

Summer 2019 Practicum Abstracts – MPH Health Promotion Students

C.M.R.

University Health Network, Ontario Community Outreach Program for Eating Disorders

OCOPED is housed at the University Health Network but works collaboratively with over thirty eating disorder programs across the province to support a network of specialized eating disorder service providers. Beginning in 2018-19, OCOPED is leading a newly funded promotion, prevention, and early intervention of eating disorders initiative (ED-PPEI). This entails the development of a suite of evidence-based, implementation-sensitive interventions co-designed in partnership with regional stakeholders across Ontario to extend the existing continuum of eating disorder care. During my practicum, I had the opportunity to contribute to the ongoing development of the implementation and evaluation frameworks for this initiative, as well as aid in establishing cross-sector implementation teams at the regional level as part of the build across Ontario. This project also involved: 1) contributing to the refinement of a CIHR-funded professional development intervention geared toward educating public health practitioners and adult influencers about weight bias awareness, weight science literature, and evidence-based programming in the prevention of eating disorders; 2) participating in CIHR-funded research planning meetings regarding embedding eating disorders into integrated wellness hubs for youth and the structured psychotherapy program; and 3) editing and finalizing an eating disorder prevention decision making toolkit. I also had the opportunity to contribute to OCOPED network activities such as: 1) collecting, entering, and analyzing program evaluation data related to community-based training workshops for service providers; and 2) partaking in systems planning meetings with clinicians from across the province pertaining to treatment service delivery for eating disorders across Ontario.

T. L.

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)

As a research trainee at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), I gained research experience in a public health field that critically examined the prenatal impact of alcohol and other substances on child's health, including Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). Under the supervision of Dr. Lana Popova, I have conducting systematic literature searches and writing up a methodology section as part of a draft manuscript. A goal of the research project is to work on a surveillance system of the prevalence of FASD in Canada. A major task of the research involved data cleaning, coding, and analysis of a dataset from a FASD diagnosis centre located in British Columbia. While we are unable to fully estimate the prevalence or incidence rate of FASD, the focus of analyzing the dataset is to draw insights regarding the impacts of FASD on people's lives. This project will specifically provide a profile of people diagnosed with FASD living in British Columbia. Extending the understanding of FASD beyond the geographical context of Canada, I engaged in global health related work. As such, I completed cross-checking data from the WHO's study on child development and prenatal risk factors with a focus on FASD. Overall, the intent of the research is not to further stigmatize people affected by FASD, but to generate accessible data that can be used to drive necessary changes that supports families of children with FASD and to prevent future cases of FASD.

C. T. M.

Women's College Hospital (WCH)/University of Toronto

The Indigenous Women's Stress Study (IWSS) consisted of delivering a culturally-grounded stress-reducing intervention to Indigenous women in Toronto and Thunder Bay, who were living with and without HIV and experiencing socio-economic insecurity. The purpose of the intervention was to reduce the stress and improve the well-being of the women who participated bi-weekly over a 6-month period. Changes in stress were measured through a questionnaire which contained scales on stress, biological samples which measured stress levels at multiple time-points over the course of the intervention, and focus group discussions which were held post-intervention. In this practicum, the student contributed to the evaluation of the intervention, which was based on the RE-AIM evaluation framework. They facilitated a focus group discussion with intervention facilitators in Thunder Bay, coded and conducted thematic analysis of five participant and one facilitator focus group discussions, and worked on four corresponding reports on the strengths and areas of improvement of the intervention. They also created a facilitator program guide based on the intervention, which will be used as a health promotion tool for organizations that wish to implement the program with Indigenous women in their communities. The guide documents the unique contributions of the IWSS, provides a detailed overview of suggestions on how ensure program effectiveness, and offers comprehensive ideas for culturally grounded, educational, and strength-based activities for program sessions. The student worked collaboratively with the IWSS research team on the required deliverables and presented the findings at a knowledge translation and exchange (KTE) meeting in Thunder Bay, and a KTE conference in Montreal. The student developed and strengthened the following health promotion competencies: program planning and implementation, research and evaluation, health education and communication, community mobilization and development, and partnerships and collaboration.

