NEWS | POSTED FEBRUARY 22, 2023

# Introducing the SRCD 2023 Early Career Interdisciplinary Scholars Fellowship Program Recipients

The Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) welcomes the fellows of the 2023 Early Career Interdisciplinary Scholars Fellowship Program.

The Early Career Interdisciplinary Scholars Fellowship is a program established and organized by SRCD's Interdisciplinary Committee with a mission to connect interdisciplinary and psychology/human development scholars, providing a forum in which scientists of various disciplines can share research and interdisciplinary scientific methods. This year's cohort includes outstanding scholars whose research is related to a diverse range of fields such as environmental toxicology and epidemiology, early childhood education policy, and criminal justice. Learn more about the fellows below.



**Yun-Ju (Claire) Chen**

Dr. Yun-Ju (Claire) Chen is a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences at McMaster University in Canada. She received her Ph.D. in Occupational Science from the University of Southern California in 2021. Her research interests span the fields of occupational science/therapy, developmental psychopathology, and child psychiatry, with a focus on the heterogeneous behavioral manifestations across the lifespan among children on the neurodevelopmental spectrum. Her dissertation examined the developmental trajectories of sensory features as a behavioral marker for early identification of autism and associated challenges in the general population, with findings published in the journals of Child Development and Development and Psychopathology. She is particularly interested in applying various quantitative approaches that are suited to address the complex and dynamic nature of typical and atypical development. Grounded upon the concepts and methodology of developmental science (e.g., developmental variability and cascades) and occupational science (e.g., person-environment fit and transactions), she aspires to conduct meaningful research that informs early identification and intervention of autism as well as helps improve the life outcomes of autistic individuals and their families from diverse backgrounds. Through participating in this fellowship program, she is most excited about connecting with and learning from various scholars in the field of developmental psychology to refine her conceptual and methodological lens. Before coming to North America, she was an occupational therapist in Taiwan working

with children with special needs across a variety of settings. Given her international and interdisciplinary background, she seeks to apply her research skills and knowledge to a cross-cultural context and to bridge the disciplines of occupational science/therapy and psychology through her current and future work.

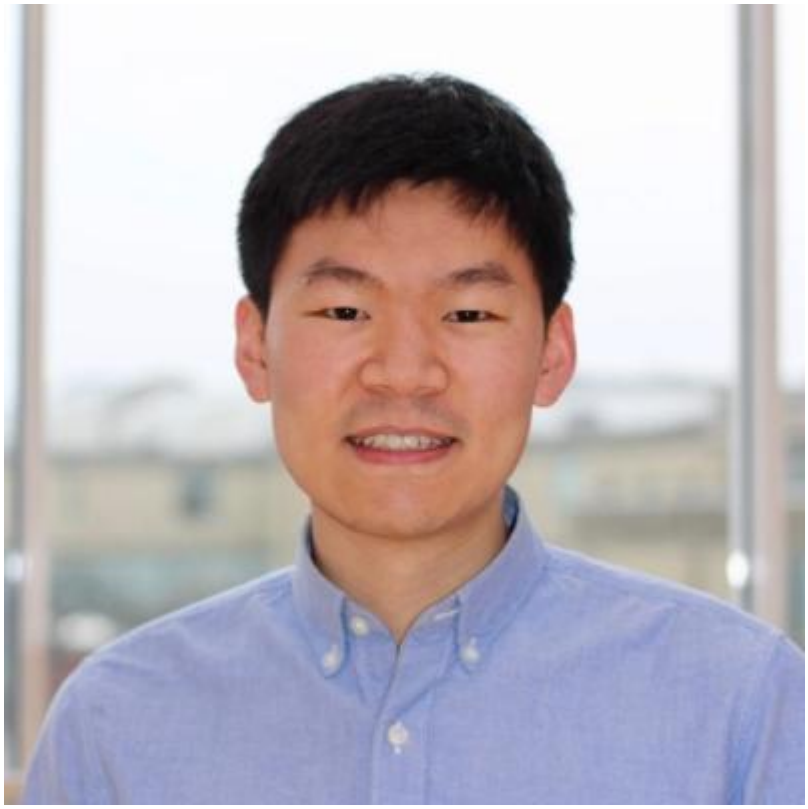


**Olivia Halabicky**

Dr. Olivia Halabicky is a children's environmental health nurse scientist who studies the environmental inequities in childhood toxicant exposures, in particular lead exposure, and resulting disparities in health outcomes. She is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Michigan School of Public Health in their Environmental Toxicology and Epidemiology T32 program, having graduated with her Ph.D. in Nursing from the University of Pennsylvania. She has additional expertise in Child Health and Wellbeing with an M.Sc. from Trinity College Dublin, and training in stress neuroscience with a graduate certificate in Social, Cognitive, and Affective Neuroscience.

