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Professor

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**Dr. Megan R. Holmes** is a Professor and Founding Director of the Center on Trauma and Adversity. She has nearly 20 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 et al., 2018](#); Holmes et al., in press).

Building on this research, Dr. Holmes 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 et al., 2018](#)). 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 et al., 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 ([Holmes et al., 2022](#); [Holmes et al., 2021](#)). 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 ([Holmes et al., 2023](#)). 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 works 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). Dr. Holmes received the 2023 CWRU Research Innovator of the Year award for her work with the City of Cleveland, which recognizes the CWRU community member who has demonstrated the greatest high level of innovation in research or translation activities over the previous academic year.

Dr. Holmes's work has also focused on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health and the ways in which individuals are building resilience and coping with the psychological stress of the pandemic. In March 2020, Dr. Holmes led a team of researcher to launch the *COVID-19 Pandemic and Emotional Well-Being Study*, a national prospective panel study of over 1,200 respondents, that examined the psychological effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on first responders, essential classified workers, and the general public. Findings indicate elevated levels of posttraumatic stress, anxiety, and depression ([Holmes et al., 2021](#)). She identified organizational support to reduce indirect trauma symptoms among social workers ([Holmes et al., 2021](#)) and conducted a qualitative analysis that defined social connection among frontline medical workers ([Bender\\* et al., 2021](#)) and parents ([Miller\\* et al., 2022](#)). Dr. Holmes also launched an ongoing longitudinal study in collaboration with her doctoral student, Kylie Evans, examining the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on social work doctoral students. Our first publication from this study contributed to the larger body of literature on factors associated with risk, resilience, and well-being among doctoral students, and it offers a specific exploration of these factors within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic ([Evans\\* et al., 2021](#)). This study also deepened our understanding of social work doctoral students, in particular, who have higher rates of doctoral enrollment by women and persons of color than many other academic disciplines.

Dr. Holmes's current program of research includes trauma-informed recreation centers, child exposure to domestic violence, and measurement development of sibling relationship quality.

Particular areas of focus for Dr. Holmes include:

- Intimate partner violence/domestic violence exposure
- Sibling relationships and maternal parenting
- Early childhood development
- Trauma-informed systems and organizations
- COVID-19 pandemic, collective trauma, and mental health

At the Mandel School, Dr. Holmes teaches Theory and Practice Approaches in Direct Practice Social Work in the master's degree program. Grounded in a trauma-informed approach, 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 mentoring undergraduate, masters, and doctoral 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. Dr. Holmes is also the Director of the Center on Trauma and Adversity Underrepresented Minority Research Scholars program.