A.B.

Public Health Ontario - Health Promotion, Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention

With increasing recognition of mental health's importance for overall health, public health professionals are seeking to better understand early risk factors for mental illness. A majority of mental health problems emerge in childhood, with a complex etiology involving both genes and environment. There is evidence of a particular association between childhood growth and mental health. The current study sought to determine the association between growth trajectories during infancy and early childhood (birth to age 5) and mental health (behavioural and emotional difficulties) in early- to mid-childhood (age 3 to 8). The current study was conducted among a subset (n=665) of participants from The Applied Research Group for Kids (TARGet Kids!), an ongoing longitudinal cohort study. Five growth trajectories were determined via repeated measures of age- and sex-standardized BMI. Mental health was assessed using the Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) total difficulties, externalizing problems, and internalizing problems scores. The sociodemographic and health characteristics of the sample were described by mental health status (per the SDQ). Linear and logistic regression analyses were run to determine the association between growth trajectories and SDQ scores. Adjusted models controlled for

associated sociodemographic and health factors. There was no statistically significant association between increased growth ("rapidly accelerating" trajectory) and SDQ total difficulties ($b=1.49[-3.82,6.81],p=0.58$), externalizing problems ($b=0.31[-3.29,3.91],p=0.86$), or internalizing problems ($b=1.18[-1.73,4.09],p=0.43$). There was a significant association between decelerating growth and increased internalizing problems ($b=0.69[0.07,1.31],p=0.03$). Current results do not support an association between increased growth and poorer mental health in early- to mid-childhood; however, a pattern of decelerating growth may be associated with more internalizing problems. Future research should use a larger sample and examine the concurrent development of growth and mental health into later childhood.

P. C.

Pathstone Mental Health

This summer, I worked as a Research Assistant at Pathstone Mental Health, the lead agency for children's mental health in the Niagara Region. Pathstone Mental Health offers a broad spectrum of mental health services and programs to strengthen the quality of life for children, youth and families who are dealing with mental health challenges. In my role as a research assistant, I was tasked with evaluating the agency's walk-in mental health clinic. This included examining clinic intake forms, developing a telephone survey, conducting calls with client's parents, and analyzing data. Alongside the evaluation, I was also tasked with developing psychoeducational tool-kits for parents and youth, with topics ranging from substance misuse and addiction, to behavioral addiction and healthy media use. In addition, I developed various psychoeducational workshops for parents and youth on these topics. Other key work during my practicum included writing literature reviews on a multitude of subjects, including barriers to community mental health treatment, factors that promote family engagement in care, and efficient treatment pathways for community mental health referrals.

V. C.

Yorktown Family Services - Youth Mentorship Program

Yorktown Family Services (YFS) is a community-based non-profit agency that aims to improve mental health outcomes of children, youth, women, and families through its many social services and outreach programs in the former City of York. From May to August 2019, I worked with YFS in supporting its youth programs at the West Toronto Youth Hub. More specifically, my practicum placement at YFS mainly focused on restructuring and strengthening their existing Youth Mentorship Program (YMP). Here, I used health promotion competencies including situational assessment, communication, program development, and program evaluation. More specifically, my time at YFS involved consistent formal and informal community engagement and assessment through in-person and online outreach activities; restructuring the YMP such that it focuses on mental health and health promotion; developing a 7-week training program that increases young participants' access to resources; and ensuring the success of the new YMP through process and outcome evaluations. Additionally, my time at YFS involved two smaller projects. First, I had the opportunity to initiate the development of the agency's harm reduction policy. This involved conducting a literature review of community-based harm reduction best practices and an assessment of the agency's readiness for this policy implementation. Second, as a result of consistent community engagement and with support from the management team, I successfully proposed and advocated for the establishment of Rainbow West, a new program that provides a safe space for the

underserved community of LGBTQ2S+ youth in Toronto's west end. Here, I developed a peer-led model program and recruited volunteer peer leaders to run bi-weekly drop-in programs for LGBTQ2S+ youth. To further support this initiative, I have applied for a City of Toronto grant which has successfully passed phase 1 of reviews and is awaiting further funding decisions to be announced in late fall of 2019.

