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Announcing the 2024 Recipients of the Small Grants for Early Career Scholars

The Small Grants Program celebrates its eighth year by awarding up to $7,500 USD to each of the nine selected projects, directly supporting a diverse group of early career researchers from institutions in the United States, Australia, England, Canada, and Norway.

Driven by its Strategic Plan, the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) recognizes the importance of capacity building for early career scholars seeking to establish their research programs, especially considering the limited funding available for conducting exploratory work. The Small Grants Program for Early Career Scholars addresses this need within developmental science by supporting pilot or small-scale research projects proposed by members who completed their doctoral degree within the last five years.

The Small Grants Program celebrates its seventh year by awarding up to $7,500 USD to each of the fifteen selected projects, directly supporting a diverse group of early career researchers from institutions in the United States, China, Australia, and Ireland. The 2024 projects were selected from a highly competitive pool of 111 applications and cover many research areas and topics, including children's and adolescents' caregiving for the family, postnatal experiences on infant neurocognitive development, mental health literacy amongst Black youth, emotion regulation during social media use, and others. To read more about each proposal, see the biographies of the awardees below.

SRCD thanks all 29 reviewers involved in the selection process and congratulates the 2024 Small Grant recipients:

Drs. Emma Armstrong-Carter, Rong Bai (with Shaobing Su), Annie Brandes-Aitken, Dashawna Fussell-Ware, Vivian Liu, Sumudu Mallawaarachchi, Andrea Medrano, Franklin Moreno, Sarah Myruski, Andrea Negrete, Niyantri Ravindran, Zoe Smith, Zhenlan Wang, Xutong Zhang, and Danhua Zhu.

The grant recipients will be recognized at the 2025 SRCD Biennial Meeting. Read on to learn more about this year's Small Grant projects and researchers!



Emma Armstrong-Carter

"Children and adolescents who are caregivers for family: Assessing disparities and opportunities in partnership with local schools"

Dr. Emma Armstrong-Carter, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor at Tufts University in the Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Study and Human Development. She is a developmental psychologist with interdisciplinary training in education policy and data science. She researches children's and adolescents' experiences caregiving for family - and how these experiences relate to their wellbeing and school success. Dr. Armstrong-Carter earned her Ph.D. from Stanford University in 2022, where she was also a fellow in the Stanford Data Science Initiative and Center for Education Policy Analysis. She completed postdoctoral

training at the University of California, Berkeley and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her work has been funded by the National Science Foundation, National Institutes of Health, and Institute of Education Sciences. Her SRCD-funded project focuses on identifying and understanding the development of caregiving children and adolescents in Massachusetts schools for the first time. Caregiving youth (below age 18) provide ongoing care for aging, ill, or disabled family members - they are a rapidly increasing population in the US. However, the US does not yet formally acknowledge or support caregiving youth within educational systems or social services. Specifically, this project will (1) identify the number of caregiving youth in Massachusetts middle and high schools; (2) examine longitudinal disparities in anxiety, depression, and academic grades; and (3) collect information about caregiving youths' specific experiences and needs that can inform future intervention work to support the thriving of caregiving youth and their families.



Rong Bai and Shaobing Su

"Navigating Parenthood: Exploring Parenting Strategies among Youth Aging out of Foster Care"

Dr. Rong Bai is an Assistant Professor at the School of Social Work at East Carolina University. She received her Ph.D. in social welfare from Case Western Reserve University. Her overarching research centers on examining the social determinants that contribute to child maltreatment and involvement in the child welfare system, with an aim to promote child and family well-being. Specifically, one of Rong's long-term research goals is to develop prevention programs that break the cycle of intergenerational involvement in the child welfare system among young parents who have aged out of the foster care system. The 2024 SRCD Small Grants Program will provide foundational steps to aid Rong's long-term research goals by understanding the parenting strategies and service needs of parents aging out of foster care through key informant qualitative interviews.

