

UNIVERSITY-BASED CHILD AND FAMILY POLICY CONSORTIUM

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Linking Research to Policy: Recommendations from a Family and Child Development Scholar

By: **Melissa N. Richards**

The Consortium Engagement Interest Group aims to bridge the gap between policy and research and promote collaboration among all Consortium members. In each upcoming newsletter, we will highlight a policy topic by interviewing scholars who have experience applying their research to that topic. In this newsletter, we feature Consortium member, Dr. Rebecca Ryan, Associate Professor of Psychology at Georgetown University and affiliated faculty at the Georgetown Public Policy Institute. Ryan discussed her experiences communicating with those outside of academia, the importance of basic research, and her advice for young scholars.

Dr. Rebecca Ryan's research focuses primarily on family structures and child and adolescent well-being, an area that is of high interest to policymakers. As a scholar who studies the effects of different family structures on at-risk populations, Ryan believes she has a responsibility to inform policies that may be able to ameliorate pervasive problems among youth. As she put it, "it is not good enough just to 'know'." Rather, she believes that her findings should always be applicable to real-world settings. She often ensures this pertinence by only asking research questions that have the potential to affect policy.



When asked about the most difficult part of applying her research to policy, Ryan mentioned that communicating and translating the implications of child

development and family research to policymakers and the press can be challenging. In a perfect world, she would like for there to be more "middle men" in the field; that is, people who translate academic findings into a language that is meaningful for policymakers.

In addition to challenges with communication, Ryan mentioned that some of her findings are not what policymakers want to hear. For example, some of her studies have shown results that do not advocate for many current family structure policies that intend to aid at-risk children. In fact, Ryan found that policies that incentivize marriage alone may not actually improve child outcomes—rather, there are other problems besides family structure within the child's environment that may lead to less than favorable consequences. In order to tackle this issue, Ryan often makes it clear to the press that she cannot make recommendations for specific individuals; instead, she reports "what is true on average with the hope that people will make informed decisions."

Perhaps most importantly, however, Ryan said that there is a "mismatch between the broad policy levers that drive legislation and child development – which is a more subtle process." Therefore, she finds that even papers without direct policy implications can still be extremely important for practice. Unfortunately, policymakers often overlook papers that focus on basic research, even though the information presented in these basic pieces is valuable.

When asked if she had any advice for researchers looking to get involved in policy-relevant research, she recommended networking at conferences and keeping professional connections at research organizations through regular contact. She also said that students should look at "policy outlets as part of their daily diet." As such, she recommends that students read articles in policy-related journals that are out of their comfort zone and from a diverse set of disciplines. Finally, she suggests that scholars keep policy a goal throughout their entire research process. As she said, "Do not think of your work as an academic endeavor with a policy implication at the end. Think of how policy applies to your work from the beginning."

In sum, Ryan believes research in child development should be linked to policy because it is extremely rewarding and meaningful to those both in academia and in policy settings. Although there are challenges to this process – such as effectively communicating methodology and the resulting implications to those outside of academia – Ryan has offered recommendations on how to confront these issues. If researchers follow Ryan's suggestion to keep

policy in mind throughout the *whole* research process –not just at the end, then they will undoubtedly have a high chance of success in their future careers, both in academic and policy -related fields.

To contact or get more information about Dr. Ryan, send her an e-mail: RMR64@georgetown.edu or visit her website:

<http://www7.georgetown.edu/faculty/rmr64/Home.html>

Calendar

Upcoming monthly calls:

Monday, October 15, 11:00am-12:00 EDT

Robert Foss, PhD

Senior Research Scientist, Director, Center for the Study of Young Drivers, University of North Carolina

Friday, November 16, 11:00am-12:00 EDT

Patrick Tolan PhD (tentative)

Professor, Director, Youth-Nex | The U.Va. Center to Promote Effective Youth Development

No call scheduled for December

*Call details will be sent to the Consortium list serve in advance. For more information about calls, please contact [Shannon Smith](#).

Relevant Conferences

Society for Research in Child Development; Transitions from Adolescence to Adulthood October 18-20, 2012, Tampa, FL

4th Annual Research to Practice Conference, Center on Teaching and Learning, University of Oregon
October 28-30, 2012, Portland, OR

National Council on Family Relations Annual Conference
October 31-November 3, 2012, Phoenix, AZ

20th International Re-conceptualizing Early Childhood Education Conference, Pennsylvania State University
November 4-7, 2012, State College, PA

National Association for the Education of Young Children Annual Conference and Expo; Developmentally

Appropriate Practice in the 21st Century

November 7-10, 2012, Atlanta, GA

**Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management;
Policy Analysis and Public Management in an Age of
Scarcity**

November 8-10, Baltimore, MD

**Early Childhood Conference; Honoring the Child,
Honoring Equity 12 Troubling truths: bridging divides
for equity**

November 16-17, 2012, Melbourne, Australia

**National Training Institute; Leading Edge Early
Childhood Science, Policy and Practice**

November 28-Dec. 1, 2012, Los Angeles, CA

For more upcoming events, visit the

Consortium's calendar.

