

What's happening at CFR

Center for Family Research at the University of Georgia

Spring, 2023

Misunderstood

Some kids's behaviors are a symptom of a much larger problem

When she worked as a school psychologist, Sycarah Fisher felt herself drawn to the kids labeled as "bad." As she worked with them, she "learned to love them and realize that their behaviors are a symptom of a much larger problem," she says.

That much larger problem is now a central focus of her research as a UGA associate professor of educational psychology and collaborator at CFR.

Dr. Fisher's goal is to help schools recognize that when students present with problem behavior, including substance use, the solution is not the harsh discipline that leads to a "school-to-prison pipeline," but instead, mental health services that take into account the circumstances of the student.

It's not that teachers and administrators do not care, according to Fisher. Most of them are "super hardworking, caring, loving and want the best, but there is a level of system disorganization that prevents real change," she said. "I think it's partially because you're dealing with the population that has its own chaos going on."

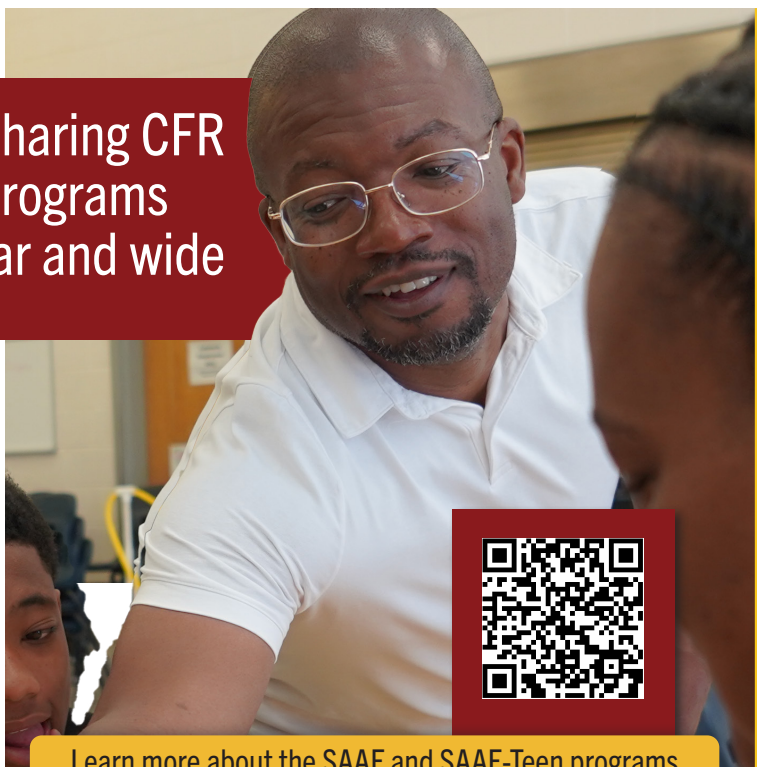


As one high school student described to her, his use of pot was a coping mechanism for the bedlam in his life. Taking this kind of context into account includes understanding the effect of race on substance-use practices as well as racial identity as a protective factor.

Growing up, she was one of the few Black kids in her schools. "I had a really hard time with my own identity development growing up in spaces like that," she said. It is part of the reason why she started doing research on ethnic identity as a scholar.

Her work and other research at CFR has helped lead us to understand that a strong racial identity is important in withstanding racism and other pressures that come from being Black in America. When she first arrived at UGA, Fisher reached out to Dr. Steve Kogan, one of CFR's principal researchers, to find other scholars who were interested in substance use and Black youth. Now the two work together on a CFR project which seeks to understand the factors that protect rural African American youth from low-resource environments and racism and the stress that goes along these circumstances.

Sharing CFR programs far and wide



Learn more about the SAAF and SAAF-Teen programs

Greg Rhodes shares our Strong African American Families (SAAF) and SAAF-Teen programs as far and wide as possible. Having recently traveled to Miami and Buffalo, New York to train groups to deliver the programs, he seems to be spreading them pretty widely!

Dr. Rhodes started his career as an educator in his hometown of Warrenton, Georgia and has worked mostly in education and social services.

Before joining us full-time in September, he facilitated a number of CFR programs with families over the last ten years. He says he has seen first-hand the value of them. "Just being in the communities where I implemented them and seeing the overall effects of the programs on those young people, that's what sold me on SAAF and SAAF-Teen," he says.



