

Sonia Minnes, PhD

Biography (2023)

Sonia Minnes is the Verna Houck Motto Professor of Social Work at the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences (MSASS) and Research Director at the Schubert Center for Child Studies, Case Western Reserve University. She holds bachelor's and Master's degrees in psychology and a doctorate in social welfare from the Mandel School. Her research interests are in the study of child development, the multiple factors that affect cognitive and mental health outcomes, and the development of problematic substance use. Dr. Minnes studies risk and protective factors, both biological and environmental, that interact to affect developmental outcomes. Biologic risk factors of interest include prenatal drug exposure (opioid, cocaine, marijuana, alcohol, and tobacco) and elevated blood lead levels. Environmental factors of interest include exposure to ongoing stress, maternal psychopathology and substance use, out-of-home placement, and other conditions related to compromised opportunity and socioeconomic status.

Dr. Minnes was the Principal Investigator of a longitudinal study of prenatal cocaine exposure funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse. This study has now completed its fifth phase of data collection after 21 years. She and her colleagues followed a group of over 400 caregiver infant pairs since the children were born (1994-1996). Dr. Minnes is currently analyzing data from across childhood development and emerging adulthood and will evaluate participant substance use and antisocial behaviors, the development of mental health problems, and adaptive functioning. Through her work with multi-risk, prenatally drug-exposed children, she has recognized the importance of health disparities among inner-city children, particularly in regard to exposure to environmental hazards, including lead found in old housing stock and water in US cities.

Most recently, Dr. Minnes became the Research Director of the Schubert Center for Child Studies (September 2020), where she has collaborated with partners from CWRU's Department of Environmental Health and has worked to evaluate supportive after-school programming for middle and high school children in Cleveland and community programs that support families with young children (Louise Stokes Scholar House, Family Space, and Cuyahoga Safe Babies Court). Dr. Minnes has also joined the collaborative efforts of First Year Cleveland and the Mandel School to reduce disparities in infant mortality by serving as an advisor.