*If you would like to add an event to the calendar, please contact
Paige Peltzer.*

Announcements

Introducing New Consortium Steering Committee Members!

Erin Bumgarner, fourth-year doctoral student in Developmental Psychology, Teachers College, Columbia University
erin.k.bumgarner@gmail.com

Barbara Fiese, Ph.D., Professor; Pampered Chef, Ltd. Endowed Chair in Family Resiliency; Director, Family Resiliency Center, University of Illinois
bhfiese@illinois.edu

Cathy Jordan, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Pediatrics; Director, Children, Youth, and Family Consortium, University of Minnesota Extension
jorda003@umn.edu

Rebekah Levine Coley, Ph.D., Professor of Applied Developmental and Educational Psychology, Lynch School of Education, Boston College
coleyre@bc.edu

Laura Sosinsky, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Fordham University
sosinsky@fordham.edu

The following members of the Steering Committee have not yet completed their term or were reelected to another term:

Karen Cadigan, Ph.D., Director, Minnesota Office of Early Learning
karen.cadigan@state.mn.us

Kenneth A. Dodge, Ph.D., William McDougall Professor of Public Policy; Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience; and Director, Center for Child and Family Policy, Duke University
dodge@duke.edu

Matthew Stagner, Ph.D., Senior Lecturer, Irving B. Harris School of Public Policy Studies; Executive Director of Chapin Hall, University of Chicago
mstagner@chapinhall.org

On behalf of the entire Consortium, the Steering Committee thanks Rachel Gordon and Anna Johnson for their tremendous contributions to the Consortium Steering Committee. Their insight and focused worked on a wide range of Consortium efforts have been invaluable and will continue to be!

Welcome, Sara Benning!

The Consortium welcomes Sara Benning, Policy Lead at the University of Minnesota's [Children, Youth and Family Consortium \(CYFC\)](#). In addition to co-chairing the Careers Interest Group, Sara looks forward to working closely with Jenni Owen in an associate director role to help guide, organize, and support the work of the Consortium and its members.

Welcome, Anna Markowitz!

Anna Markowitz is a second year dual Masters in Public Policy/Psychology Ph.D. student at Georgetown University. Prior to Georgetown, Anna earned her Masters in Developmental Psychology from Boston College. Anna's passion for developmental policy arose while teaching 7th and 8th grade, and she is thrilled about the opportunity to work with the Consortium as the new Careers intern and support young scholars and professionals. You can reach Anna at: ajm267@georgetown.edu.

Membership Update

In mid-June, directors of all Consortium member entities received a letter from the Consortium Steering Committee, a summary of recent Consortium [accomplishments](#), and an invoice for annual dues.

Individual Consortium memberships are available for those who are at a university but not affiliated with a [member institution](#). The annual individual membership fee is \$100. If the cost of individual membership is prohibitive, please contact [Shannon Smith](#) to inquire about alternate arrangements. For more information, or if you have any questions regarding membership, please contact [Shannon Smith](#).

Members in the News

June 2012

Boston College's Thomas More Brennan Chair in Education **Andy Hargreaves** and co-author Michael Fullan released their new book, Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School. Hargreaves and Fullan wrote a commentary on their new book in *Education Week*.

The *Education Week* article, Study Tracks Growing Understanding of UDL, features 2011-12 Richmond Fellow **Todd Grindal** discussing universal design for learning (UDL), an educational framework aimed at adapting instruction for individual learning differences. Grindal is a research associate for the Center on the Developing Child's meta-analytic database and a fifth year doctoral student at the **Harvard** Graduate School of Education.

Karen Cadigan, director of the **University of Minnesota** Office of Early Learning, and **Sara Benning**, Policy Lead at University of Minnesota, Children, Youth & Family Consortium, co-authored a journal article titled The Family Impact Lens: A Family-Focused, Evidence-Informed Approach to Policy and Practice, featured in *Family Relations* that proposes the family impact lens as one way to shift the rhetoric from appreciating families to prioritizing them as worthy of study, investment, partnership, and political action.

Rebecca London, senior researcher at **Stanford** University's Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, weighed in on child obesity and how it relates to academic achievement in a CNN health report.

July 2012

Jens Ludwig, McCormick Foundation Professor of Social Service Administration, Law, and Public Policy in the **University of Chicago** Harris School of Public Policy wrote about programs to cut violent crime in the *Chicago Sun-Times*. The title of his study: Chicago sports program cut violent crime, boosted school attendance.

In the aftermath of the shooting in Colorado, the *New York Times* asked several experts, including **Duke's** Sanford Professor of Public Policy and Center for Child and Family Policy Faculty Fellow **Phil Cook**, to weigh in on what impacts different state laws have on gun violence.

In an interview posted on the *Education Views* blog, Senior Research Scholar at **Duke**, **Joel Rosch**, discusses different aspects of juvenile justice, particularly the ramifications of laws in North Carolina and New York that allow 16- and 17-year-olds to be treated as adults.

