

Research \ Action

Midyear Brief

Screening Teens for Depression, Before and During a Pandemic

For the past three years, Senior Research Scientist **Tracy Gladstone**, Ph.D., and her research team have screened students in Holliston, Massachusetts, for depression. By early February of this year, they had screened 620 students in grades 7, 9, and 11, and met personally with the 20-25 percent who reported experiencing symptoms of depression. They made contact with those students' families, and in some cases referred them to resources outside the school.

Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Dr. Gladstone and her team wondered how many of the students they had screened a few months ago were now experiencing depressive symptoms, and how many were affected by anxiety as well. To find out, they will be completing follow-up screenings remotely in the next few months.

“When all of this started, I thought of a study I read years ago about a researcher who collected data from Stanford students before the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989,” said Dr. Gladstone. “Then she went back and collected follow-up data afterward. It was an example of finding some use in a disaster and being able to learn something from it.”

The researchers will send students a link to an online survey, and then follow up by phone with those who report symptoms (as well as talk with their parents or guardians). When it's



needed, they will also offer referrals to treatment resources that are available remotely. The plan is to collect the same data on depression as they did earlier in the year, but with additional questions about anxiety, coping strategies, and relationships.

“I'm excited to be able to offer these screenings as a resource to parents and schools,” said Gladstone. “Once we have this data, we'll be able to make suggestions about how best to support those students who are experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depression. And we'll know more about what kind of effects this pandemic is having on kids.”

WCW Recommends Focus on Early Childhood Care and Education in Reopening Plans

Early childhood care and education programs have been hit hard by COVID-19. Except for emergency care, all center-based and home-based programs in Massachusetts are to remain closed through at least June 29. In addition, many educators have been laid off, and—since social distancing with toddlers is tricky or near impossible—the way forward is unclear. Senior Research Scientist **Wendy Wagner Robeson**, Ed.D., of WCW's **Work, Families and Children Research Group**, is helping to chart a path.

Robeson has been participating in daily calls with other early childhood care and education advocates in Massachusetts, led by the nonprofit organization Strategies for Children. The group has been in communication with state and federal leaders about how and when child care programs can reopen

safely, and what support they and their workers need until and after that happens. Above all, the group's goal is to make it clear that no economic recovery will be successful if employees and working families do not have access to safe, affordable, and high-quality care for their children.



WCW Completes Study on Campus Sexual Assault as New Rules Are Released

In early May, the U.S. Department of Education issued new rules for how colleges and universities must respond to allegations of sexual misconduct on campus. At around the same time, Senior Research Scientist **Linda M. Williams**, Ph.D., who directs WCW's **Justice and Gender Based Violence Research Initiative**, completed a research project on how colleges currently respond to sexual assault allegations.

Beginning in January 2016, Williams and her team examined the range and scope of policies and practices at institutions of higher education in the U.S., documenting and classifying the current landscape of campus responses. The first step, informed by a victim-centered focus, was a web-based search of a randomly selected sample of 969 four-year colleges and universities, followed by interviews with 47 Title IX coordinators across the country. The team included Senior Research Scientist **April Pattavina**, Ph.D., Visiting Scholar **Alison Cares**, Ph.D., Senior Research Scientist **Nan Stein**, Ed.D., and Operations Manager **Mary Frederick**. The project was funded by the National Institute of Justice of the U.S. Department of Justice.

“Based on our research, many colleges will have to make adjustments to their policies and procedures before August 15, when they are required to implement these new rules,” said Williams. “They will lose some of the flexibility they previously had to tailor their approaches to their communities. And they will be required to behave more like the criminal justice system, which goes against their mission to be educators rather than adjudicators.”

Shaping a Better World through Research & Action **Wellesley Centers for Women**

The Wellesley Centers for Women is a research and action institute at Wellesley College that is focused on women and gender and driven by social change.

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Celebrating International Women's Day



One of the last gatherings WCW was able to host on campus was a celebration of International Women's Day, held on March 5 and co-hosted by Wellesley College's **Slater International Center** and **Albright Institute**. Student panelists from Slater spoke movingly about what it was like for them to come to Wellesley from their home countries, and WCW Visiting Scholar **Hauwa Ibrahim**, J.D., S.J.D., M.L., served as an inspirational guest speaker.

Ibrahim is an international human rights and Sharia law attorney with over 20 years of experience representing women and children condemned to death in Sharia courts. Her research investigates the root causes of terrorism and builds bridges of cooperation between religious and non-religious communities.

Since Ibrahim's arrival at the Centers, her work has taken exciting new directions. She brought together women from around the world to discuss ways to steer youth away from extremism through her Mothers Without Borders project. Last summer, she and WCW Research Scientist **LaShawnda Lindsay**, Ph.D., collaborated with an international network of partners to offer a culturally responsive, student-centered science, technology, engineering, arts, and math (STEAM) camp in Northern Nigeria.

In honor of International Women's Day, Ibrahim spoke about how she draws inspiration from empowered women and girls across the globe. “We celebrate today because there are women and men who have made it possible,” she said. “Today we are trying to build on what they have given us.”

View photos and video from the event: wcwonline.org/researchandaction



Supporting Educators With Social and Emotional Learning Resources



As elementary school teachers pivoted to remote education in March, our **Open Circle** team acted fast to adapt their social and emotional learning (SEL) curriculum. Director **Kamilah Drummond-Forrester, M.A., CAGS**, also created a series of tips—based on her professional knowledge as well as her experience with her own four children—on how to talk to kids about COVID-19.

“It’s important to help kids develop skills to recognize and manage their emotions,” she wrote. “It’s also important for them to feel safe and cared for, especially in the midst of a crisis. Effective SEL strengthens our ability to understand, name, and manage our emotions, all while building healthy relationships with others that foster increased empathy and community.”

The Open Circle team identified lessons and activities that are particularly relevant right now, and that could be incorporated into remote learning. Skills like being calm, practicing positive self-talk, and cooperating were highlighted. The team also put together tech tips for virtual Open Circle meetings and ideas for making Open Circle literature connections remotely.

The program’s curriculum will be available digitally later this year, and its professional development sessions are transitioning to an online format. This will allow training programs to move forward—so that educators can help students learn SEL skills they will put into practice on a daily basis during this crisis.



When Social Distancing Collides with Social Media

Across the country, summer camps, jobs, and internships have been canceled due to the COVID-19 outbreak, and teens and tweens are stuck at home. It’s likely that they’re spending a lot of time on social media—even more than usual.

Linda Charmaraman, Ph.D., senior research scientist and director of the **Youth, Media & Wellbeing Research Lab**, is getting a lot of questions from friends about how to help their children maintain a healthy relationship to social media during this time. Based on her own research and that of others, she points to several things to keep in mind—including what we know about screen time and its effects, how social media can affect the moods of both parents and kids, and how it can provide opportunities for teens and tweens to lean on their communities.

Charmaraman is digging deeper into this issue in her research. Currently, she is collecting data for her ongoing study of adolescents and social media funded by the National Institutes of Health. She’s looking into how social distancing has impacted parents and their children in positive and negative ways, and how teens’ and tweens’ physical and behavioral health has been affected. She’s also investigating the characteristics of adolescents, parents, and households that are more resilient and more vulnerable to the harmful effects of the pandemic.



For more stories about how our work is pivoting in response to COVID-19, preventing depression during social distancing, and how we are working with Wellesley College students remotely, visit wcwonline.org/researchandaction

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Spring 2020

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Pivoting Our Work in Response to COVID-19

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Featuring:

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