Dr. Shaobing Su is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Psychiatry, UMass Chan Medical School. Dr. Su received a Ph.D. degree in Child Study and Human Development at Tufts University and completed 4-year postdoctoral training (including 2-year NIH K99 Award as the PI) at Boston College School of Social Work. Dr. Su's experiences and expertise include developmental theories, advanced research methods (e.g., mixed-methods research, longitudinal sequential design, interventions, and implementation science), and advanced statistical techniques. Dr. Su's research interests focus on mental health and positive youth development (PYD) for vulnerable and underserved children, with a particular focus on those affected by parent-child separation. Dr. Su is the PI of an NIH K99/R00 Award (K99MD017269 and R00MD017269) in which she uses community-based participatory research (CBPR) and mixed-methods approaches to understand mental health and multilevel risk and protective factors for children with a history of early and prolonged parent-child separation. Her current research also focuses on cultural adaptation and evaluation of evidence-based interventions for vulnerable and underserved children and families. Dr. Su has published 35 peer-review papers and book chapters.



Annie Brandes-Aitken

"Characterizing Biobehavioral Trajectories of Maternal Postpartum Depression and Evaluating Effects on Infant Stress and Attention"

Dr. Annie Aitken is a post-doctoral research fellow in the Applied Psychology Department at New York University where she also earned a Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology. Her program of research is focused on examining the pathways by which early postnatal experiences shape infant neurocognitive development. With the support of the 2024 Small Grant for Early Career Scholars, Dr. Aitken aims to implement wearable technology and smartphone-based assessment methods among sociodemographically diverse mothers to monitor physiological and self-reported experiences of postpartum depression across a sensitive period of neurodevelopment. This study will evaluate how stress physiology may lead to an increased risk of postpartum depression and mediate effects on infant stress and attention outcomes. Collectively, this work seeks to introduce low-burden, mechanistically focused assessment methods to improve the detection and prediction of postpartum mental health concerns, particularly amongst maternal populations facing elevated risk for postpartum depression.

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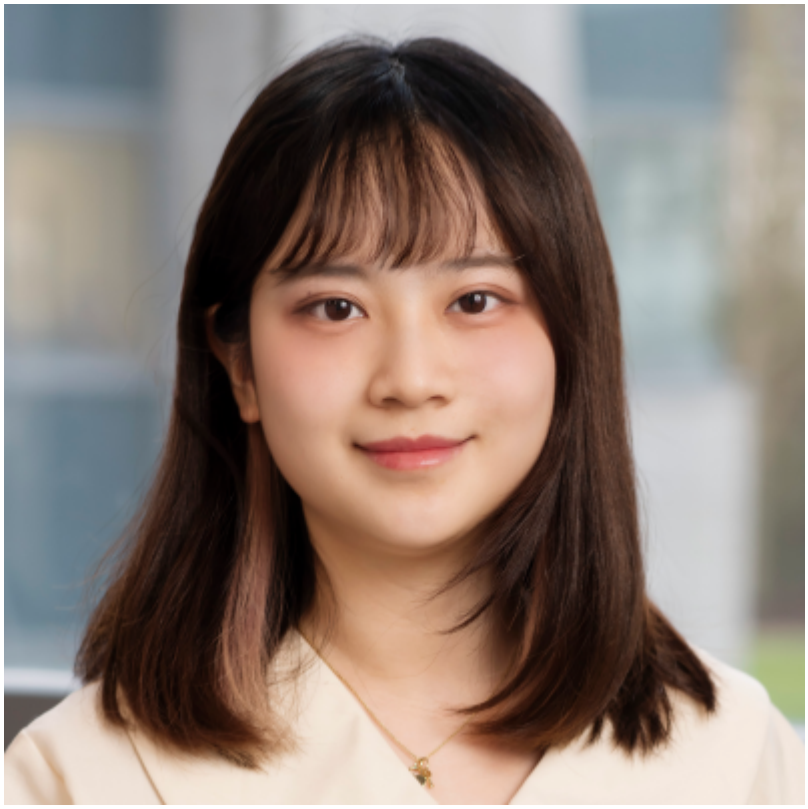