E.M.A.

Fred Victor, Health Promotions Office

Fred Victor focuses its work on assisting populations experiencing homelessness and poverty in Toronto through a wide-variety of individual and system-level programs from its Health Promotions office. Daily tasks in this practicum ranged from working directly with the community to high-level municipal governance work engaging with Toronto City Council. Firstly, a key component of this practicum entailed facilitating and developing programming for weekly peer support groups for community members in vulnerable populations. Secondly, this practicum also included introducing public health best practices into the development and maintenance of programs in the Health Promotions division. This included creating surveys to collect data for the evaluations of existing programs and forming evaluation plans. Thirdly, this practicum also dealt with municipal-level advocacy between Fred Victor and the St. James Town Service Providers' Network (SJTSNP) a network of agencies that collaborate on projects in downtown Toronto. Tasks included attending meetings and providing insights on ongoing projects including the St. James Town Festival and the Neighbourhood Improvement Area (NIA) petition. This work often entailed engaging with other service providers to address needs in the community and develop knowledge translation materials. In particular, this practicum included creating infographics to inform community members of advocacy efforts regarding the NIA petitions. Lastly, this practicum also required drafting letters of support for the NIA petition on behalf of the Executive Directors of the partnering SJTSNP agencies. These letters were submitted directly as part of the NIA petition motion to City Councillors and voted upon in Toronto City Council in July of 2019.

N.S.

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) - Provincial Support System Program (PSSP)

The Provincial System Support Program (PSSP) at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) works with key stakeholders around the province to establish and sustain system improvements. During my practicum at the PSSP, I worked with implementation specialists and evaluators on both provincial and municipal projects to address needs in the mental health and addictions sector. I worked on three main projects: Thrive Toronto, Continuing Care Project, and Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario. I completed various tasks to support project implementation, such as conducting literature reviews, analyzing data for evaluation, assessing project risk, collaborating with stakeholders, and developing evidence-informed approaches to change. Aside from these projects, other deliverables included a qualitative analysis on the implementation of stage screening and assessment (transcribing, coding, and thematic analysis), two reports for the ministry and Ontario Health Teams (OHTs), and a collaborative project with the Margaret and Wallace McCain Centre at CAMH which included manuscript writing and both qualitative and quantitative data analysis. Overall, my experience at the PSSP provided me with systems-

level perspective on mental health and addictions, while allowing me to apply core health promotion competencies into my daily tasks.

N.T.D.N.

The Hospital for Sick Children (Sick Kids), Child Health Evaluative Sciences

I completed my first practicum at the Peter Gilgan Centre for Research and Learning, The Hospital for Sick Children (Sick Kids). Under the supervision of Drs. Catherine Birken and Jessica Omand, I was tasked with conceptualizing and undertaking a research project using the recently acquired Early Development Instrument (EDI) data. The EDI is a health-relevant measure of children's developmental expectations, and is a proxy for school readiness. I chose to study child care, in relation to the EDI, as this is a relevant public health topic with implications for the overall well-being of children in Ontario. Therefore, my research project was titled: Is type of child care associated with school readiness at kindergarten entry? I used sample data from the TARGet Kids! and Fit-for-school cohorts to conduct extensive preliminary data analysis. I will be conducting my secondary data analysis during the Fall. This practicum enabled me to participate in ongoing education relating to growth, child health, nutrition, population health, and psychology. I was provided multiple opportunities to present my data collection plan, including to the science team at the Offord Center for Child Studies, McMaster University. I also strengthened my longitudinal study methodology competencies. Furthermore, I participated in educational activities including biweekly TARGet Kids! research rounds, which provided an opportunity to collaborate with peers and researchers across disciplines.

J.S.F.B.

