence-based practices to make communities healthier for people of all ages and colors.

I would like to acknowledge that Hans and I were introduced by the late Dr. Meredith Hanson because of our shared academic interests. Dr. Hanson's personal touch and effort to build relationships between students and faculty in order to prepare the next generation of social workers was one of his many lasting legacies. From both Hans and I, may he rest in peace.

XIAORAN WANG



Xiaoran Wang completed her undergraduate study in Labor and Social Security from China Youth University for Political Sciences and received her MSW from Case Western Reserve University. Her research interests include early intervention for children with special needs, parenting education and support, comparative social policies, and social work education. Xiaoran is a collaborator in a cross-country research project on the social support for parents with children with disabilities across Beijing, Sydney, New York City, and Taiwan, awarded by the International Doctoral Student Fund from the University of New South Welsh (UNSW), Australia.

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

Fuhua Zhai, Ph.D., Chair
Rose Perez, Ph.D., Second Reader
Yi Ding, Ph.D., External Reader

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Seeking Early Intervention Services for Young Children with Autism: Chinese Parents' Lived Experiences in Beijing and New York City

Early intervention has a significant impact on the development of children with autism, in which parents' roles are critical. Informed by the Theory of Planned Behavior, Social Cognitive Theory, and Health Belief Model, this phenomenological study aimed to understand Chinese parents' early intervention experiences in Beijing and New York City (NYC). One-on-one in-depth interviews were conducted with 12 parents in Beijing and 10 first-generation Chinese immigrant parents in NYC whose child had autism and were under 9 years old. The findings revealed that parents in Beijing strove to meet their children's early intervention needs in the absence of social services, while parents in NYC faced the gaps between professional support and their expectations within existing social service systems. The comparison highlighted the influence of social policies, Chinese culture, and acculturation in the U.S. Social work professionals are expected to adopt a holistic perspective and develop competencies across support areas.

A NOTE FROM DR. ZHAI

Xiaoran Wang has been passionate about exploring and understanding research and practice issues related to child and family policies and interventions as well as mental health service use. Before joining the GSS doctoral program, she served as a community development coordinator, program assistant, and community advocate in social service agencies in China and the U.S. During her study in the doctoral program, Xiaran has worked with GSS and other faculty members and scholars on multiple research projects. From 2016 to 2019, she served as a project manager funded by CDC NIOSH and collaborated with public health scholars to examine PTSD risk factors and mental health service use after the World Trade Center Attack. She received an award from the International Doctoral Student Fund at the University of New South Welsh (UNSW), Australia, to co-investigate the social support for Chinese families of children with special needs across Beijing, New York City, Sydney, and Taipei. Supported by the Fordham University Social Innovation Research Internship, she worked with me and other colleagues on an intervention research project that uses a randomized controlled trial to examine the impact of a parenting group model on parenting and child outcomes among Chinese and Latinx immigrants in New York City.

Built on this body of research, Xiaoran's dissertation focused on the early intervention services and experiences of Chinese parents of children with autism in Beijing and New York City. She used a phenomenological approach to explore how parents of children with autism would expect, think, feel, and act to make sense of their experiences of seeking early intervention services as well as how the contexts of culture, policy, and social services influenced their experiences. The results highlight the important roles that social policies, Chinese culture, and acculturation played in parents' help-seeking decisions and experiences. The findings also called for a holistic perspective in developing culturally competent services for families of children with autism in multiple areas, including building individual and family capabilities, bridging early intervention resources at the community level, promoting social awareness of autism, empowering parents, and engaging in policy advocacy.

In addition to her solid knowledge and skills in both quantitative and qualitative research, Xiaoran is dedicated to social work teaching and has taught courses related to social work research, program evaluation, social policy practice, and comparative social policies. After graduation, Xiaoran plans to continue her research and teaching trajectory, and aims to contribute to disability policies and social work education in China. I was fortunate and honored to have the opportunity to work with Xiaoran on her dissertation and some other projects. I have no doubt that she will thrive as a great scholar and teacher.