Dashawna Fussell-Ware

"The Black Youth Mental Health Literacy Study"

Dr. Dashawna J. Fussell-Ware, LSW is an Assistant Professor at The University of Tennessee Knoxville College of Social Work. This grant will partially fund data collection for Dr. Fussell-Ware's Black Youth Mental Health Literacy Survey Study. This study will assess current levels of mental health literacy (MHL) among Black youth between the ages of 14-25 from select cities across the country and psychometrically validate an MHL measure with an exclusively Black sample. The results of this study will produce some of the first data on MHL among Black youth in the United States.

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Vivian Liu

"Investigating Youth Peacebuilding Behaviours and Attitudes in Divided Societies"

Dr. Vivian Liu is a postdoctoral researcher in the School of Psychology at University College Dublin. She completed her Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology at New York University. Her research interests center around how children form ideas about social groups and intergroup relationships in a context of inequality, as well as ways to address stereotyping and bias from an early age. The 2024 Small Grant for Early Career Scholars will support expansion of her current research program in youth peacebuilding — a mixed-methods, longitudinal project looking at how young people of the next generation can play an active and crucial role in improving intergroup harmony across both conflict- and non-conflict contexts. Specifically, the grant will support research in Colombia, where despite the signing of a peace agreement in 2016, tensions and divisions remain strong with civilians at a high risk of experiencing violence.

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Sumudu Mallawaarachchi

"Study of the Impact of App Design Features on Young Children's Digital Engagement and Self-Regulation"

Dr. Sumudu Mallawaarachchi is a Research Fellow at the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child within University of Wollongong, Australia. She received her Ph.D. in Psychology from Deakin University. Her research interests centre on technology, media and child development, specifically, the design of digital environments and its associations with children's developmental outcomes. The 2024 Small Grant for Early Career Scholars will support her research in examining the impact of app persuasive design on young children's self-regulation and digital engagement. This work will contribute to an emerging evidence base on how app design shapes children's digital experiences and developmental trajectories while facilitating evidence-based guidance on designing ethical digital environments for children.

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Andrea Medrano

"Polyvictimization among Mexican Adolescents Interview Study (PAIS)"

Dr. Andrea S. Medrano is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Pittsburgh. She received her Ph.D. in Social Work and Developmental Psychology from the University of Michigan. Dr. Medrano draws from a resilience framework and strengths-based perspective to examine contextual aspects of neighborhoods—such as poverty and exposure to community violence—and their influence on adolescents' psychological and academic functioning. The 2024 Small Grants Program for Early Career Scholars will support research aimed at qualitatively exploring adolescents' experiences with multiple forms of violence in a highly violent urban setting in Mexico and their impact on adolescents' mental health, as well as resilience factors and coping strategies employed by violence-exposed youth.

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Franklin Moreno

"Children's and Adolescents' Moral Evaluations about Violence Perpetrated by Law Enforcement in Honduras"

Dr. Franklin Moreno is a Stoneleigh Emerging Leader Fellow in the Department of Criminal Justice and Public Policy Lab at Temple University. He earned his Ph.D. in Education from the University of California, Berkeley. Dr. Moreno's mixed-methods research focuses on children's and adolescents' experiences across multiple contexts of violence, locally, cross-culturally, and transnationally. His work examines youth emotional, cognitive, and behavioral development associated with community violence, including by law enforcement, in Honduras and the US. Dr. Moreno also conducts evaluations of violence reduction programs in Honduras, and research on gun violence reduction programs in the US. The 2024 Small Grant for Early Career Scholars will support ongoing research with children and adolescents in Honduras. Specifically, this project will examine youth's moral evaluations about police violence amid chronic community violence. This study is in preparation for a longitudinal study on youth adjustment and exposure to violence in Honduras.



