

Anti-racism and Mental Health Seed Grant funded by the Friends of Semel 2024 Awardees

The UCLA Psychiatry Office of JEDI is incredibly excited to announce the awardees for the Anti-racism and Mental Health Research Seed Grant Program, which is made possible through the generosity of The Friends of the Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior at UCLA.

The program provides funding for Academic Year 2024-2025 for research projects that directly apply anti-racism to clinical practice, policy, research, and/or other areas in psychiatry, psychology, and mental health. The award was launched in 2020 in honor of George Floyd and other victims of long-standing systemic racism.

2024 The Friends of Semel Anti-racism and Mental Health Seed Grant Awardees

1. *"Behind the Masjid Walls: A community-centered study to assess Muslim youth mental health needs in Greater Los Angeles"*
 - PI: **Samia Nawaz, MD, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Fellow**
 - Co-PI: Ragda Izar, MD, Psychiatry Resident
 - Co-PI: Afsara Haque, MD, Psychiatry Resident
 - Faculty Advisor: Manal Khan, MBBS, Assistant Clinical Professor
2. *"Multi-system Strategies to Promote Minoritized Family Mental Wellbeing After Experiences of Homelessness with Young Children"*
 - PI: **Alyssa R. Palmer, Ph.D., Post-doctoral Fellow**
 - Co-I: Roya Ijadi-Maghsoodi, MD, MSHPM, Asst. Professor-in-Residence
 - Co-I: Blanca Orellana, Ph.D., Asst. Clinical Professor
 - Co-I: Nastassia Hajal, Ph.D., Asst. Clinical Professor
3. *"UCLA-LAUDS Mental Health Partnership: A Mental Health Literacy Intervention Among BIPOC Adolescent Peer Health Leaders from Under-Resourced Communities"*
 - PI: **Frederick Burton III, MD, PGY-3 Psychiatry Resident**
 - Co-PI: Amira Collison, MD, CF-1 Child Psychiatry Fellow
 - Co-I: Shirley De La Cruz-Jimenez, SRA-1
 - Faculty Mentors: Sheryl Kataoka MD, MSHS (Professor Emeritus); Roya Ijadi-Maghsoodi MD, MSHPM (Asst. Professor-in-Residence)
 - Community Partner: The Los Angeles Trust for Children (LA Trust)

Learn more about each PI and their proposals below!



Dr. Samia Nawaz is thrilled to be a first-year child and adolescent psychiatry fellow physician at UCLA. She completed her general psychiatry residency training in June 2024 at the University of Utah, where she served as Global Health and Women’s Health Chief Resident. Prior to this, she completed her medical education at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, where she was elected to Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society. Over the course of her education and training, Dr. Nawaz has started multiple nonprofits, consulted for larger organizations, and even facilitated a roundtable with President Bill Clinton to promote diversity and equity. Some of her greatest professional passions include mental health equity and trauma informed care. Dr. Nawaz is honored and grateful to receive the PDAC Anti-Racist and Mental Health Seed Grant to fund her

Muslim mental health research, about which she is so passionate.

“Behind the Masjid Walls: A community-centered study to assess Muslim youth mental health needs in Greater Los Angeles” (co-led by **Ragda Izar, MD** and **Afsara Haque, MD**) aims to assess attitudes and knowledge of mental health topics in transitional age Muslims (15-26 years) in the Greater Los Angeles area. We chose to address the needs of transitional-age youth due to potentially erratic and inconsistent psychosocial supports during this stage of development, which is often marred by Islamophobia. As PIs, our identities as Muslim women from diverse ethnic backgrounds will help us to build connections and trust among communities. Our project will also purposely recruit participants from populations that have historically been excluded from research (African American Muslims and refugee Muslims). This assessment will be the first of its kind to our knowledge and will eventually serve as a springboard for creating psychosocial interventions specific to young LA Muslims. Future directions will include incorporating our findings from this study to implement mental health programming for this community, especially as it relates to suicide prevention.



Dr. Alyssa Palmer is a NIMH T-32 Postdoctoral Fellow in the science of child mental health treatment at the UCLA Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior. Dr. Palmer completed her Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota in developmental psychopathology and clinical science. Her program of research focuses on identifying, accurately measuring, and leveraging processes of multi-system resilience to promote early childhood mental health in the context of poverty, including families experiencing homelessness. As a first-generation college graduate from a low-income background, Alyssa is dedicated to engaging in translatable, relevant, and community-engaged research and service.

Los Angeles County is currently experiencing a family homelessness crisis and Black and Latinx individuals are affected (in shelter and doubled up) at disproportionately higher rates. Spanish-speaking families are a rapidly growing population of families experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles County and there continues to be a gap in knowledge of how to best provide linguistically and culturally responsive services. Further, over 1.2 million children under the age of six years old experience homelessness every year and they make up over half of all children in emergency shelters. Young children who have experienced homelessness have mental health concerns two to four times greater than low-income but housed children. This study will work with minoritized families with children under 6 years old, purposively recruiting a representative sample of Spanish-speaking families. We will collect data on parent and homeless service worker perceptions of mental health care, shelter settings, parenting while experiencing homelessness, and child emotional and behavioral health. We aim for this study to inform multisystem resilience strategies for family mental health at the 1) family intervention level, and 2) shelter level, including strategies for supporting parents and homeless service providers working with minoritized families experiencing homelessness.



Dr. Frederick Burton III is a dedicated resident physician specializing in Psychiatry at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), where he serves as a Chief of Healthcare Administration/System Improvement. Dr. Burton completed his medical degree at Dartmouth Geisel School of Medicine and holds a Bachelor of Science in Neuroscience and Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from The University of Rochester. His clinical interests include Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and he is actively involved in healthcare administration, quality improvement, and looking to increase the accessibility to mental health services.

Our project's mission is to increase mental health literacy and help-seeking amongst BIPOC high school students in under-resourced communities in Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) through a peer-led mental health literacy intervention. This project builds on a recently developed community-academic partnership between UCLA Psychiatry and the Los Angeles Trust for Children (The Trust), a community agency that supports peer-to-peer health education programs in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). For our project, we have adapted an existing evidence-based high school mental health literacy curriculum, the Mental Health & High School Curriculum Guide for use in a peer-led mental health intervention aimed to improve students' mental health knowledge, attitudes towards mental health, and help-seeking behaviors. Our approach to implementing a peer-led model for the intervention utilizes the L.A. Trust's existing peer-based student health and wellness intervention, the Student Advisory Board. The Student Advisory Board exists across ten LAUSD schools in predominantly under-resourced communities. The Student Advisory Board is comprised of six to ten selected high school students from each LAUSD school. The student advisory board members serve as health student advocates for their respective schools. Our mental health intervention provides the Student Advisory Board members with formalized training and supervision on mental health literacy. This formal mental health training prepares the student peer leaders to take on a supportive and educational role with similar-aged pupils in their school through mental health promotion interventions, such as tabling events, flyers, social media campaigns, etc. The program empowers school communities from within by allowing the students themselves to be advocates and voices for students' needs. The mental health trainings are delivered by UCLA Psychiatry resident physicians and medical students, who serve as co-leaders during interactive small group break out discussions. The project is purposed to strengthen the department's core mission of health equity, diversity and inclusion by providing increased opportunity for community outreach and for trainees in the Department of Psychiatry, while addressing a large unmet need for mental health awareness and education in Los Angeles BIPOC communities.

Mirella Díaz-Santos, PhD

Chair, Task Force Committee, "Anti-Racism and Mental Health Seed Grant funded by the Friends of Semel"

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