All children face stressors, but Black and Latinx children face some unique ones in our society. Our Project STAR (Strong Teens Achieving Resilience) is a research study designed to learn more about the family and community factors of these children that may shape their mental and physical health.



We're especially interested in identifying sources of resilience—those things that help children thrive even when faced with unfair treatment. So far, our findings suggest that when children have negative experiences at school or in the community, their physical health can be protected from the stress by nurturing and involved parents.

We are very grateful to the families who participated, particularly the children and teens who came to the lab three times over the course of a year and shared their life experiences with us. Learn more on our website: <https://www.healthanddevelopmentlaboratory.com/>



The Health and Resilience Project (HARP) continues our work to better understand the effects of stress on the health of African Americans in two groups: young adults between 18 and 24 years of age and families with youth 10 to 13. If you know people who might be interested in participating, send them our way!

Learn about participating in HARP



<https://cfr.uga.edu/harp/>

Are you helping bridge the gaps in knowledge?

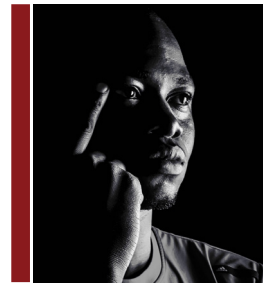
Much of what we know about people from science is from research conducted with White people. Some of that knowledge applies to Black people as well, but some might not. Fortunately, researchers have been expanding their limited view to include more Black people in their research. The Jackson Heart Study in Mississippi, for instance, is a large study of the environmental and genetic factors associated with cardiovascular disease among African Americans and how they can be protected from the diseases.

At CFR, we have been studying how stress from racism and other forms of oppression affect the health of Black youth and how the strength of Black families can protect youth from negative outcomes. Participating in this kind of research helps bridge the gap in our knowledge of things that can help African Americans live healthier, happier lives.

CFR held a Family Fun Day at the Lake Herrick pavilion on the campus of UGA for participants in our Health and Resilience Project (HARP). Families with kids of all ages, and our staff, enjoyed food, games, and lots of socializing during the event. We are grateful for the families who participate in our projects.



We have followed a group of young, Black men from rural Georgia for nearly 10 years as they transition to adulthood. Through the **African American Men's Project (AMP)**, we are trying to understand how structural racism and the legacy of oppression influences their health and development. We are using unique methods to learn if the specific location where they live improves or worsens the effects of racial disparities they experience. We want to better understand how these influences affect men's well-being and ways that families, friends, and romantic partners may support men's development despite structural racism.



Strong Families Tip > Create a predictable homelife



Sometimes routines can feel boring. Every day or every week is predictable. Dinner is usually around 6 pm. Sunday lunch is always at grandma's house. And bedtime on school nights is always at 10. But this kind of predictability creates security for kids. Consider the opposite of this for them, chaos: not knowing for sure when or if things will happen; where they will be; who they can expect to be around and when. That kind of uncertainty can create anxiety and behavior problems that can contribute to even more chaos. There is security and comfort in knowing what to expect.

It can be hard to create a predictable routine at home because work schedules change, and life just happens. But it is important to strive for as much routine as possible when there are kids in your home. Some of it just happens. Grandma, for example, insists on that Sunday lunch. But work to create routines where you can. Homework comes before TV or computer time. Kids rotate who helps clean up from dinner. Fridays are spaghetti night. Dad plays basketball with the kids for a while on Saturdays. These help define your family and create predictability that helps children.

Good relationships and your health



Can good relationships help your health? It is one of the questions we are answering in **The Family and Community Health Study (FACHS)** in which we continue to research how family processes, neighborhood characteristics, and other factors affect Black families. Aging biologically faster than your actual age is a major contributor to early onset of heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, dementia and other diseases of old age. Recently, we examined the impact of feeling more socially involved (less lonely) on the pace of biological aging across middle age. We found that the more socially involved people are, the slower the pace of biological aging across an 11-year period regardless of things like smoking and alcohol consumption. The results support the value of protecting and increasing social connections across middle age.

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CFR in Numbers

5000+

the number of families who have participated in CFR research

Learn more about CFR at <https://cfr.uga.edu>

Research | Insights | Intervention

Research that makes a difference in the lives of African American families

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