Sarah Myruski

"Delta Beta Coupling and Digital Media Use as Predictors of Anxiety in Adolescence"

Dr. Sarah Myruski is an Assistant Research Professor of Psychology and Associate Lab Director of the Emotion Development Lab at The Pennsylvania State University. Dr. Myruski earned her Ph.D. in Psychology, with a Behavioral and Cognitive Neuroscience concentration, from The Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Dr. Myruski's research leverages neurophysiology to illuminate elements of affect and cognition that shape anxiety trajectories in adolescence, with an emphasis on the social-emotional costs and benefits of digital media use. The 2024 SRCD Small Grants Program for Early Career Scholars will support expansion of her ongoing research by examining neurophysiological correlates of emotion regulation during real-time digital media use, and how these factors concurrently and longitudinally relate to adolescent anxiety symptoms.

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Andrea Negrete

"Understanding the Role of Return Migration on Mexican-Origin Adolescents' Well-being"

Dr. Andrea Negrete is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at Wesleyan University. She received her Ph.D. in Community Psychology from the University of Virginia. She was born in Guanajuato, Mexico, and grew up in a rural farmworker community in central Washington. She studies how systems of oppression shape adolescent development and the ways youth cope with and resist oppressive conditions. Funding from the 2024 Small Grant for Early Career Scholars will support data collection in Mexico with youth and caregivers who have experienced return migration from the U.S. Specifically, the project will examine how families varied reasons for returning to Mexico after living in the U.S. relate to youth education and well-being domains and the extent to which family dynamics serve a protective role.

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Niyantri Ravindran

"Measuring Context-Specific Emotion Socialization Practices in Black American Parents"

Dr. Niyantri Ravindran is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Human Development and Family Science (HDFS) at the University of Georgia. She received her Ph.D. in HDFS from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her research focuses on understanding the dynamics of parent-child interactions during emotionally challenging situations in early childhood. Specifically, she examines factors that contribute to parental responses to children's negative emotions, as well as the role parent-child interactions play in the development of children's emotion and stress regulation. The 2024 Small Grants for Early Career Scholars will support her project on developing and validating measures to examine Black American parents' responses to children's negative emotions in different contexts (i.e., in public settings and/or in the presence of authority figures where the risk of racial bias is higher vs. private settings such as the home). She will also examine correlates and outcomes of parents' context-specific responses.



Zoe Smith

"Excluded, Not Forgotten: Mental Health Inequities Experienced by Black and/or Latiné Adolescents with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder"

Dr. Zoe R. Smith (she/her) is a licensed child and adolescent clinical psychologist and an assistant professor of psychology at Loyola University Chicago. Dr. Smith focuses on providing culturally responsive assessments and interventions for Black and/or Latina/é/o youth and their families. Her work uses community-based participatory action research methods to develop and provide mental health services for youth and their families. In particular, she focuses on working with youth with ADHD, which will be the focus of her SRCD Small Grant. This grant will increase our understanding of how systemic oppression (i.e., racism, discrimination, pandemic stressors) and neighborhood factors affect the wellbeing and mental health service access of Black and/or Latiné youth with ADHD. The goal of this work is to see neurodiverse Black and/or Latiné youth thrive despite experiencing complex stressors. Additionally, we will learn where and how to intervene to increase access to mental health care services.

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Zhenlan Wang

"Social and Emotional Learning through Storybook Read Aloud"

Dr. Zhenlan Wang is a Postdoctoral Associate at Yale University and an incoming Assistant Professor at Bryn Mawr College. She earned her Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology from The New School. Her research focuses on the socialization of everyday coping strategies (e.g., advice giving, emotion regulation, emotional support, etc.) through cultural products. Fascinated by the power of storybook read-aloud in child development, she has been analyzing the cultural, social, emotional, and moral content of children's storybooks in China. The 2024 SRCD Small Grant for Early Career Scholars will support her further study of the reading practices using storybooks that vary in their content in Chinese preschools and kindergartens. The goal of this project is to establish culturally relevant reading materials and practices for children's social and emotional development beyond the WEIRD population.