In her paper, [Child-Care Subsidies: Do They Impact the Quality of Care Children Experience?](#), **Anna Johnson**, a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at **Georgetown** University, looked at the effects of child care subsidies on child care quality. After being published in *Child Development*, the paper was cited in a Senate Subcommittee hearing on reauthorizing the Child Care and Development Block Grant, which funds state child care subsidy programs.

August 2012

In the *New York Times* article, [Obama vs. Poverty](#), **Jack Shonkoff**, director of the Center on the Developing Child at **Harvard** University, weighed in on Obama's campaign to translate the science of adversity and brain development into new policies to better serve American children living in deep poverty.

The Director of the **University of Minnesota's** Children, Youth, and Family Consortium, **Cathy Jordan**, was interviewed by and quoted in [Metro](#) regarding the developmental and health benefits of connecting children to nature, as well as the connection between children's experiences with nature and adult environmental stewardship.

In a recent *New York Times* [letter](#) to the editor, **Sara McLanahan**, director of the Center for Research on Child Well-Being at **Princeton** University, disputes how her [research](#) has recently been portrayed in the *New York Times* opinion pages.

The **University of Chicago** Harris School of Public Policy professor **Ariel Kalil's** research on the effect of parental unemployment on children was featured in the article [The Great Recession Could Reduce School Achievement for Children of Unemployed](#), in *ScienceDaily*.

September 2012

Curtis Skinner, director of the Family Economic Security program at the National Center for Children in Poverty at **Columbia** University's Mailman School of Public Health was quoted in a *Mother Jones* [article](#) that covered the importance of children living in poverty as it relates to a Romney campaign lead by Robert Rector.

Jake Vigdor, professor of Public Policy and Economics and director of graduate studies at **Duke's** Sanford School of Public Policy, discusses the different issues at stake in the Chicago teachers strike on the *Education Views* [blog](#).

In an [interview](#) on WBEZ Boston radio's Afternoon Shift Program, **Duke's** Sanford School of Public Policy Edgar T. Thompson Distinguished Professor, Helen "Sunny" Ladd, details

what other issues must be addressed beyond school reform to help kids in poverty succeed academically.

The work of **Ariel Kalil**, PhD, professor at the Harris School of Public Policy Studies at the **University of Chicago**, was featured in *Child Development*, examining the impact of parents' precarious immigration status on the health of their low-income, American-born children.

The September 2012 issue of *Child Development* article by **Suet-Ling Pong** and **Nancy S. Landale** of **Pennsylvania State University** found that parents' education level prior to immigration is the most important factor in their children's achievement.

Resources

SRCD's Call for Students

For students interested in being a student representative for the SRCD committees and Student and Early Career Council (SECC). See also the SRCD SECC Dissertation Funding Award.

American Psychological Foundation (APF) Request for Nominations: Diane J. Willis Early Career Award

APF provides financial support for innovative research and programs that enhance the power of psychology to elevate the human condition and advance human potential both now and in generations to come.

APF encourages nominations from individuals who represent diversity in race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability, and sexual orientation.

Hiring: Georgetown University Visiting Professor Position in Psychology and Public Policy

The Department of Psychology at Georgetown University seeks to fill a visiting professor position to begin either in the Spring semester of 2013 or in the Fall semester of 2013 and continuing through the 2013-14 academic year with the possibility of one additional year.

Hiring: Central California Children's Institute Research Fellow position

The Research Fellow shall contribute to the Central California Children's Institute's (CCCI) core functions of applied

multidisciplinary research and interdisciplinary training.

Hiring: University of Illinois at Chicago Department of Psychology

The University of Illinois at Chicago's Department of Psychology seeks to fill a tenure-track position at the Assistant Professor level, to begin August 2013.

Applications now being accepted for Doris Duke Fellowship

Thanks to the generous support of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago is pleased to offer the Doris Duke Fellowships for the Promotion of Child Well-Being (formerly called the Doris Duke Fellowships for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect).

The application period for Cohort Three of the fellowships is open until December 15, 2012.

Call for Submissions: Early Childhood Research Quarterly Special Issue

Early Childhood Research Quarterly is planning to publish a special issue dedicated to Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS). This special issue seeks to add to the available research by fostering a deliberate and systematic examination of the strengths and weaknesses, and advantages and limitations, of QRIS as a vehicle for improving children's early education experiences.

Manuscripts of a maximum of 40 pages must be written in APA 6th pre-publication style and submitted through the regular ECRO online submission process. Submissions must mention in the cover letter and in the comments field on the site that the submission is specifically for the special issue on QRIS.

The deadline for submissions is November 1, 2012.

Call for submission: Infant Mental Health Journal

The *Infant Mental Health Journal* Announces a special section on Research-Based Challenges and Successes in Improving International Practice and Policy on Residential Care for Vulnerable Infants and Toddlers. [Click here for submission guidelines.](#)

Upcoming Newsletters We are always looking for

Consortium news, resource information, and other relevant material to highlight in the newsletter. Please send suggestions to [Paige Peltzer](#).

The Consortium is a national, interdisciplinary member organization of university-based child and family policy research centers, institutes, and programs.



*This is a periodic newsletter of the Consortium.
We welcome your feedback and submissions for inclusion in future issues.*

