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Announcing the 2025 Recipients of the Small Grants for Early Career Scholars

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 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. The 2025 projects were selected from a highly competitive pool of 114 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 40 reviewers involved in the selection process and congratulates the 2025 Small Grant recipients:

Dr.s Yeji Baek, Natasha Chaku (with Dominic Kelly), Yannan Hu, Cara Kelly, Pearl Han Li (with Laura Soter), Niamh MacSweeney, Tatiana Padilla, Lukas Vogelsang, Yingying Zeng

Read on to learn more about this year's Small Grant projects and researchers!



Yeji Baek

“The economic value of a parenting intervention for child development and policy implications”

Dr. Yeji Baek is a Research Fellow specializing in Global Health and Health Economics at Monash University, Australia. Her research focuses on examining the economic value of investing in child health and development in resource-constrained settings with equity considerations.

The SRCD Small Grants Program will support one of her studies examining the economic evidence of a parenting intervention in Vietnam and stakeholders’ perspectives. The study aims to (1) assess the cost-effectiveness of the intervention in mid-childhood, and (2) explore stakeholders’ views on the evidence and its translation into practice. The evidence will support the integration of cost-effective parenting programs into national services and policies.



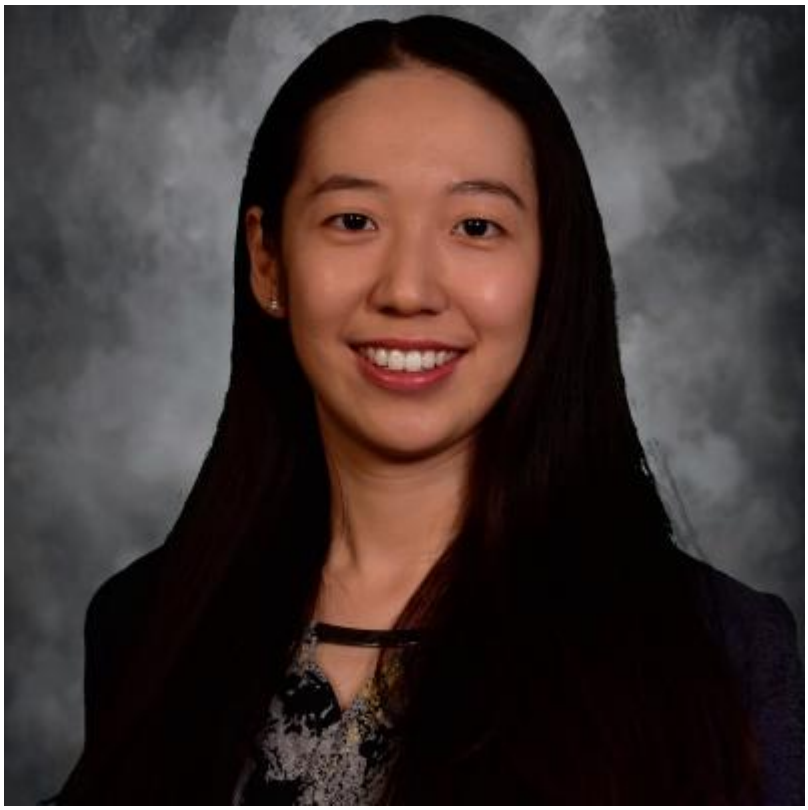
Natasha Chaku & Dominic Kelly

“Considering a multiverse of pubertal timing effects: Do different operationalizations produce different results?”

Dr. Natasha Chaku is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences at Indiana University and the principal investigator of the interACT Lab. Dr. Chaku's research uses longitudinal, physiological, and computational methods to examine how developmental transitions are associated with subsequent behavior. Specifically, her research focuses on pubertal development, stress, and cognitive development as key mechanisms that underlie trajectories of health and wellbeing across adolescence and adulthood. The 2025 Small Grant for Early Career Scholars will support a data harmonization project to understand the effect of measurement on associations between pubertal timing and depression.

Dr. Dominic Kelly is a Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Longitudinal Studies at University College London. Dominic earned his doctoral degree at the University of Michigan, where he specialised in daily survey studies. His focus was on how daily cognitive factors (i.e., executive functions, spatial skills) are affected by daily non-cognitive factors (i.e., mental health, hormones). As an interdisciplinary developmental

psychologist who specialises in adolescence and emerging adulthood, he is particularly interested in leveraging longitudinal cohort data to investigating the effects of mental health for academic achievement and labour market outcomes.



Yannan Hu

“Infant-Adult Vocal Coordination Among Families in the United States and India”

Dr. Yannan Hu is a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences at Indiana University Bloomington. She received her Ph.D. in Human Development and Family Studies from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Her research focuses on the real-time dynamics of caregiver-infant interactions at both behavioral and physiological levels and how these multimodal processes are related to early socio-emotional development. The 2025 Small Grants for Early Career Scholars will support her project that aims to investigate the temporal structure of infant-adult vocal coordination in everyday life, using a data-driven approach, among U.S. and Indian infants between 1 and 12 months of age. She will also examine the role of infant autonomic nervous system in real-time infant-adult vocal coordination.



