

Center on Trauma and Adversity



JACK, JOSEPH AND MORTON MANDEL
SCHOOL OF APPLIED SOCIAL SCIENCES
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Dr. Megan R. Holmes is an Associate Professor and Founding Director of the Center on Trauma and Adversity. She has over 10 years of clinical practice and research experience working in the field of child exposure to domestic violence, which continues to be a serious and highly prevalent social problem that can negatively affect children's behavioral and mental health outcomes both in the short term and over the life course. Nationally, an estimated 15 million children are exposed to domestic violence each year and approximately a quarter of all children will be exposed before they turn 18. In her social work practice, Dr. Holmes saw firsthand the devastating effect of domestic violence exposure on children, but she noticed that not all exposed children displayed such problems. In fact, some children continued to thrive and achieve adaptive development despite early adverse life experiences. This observation serves as the foundation of her research agenda, which is to contribute to the optimal development of children exposed to domestic violence by discovering and developing new knowledge regarding risk and protective factors that will be translated into interventions. Dr. Holmes's NIH- and ACYF-funded research has established that there are long-term detrimental effects for children when they are exposed to domestic violence before the age of 5, indicating that interventions need to be targeted toward young children in order to prevent future problems (Holmes, 2013; Holmes, Voith, & Gromoske, 2015). She also has identified that that over 40% of children who are exposed to domestic violence or maltreated have resilient development of prosocial skills and academic functioning over time, and that protective factors such as caregiver responsiveness significantly contributed to these resilient outcomes despite experiencing domestic violence exposure or child maltreatment (Holmes, Yoon, Berg, Cage, & Perzynski, 2018a; Holmes et al., under review).

Building on this research, Dr. Holmes recently completed a multi-study statewide project funded by HealthPath Foundation of Ohio to examine the effects of domestic violence exposure on Ohio's children, identify the resources and services available to these children and families, and estimate the impact of child exposure to domestic violence on Ohio's economy. This study made the nation's first estimate of the economic burden of child exposure to domestic violence, which amounts to \$55 billion dollars a year to the US economy (\$2.2 billion to Ohio and nearly \$45 million to the City of Cleveland) in the form of increased healthcare costs, increased crime costs, and reduced productivity (Holmes, Votruba, Richter, Berg, & Bender, 2018b). The results of this multi-study statewide project were written in a public-facing white paper with recommendations for how the state of Ohio can better serve children exposed to domestic violence (Holmes, Votruba, Richter, Berg, & Bender, 2017). Among the recommendations, this research highlighted the great need to develop and support a coordinated statewide response among all child-serving systems as well as initiating trauma-informed care trainings for staff in settings that frequently interact with children such as in schools and hospitals. Two projects have stemmed from the white paper that are directly addressing the recommendations. The first is a partnership with the Ohio Attorney General's office in a Department of Justice-funded demonstration project aimed to identify and promote healing for victims of crime, coordinate prevention and intervention services to youth and families experiencing trauma and victimization, and build capacity within communities to meet the needs of youth exposed to violence. Dr. Holmes is creating a statewide electronic resource directory that will link victimized children, youth and families quickly to evidence-based programs that are in close

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proximity to them. The second project is a partnership with the City of Cleveland in transforming the city's 22 recreation centers into the nation's first system of trauma-informed recreation centers. The goal of this project is to create a safe space for children and youth, train staff about trauma and how they can respond in a trauma-sensitive ways, and build peer support and resiliency to secondary trauma among staff. Dr. Holmes is working closely with recreation center staff to identify organization changes and individual behavioral shifts in how staff respond to youth in order to better align with the principles of trauma-informed care (i.e., safety, empowerment, peer support, trustworthiness, collaboration, and understanding of historical, gender and cultural trauma).

Particular areas of focus for Dr. Holmes include:

- Intimate partner violence/domestic violence exposure
- Child maltreatment
- Sibling relationships and maternal parenting
- Early childhood development
- Trauma-informed systems and organizations

At the Mandel School, Dr. Holmes teaches Direct Practice Foundation Methods and Skills and Theory and Practice Approaches in Direct Practice Social Work in the master's degree program. To teach these courses, she uses interactive technology and active learning strategies aimed at promoting student engagement through in-class dynamic activities and learning experiences. She also teaches the Research Synthesis and Systematic Review Methodology course in the doctoral program.

Dr. Holmes is passionate about her ongoing work with the Mandel School doctoral and master's students. She provides multiple training opportunities to learn essential research and scholarship skills to facilitate the development of becoming a productive independent scholar. For example, under the mentorship of Dr. Holmes, students obtain authorship on publications; learn the process of grant writing; present research at national conferences; and develop their own clear independent research and scholarship plan. Her federal and foundation grants provide funded research opportunities to her students. She mentors students in writing their own NIH F31 grant applications to fund dissertation research. She also welcomes the opportunity for doctoral students to participate in a teaching mentorship for her current courses.