Olivia's research seeks to explain and reduce disparities in health and developmental outcomes associated with childhood toxicant exposure by examining synergistic effects of toxicant and social co-exposures and identifying shared biological mediators (e.g., physiological stress, epigenetics). She employs methods from a

variety of disciplines including nursing, environmental health sciences, developmental sciences, epidemiology, and psychology. As a postdoctoral fellow, she is working with The Early Life Exposures in Mexico to ENvironmental Toxicants (ELEMENT) cohort examining associations between early life lead exposure and home environments on later adolescent allostatic load and epigenetic alterations to stress related genes. She also collaborates with researchers identifying the modifying effects of nutrients on associations between prenatal and early postnatal toxicant exposure and later neurocognitive outcomes. In the future, she hopes to develop interventions to target modifiable psychosocial and nutritional factors and/or biological mechanisms to improve outcomes for children already exposed to environmental toxicants.



**Joshua Jeong**

Joshua Jeong is a global public health researcher with interest in male caregiver involvement and early child development in low- and middle-income countries. He applies mixed-methods research to investigate the family processes through which fathers influence their children's early development and to design and evaluate father-inclusive parenting interventions in low-resource global settings. He is the recipient of a NICHD K99/R00 Pathway to Independence Award that aims to develop and pilot a multicomponent fatherhood intervention for enhancing fathers' parenting, marital relationships, and mental health to

improve early child development in Tanzania. He collaborates with researchers in various disciplines as well as with NGOs and international organizations like WHO and UNICEF to generate evidence that can improve multisectoral early childhood programs and policies. This summer, Joshua will join the faculty at Emory University as Rollins Endowed Assistant Professor in Global Health.



**Samantha (Sam) Melvin**

Samantha (Sam) Melvin, Ph.D. is an Assistant Research Professor at Erikson Institute's Herr Research Center. Sam earned her Ph.D. and M.A. in Early Childhood Education Policy from Teachers College, Columbia University and her B.A.in Cognitive Psychology from Wesleyan University. In her current work at Erikson Institute, Sam directs and collaborates on community-engaged, policy-relevant research projects focused on understanding and transforming early childhood policies and systems to equitably meet the needs of children, families, and educators, with a particular focus on elevating the voices and value of home-based childcare professionals. Sam's research leverages mixed-method and action-oriented approaches; draws on critical theoretical frameworks; and incorporates knowledge from developmental psychology, early childhood education, sociology, and public policy to inform systemic change. Through the SRCD Early Career Interdisciplinary Scholars Fellowship Program, Sam is excited to learn from like-minded researchers about how interdisciplinarity, collaboration, and community-building can inform more justice-oriented research,

policy, and practice for young children.



**Abigail Novak**

Dr. Abigail Novak is an Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice and Legal Studies at the University of Mississippi. She received her Ph.D. in Criminology, Law, and Society at the University of Florida, her masters degrees in social work and public administration from Florida State University, and her undergraduate degree from the University of Richmond. Her research interests include children and punishment, systems and delinquency, early-onset antisocial behavior, and applied quantitative methodologies. In particular, she is interested in the applications of the labeling perspective to child development, examining how punitive experiences in childhood lead to subsequent punishment and antisocial behavior. She is also interested in how childhood punishment dispropirtionately impacts BIPOC children. She is excited to participate in this fellowship to broaden her exposure to interdisciplinary work and form collaborations with interdisciplinary researchers. She is eager to become involved with the Society for Research in Child Development and is looking forward to attending the biennial meeting.



**Darlynn Rojo-Wissar**

Darlynn Rojo-Wissar, Ph.D., MPH is a psychiatric epidemiologist and Childhood Stress, Trauma, and Resilience (STAR) T32-funded postdoctoral research fellow at the Alpert Medical School of Brown University. Her research examines the role of sleep in the development and exacerbation of poor mental and physical health outcomes across the lifespan in the context of early-life adversity (i.e., adverse childhood experiences, the child welfare system), and parent-child bonding/attachment as a protective factor. Dr. Rojo-Wissar also investigates whether racial/ethnic differences and/or disparities in these associations exist. She received her B.A. in Psychology and MPH in Maternal and Child Health from the University of Arizona, and her Ph.D. in Mental Health from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.



**Ying Xu**

Dr. Ying Xu is an Assistant Professor in the School of Education at the University of Michigan. Her research focuses on designing and studying intelligent media that promotes language and literacy development, STEM learning, and wellbeing for children. Specifically, she investigates the potential of conversational AI technologies to serve as language partners and learning companions for children, and how this affects children's social interactions and developmental processes. In addition, Dr. Xu explores children's understanding of AI and develop programs to foster their AI literacy. Her research places particular emphasis on underrepresented communities, and she collaborates closely with local families and community organizations to create media that is informed by and reflective of the community's linguistic and cultural assets.

Dr. Xu's work has been published in leading academic journals across psychology, education, and human-computer interaction, including *Child Development Perspectives*, *Child Development*, *Computers & Education*, and the ACM CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems. She has been honored with several best paper nominations and awards. She collaborates with major organizations such as PBS KIDS and the Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop, and her research is funded by the National Science Foundation, Schmidt Futures, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

learn more about the Early Career Interdisciplinary Scholars Fellowship Program