Cara Kelly

“Quality Matters: Exploring Families’ Perceptions of Infant and Toddler Care”

Dr. Cara Kelly is a Senior Research Associate at the University of Oklahoma-Tulsa’s Early Childhood Education Institute. She received her Ph.D. in human development and family sciences from the University of Delaware. Her program of research focuses on early care and education programs and policies that impact young children’s development, and her scholarship addresses questions about the indicators of early care and education programs that promote children’s development, policies that impact these programs, and types of early relationships that are associated with children’s short- and long-term outcomes. Dr. Kelly’s SRCD-funded project leverages community-based partnerships to explore families’ perceptions of quality in infant and toddler programs across Oklahoma. Results from her project will inform program-level practices and decision-making to better serve Oklahoma’s children and families.



Pearl Han Li & Dr. Laura Soter

"Cultivating Open-Mindedness: The Developmental Origins of Intellectual Humility”

Dr. Pearl Han Li (Principal Investigator) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. She received her Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology from the University of Minnesota and previously completed postdoctoral training at Duke University. Her research focuses on children’s moral development and social learning across cultures and in diverse social contexts. Specifically, she is interested in how children navigate the balance between independent reasoning and reliance on others' testimony across cultural contexts. Supported by the 2025 SRCD Small Grant for Early Career Scholars, this project investigates how children in the U.S. and China evaluate individuals who display expressions of intellectual humility and whether children view these behaviors as signs of strong moral character and epistemic competence. By integrating insights from Western and Confucian philosophical traditions, this project also explores how cultural values shape children’s judgments about open-mindedness, trustworthiness, and moral worth. Findings will contribute to a culturally inclusive understanding of intellectual virtues and inform future efforts to foster constructive engagement with

diverse perspectives in early childhood.

Dr. Laura Soter (Co-PI) is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at York University in Toronto. She received her Ph.D. in Philosophy and Psychology from the University of Michigan. Her interdisciplinary research bridges philosophy of mind, ethics, and cognitive science, with a focus on belief, mental control, and moral psychology.

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Niamh MacSweeney

“The neuroscience of hormonal contraceptives and depression risk in adolescence”

Dr Niamh MacSweeney is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Division of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Diakonhjemmet Hospital, and the Department of Psychology, University of Oslo, Norway. She completed her PhD at the University of Edinburgh in 2023. Her research investigates how brain development relates to depression risk during adolescence, with a focus on puberty, sex hormones, and early life experiences. With support from the 2025 SRCD Small Grant for Early Career Scholars, she will examine how

hormonal contraceptive use may influence brain development and mood during adolescence – a period of heightened hormonal sensitivity and increased vulnerability to depression in girls. Although millions of adolescents use hormonal contraceptives globally, little is known about their effects on the developing brain. This project will combine analysis of large-scale neuroimaging data with the development of a new study using MRI and real-time mood tracking, co-designed with adolescents. The findings will lay the groundwork for a larger study and support informed, evidence-based discussions about reproductive healthcare for young women.

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Tatiana Padilla

“Forced Separation: The Impact of Immigration Raids on Foster Care Admissions and Child Wellbeing”

Dr. Tatiana Padilla is a T32 Population Health Postdoctoral Fellow at The Institute for Social Research and Data Innovation at the University of Minnesota, where her research bridges public policy, migration, and inequality. She uses rigorous quantitative methods and innovative data to examine how immigration enforcement and contact with the criminal legal system shape disparities in children’s and families’ well-

being across race, ethnicity, and legal status. Dr. Padilla earned her Ph.D. in Public Policy from Cornell University. Her research has been published in Social Science & Medicine and International Migration Review, and recognized by the Population Association of America. She is Principal Investigator of the RAIDS Project, which documents the demographic and geographic impact of immigration raids across the U.S. Her SRCD-funded project investigates the effects of immigration raids on foster care admissions and emotional disturbance among Hispanic children in foster care—an underexamined and vulnerable population. This pilot project aims to inform child welfare policy and build capacity for policy-relevant research and mentorship of junior scholars.

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Lukas Vogelsang

“Characterizing perceptual constancies and the visual diet of late-sighted children in India Description”

Dr. Lukas Vogelsang is a Simons Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences at MIT. He earned his Ph.D. in Neuroscience from EPFL in Switzerland. His research spans sensory development, visual perception, and temporal processing, with a particular focus on how the perceptual system may rely

on temporal regularities and limited sensory inputs early in life. He combines computational modeling with experimental work in both typical and atypical development, including studies with autistic individuals and congenitally blind children treated through Project Prakash. The 2025 SRCD Small Grant will support his research on late-sighted children in India, combining two aims: first, to longitudinally characterize the emergence of key perceptual constancies, such as recognizing objects despite changes in lighting or size, and second, to document the children's natural “visual diet”. Together, this offers a rare window into how structured visual experience shapes perception from its very onset.

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Yingying Zeng

"The Role of Local Schools and Grassroots Organizations as Protective Factors for Children from Immigrant Families Amid Mass Deportation Policies”

Dr. Yingying Zeng is an Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Georgia. She received her Ph.D. in social work from Washington University in St. Louis. Her research focuses on the social determinants that influence the development and well-being of immigrants—particularly children from

immigrant families—with the goal of fostering resilience and promoting upward mobility. The 2025 Small Grant for Early Career Scholars will support her study examining how schools and grassroots organizations serve as protective factors that buffer children from the trauma and uncertainty caused by mass deportation policies. Using a community-based participatory approach, this research will amplify the voices of community members, inform policy, and contribute to the growing field of developmental science on immigrant youth resilience in times of uncertainty.

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