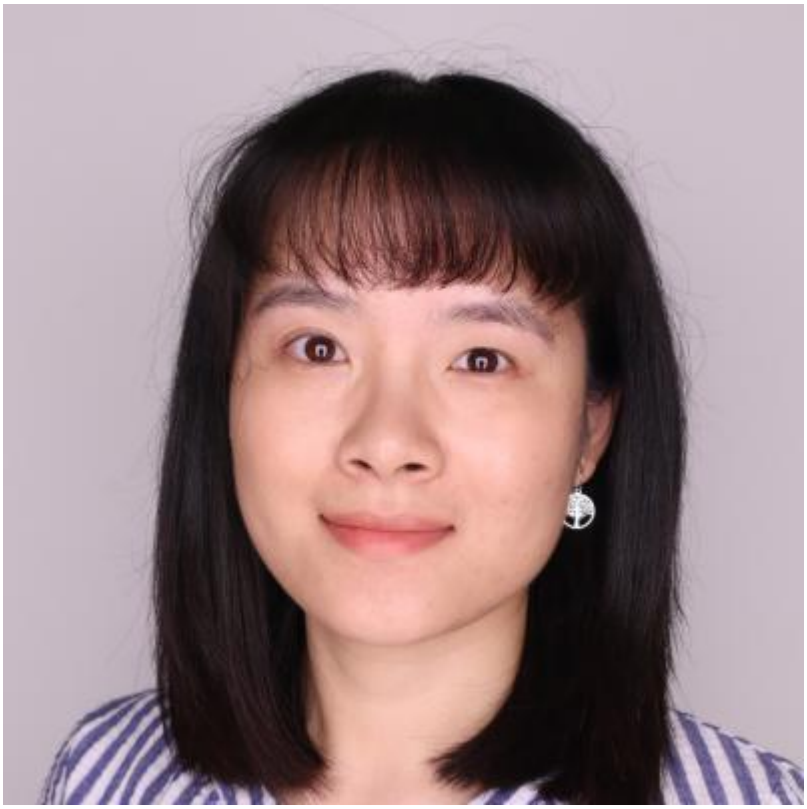
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Xutong Zhang

"The challenge of balancing academic and mental health concerns among Chinese parents: From parental beliefs to daily parent-child exchanges"

Dr. Xutong Zhang is an Investigator in the School of Psychology and Cognitive Science at East China Normal University. She earned her Ph.D. in Human Development and Family Studies from The Pennsylvania State University and completed a postdoctoral fellowship at McMaster University. Her work focuses on parents' cognitive and emotional regulatory processes that shape parenting behaviors, with the goal of contributing to family-based prevention of child emotional and behavioral difficulties. The SRCD Small Grants Program will support research that aims to understand Chinese parents' beliefs around the long-term returns to academic achievement and psychological well-being, and how those may be associated with the extent to which they balance academic and mental health concerns in daily parenting practices.



Danhua Zhu

"Parent Emotion-Centered Ethnic-Racial Socialization in Chinese American and Chinese Australian Families: A Qualitative Study"

Dr. Danhua Zhu is a Postdoctoral Scholar in the Department of Psychological Science at the University of California, Irvine. She earned her Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology from Virginia Tech. As a cultural developmental psychologist, she works with families from the United States and mainland China to study how culture shapes parents' emotion socialization in relation to child socioemotional functioning. Her research interests also include autobiographical memory and narratives within the sociocultural context. The 2024 Small Grants for Early Career Scholars will support her qualitative study exploring parents' culture-informed, emotion-centered racial socialization in Chinese immigrant families from the United States and Australia (via collaboration with colleagues at Deakin University, Australia). The ultimate goal is to unravel the protective roles of Chinese immigrant parents’ socialization practices for children’s coping and adjustment in the face of discrimination.