Women's College Research Institute

Background: Sexual violence against transgender (trans) persons is a complex public health issue that requires the coordinated effort of multiple sectors to address. A 2017 survey of Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANEs) working within Ontario's 36 hospital-based Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Treatment Centres (SA/DVTCs) revealed a strong need for training in the provision of trans-affirming care and highlighted a gap in knowledge related to local trans-positive organizations with whom nurses could refer or consult. In response, the successful design, pilot, and evaluation of a curriculum on trans-affirming care for SANEs was completed in 2018. However, there remains a pressing need to connect these nurses with trans-positive service providers across sectors to enhance the provision of care to trans survivors across the province. Goals and Objectives: To develop a provincial intersectoral network on trans-affirming practice to better support sexual assault survivors. Objectives are to mobilize knowledge on the new curriculum and engage community regionally (by connecting SA/DVTCs with local trans-positive organizations) and provincially (by brainstorming the formation of a network to advance research, policy, and practice on sexual violence against trans communities). Approach: Guided by the Lifecycle Evolutionary Model of Network Development, and informed by literature on community development, seven regional meetings across the province were designed, coordinated, and facilitated. Leaders from SA/DVTCs and local trans-positive community organizations were invited in June 2019 to attend one of seven meetings across Ontario. Key insights were transcribed for subsequent synthesis

and analysis. Results: 106 representatives from 96 SA/DVTCs and trans-positive organizations attended a meeting between 7 June and 11 July 2019. 93 (97%) organizations expressed interest in being a part of the ongoing development of the network, in addition to 31 organizations unable to attend the meetings. 18 themes related to regional and provincial intersectoral collaboration to address sexual violence against trans communities were gleaned from activities across meetings. These included education/training, peer involvement, advocacy, accessibility, and knowledge sharing/exchange. Implications: As indicated by high meeting attendance and ongoing interest in the trans-LINK project, sexual violence against trans persons is a timely issue relevant to the enhancement of public health policy, practice, and leadership across sectors. In the future, we aim to further consolidate the network, including working toward its maturation and sustainability, as relationships between network member organizations are further strengthened and the mandate for the network identified.

A.A.

Global Health Emergency Medicine / Toronto General Hospital

This summer I worked with Global Health Emergency Medicine, under the supervision of Dr. Megan Landes, on their FAST-HIV project. This initiative plans to develop, implement, and scale rapid HIV testing across Ontario emergency departments. I first completed an environmental scan that looked into how other emergency departments have implemented this form of testing (ex. staffing, counselling, linkage to care). Beyond creating a summary report of the findings, I also presented this information at a large stakeholder meeting to other health care professionals, health leaders, and community members. My other task involved a quality improvement study that looked into the perceptions of University Health Network (UHN) staff in regard to rapid HIV testing. This was to inform UHN, one of the three pilot sites of this project, on the various barriers and facilitators that need to be considered. For this study, I completed a literature review, assisted in the development of the methodology, sampling technique, and data collection methods. The latter involved the creation of an online survey questionnaire and semi-structured interview guide. As I complete my term, I will be conducting interviews with various health care professionals and analyzing these findings.

J.A.R.

Hospice Palliative Care Ontario

My practicum took place at Hospice Palliative Care Ontario, where I acted as a project coordinator for their Compassionate Communities Community of Practice branch. The term Compassionate Community refers to a group of people that provide compassion, care and practical supports to patients who are seriously ill or frail, and their families. The idea being, that living in a community will help increase happiness while subverting loneliness and isolation. In this position my team would specifically focus on all project members who are currently implementing a Compassionate Community across Ontario. My role during this practicum was to help assist the Manager of this Community of Practice to conduct an annual environmental scan of all members. I conducted an environmental scan with my partner collecting in depth qualitative and quantitative data on these current initiatives. From this data my partner and I worked to create summary and communications reports for HPCO. Working with HPCO

also gave me the chance to work on a team to implement this information for the development of their new website to help connect project members and highlight their current Compassionate Community provincially. This website would also hope to act as a revamped landing page for HPCO so that they are able to share information on these Compassionate Communities to individuals across Ontario. During my placement I also had the opportunity to gain project management and planning skills; I acted as a lead for student volunteers to follow-up with when completing various projects for HPCO such as a brochure and newsletter.