

# Funding News

## Health Psychology Research Funded by CIHR's COVID-19 Rapid Response Call



Written by Lucas Walters (Ottawa)

*In February 2020, before COVID-19 had reached North America in large numbers, CIHR launched a COVID-19 rapid response funding opportunity for projects investigating issues related to the pandemic. Here, we highlight five health psychology research teams across Canada whose work was funded in this competition.*



Principal investigators Drs. Asmundson and Taylor with their research team

### COVID-19: The Role of Psychological Factors in the Spreading of Disease, Discrimination, and Distress

Principal Investigators: Drs. Gordon Asmundson and Steven Taylor  
Institution: University of Regina and University of British Columbia

Out of the University of Regina and the University of British Columbia, researchers are exploring various psychological factors that may influence the way we all experience the COVID-19 pandemic. The proposed studies will investigate the factors contributing to the spread of this virus, corresponding psychological distress, and the ways in which various populations face discrimination during these unprecedented times. A multi-wave longitudinal study of a large Canadian and American population-representative sample will be used to meet these goals. The first study in this project, now published in the *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, presents the development and validation of the COVID-19 Stress Scales, which capture fears and xenophobia that many are currently experiencing. Further to this, the COVID-19 Stress Scales will be used in a second study to identify other critical psychological constructs needed to better understand the impact and course of the pandemic. Additional studies will be published as the second and third waves of data become available. The hope is that this project will inform the creation of an online platform for public health assessments and for the dissemination of key information. The development and potential expansion of this platform could greatly contribute to our response to this virus and could help foster greater understanding and research into the impacts felt across the world.



Principal investigator Dr. Yue Qian

### City Shutdown as a Response to COVID-19: Understanding Human Experiences and Mental Health Consequences of the Quarantine in Wuhan

Principal Investigator: Dr. Yue Qian  
Institution: University of British Columbia

At the epicenter of this pandemic, the city of Wuhan recently experienced the largest and most aggressive human quarantine ever recorded, with 56 million residents in and around the city mandated



to stay home for over two months. Though heralded as the reason for the largely successful containment of the virus in China, Dr. Yue Qian from the University of British Columbia hypothesizes that such a quarantine is not without its negative mental health impacts. In five waves of an online study with a diverse sample of 8,000 adults in Wuhan, Dr. Qian will explore how a municipal quarantine affected participant's mental health. Further to this, the project hopes to identify unique challenges faced during quarantine, and the ways in which communities have responded with services and resources. Using this data, supplemented with in-depth interviews, trajectories of post-quarantine recovery will be explored to help us learn about how we, as individuals and communities, may mitigate the psychological impact felt from these quarantine measures. Many of these in-depth interviews are designed to capture data from vulnerable populations with unique healthcare needs, as well as their primary caregivers, in an effort to further our understanding of how quarantines as a public health response affect the mental health of citizens and their communities.



PI Dr. Roxane de la Sablonnière

### **La cohésion sociale est-elle possible en situation de crises multiples? L'influence des politiques publiques entourant le coronavirus (2019-nCoV) et les préjugés envers certains citoyens et citoyennes**

Principal Investigator: Dr. Roxane de la Sablonnière  
Institution: Université de Montréal

While this virus has spread across the world, researchers at the Université de Montréal are looking more closely at the impacts felt by Canadians, specifically those that may be marginalized or are experiencing xenophobia. With increases in persecutory attitudes and hateful feelings towards many of our citizens and immigrants, the current project hopes to understand the connection between this rise in prejudice and our emerging public health policies. With an emphasis on social cohesion, the researchers hope to expand beyond the analysis of public health policies to also include the study of social media and fake news. Using a longitudinal sample of 3500 Canadians recruited online, researchers hope to further understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed social cohesion in Canada. This research also aims to investigate the general adaptation mechanisms used by the population, and how we, as a country, have changed. Following this, a series of six experimental studies will be done to explore how effective public health officials and social media have been when producing messages related to COVID-19. Dr. Sablonnière explains: "Millions of people suffer everyday of [social] change, all over the world, even worse change than the COVID-19 crisis (colonization, wars, etc.). The good news is that because it touches us now, we might turn a closer eye to the psychology of social change and its impact on communities and individuals."





PI Shelby Yamamoto

### **Assessing and addressing the psychosocial impacts of COVID-19 among pregnant women and health care providers in Anhui, China**

Principal Investigators: Drs. Shelby Yamamoto, Keith S Dobson, Shahirose S Premji, Fang-Biao Tao, and Beibei Zhu  
Institution: University of Alberta

Dr. Yamamoto and a team of healthcare professionals from multiple Canadian and Chinese sites are working together to investigate the psychosocial impacts felt by pregnant women, infants, and health care providers in Anhui, China. Pregnancy is a well-known period of vulnerability for many women, most certainly during pandemic. Many women are faced with making difficult decisions to protect themselves and their loved ones whilst public health continues to implement restrictions and precautions. Similarly, healthcare providers also face heightened levels of risk and vulnerability during this pandemic. Working on the front lines, delivering services, and caring for others can have immense impacts on the physical, social, and mental wellbeing of our healthcare providers. Dr. Shelby Yamamoto and the entire research team hope to first assess potential impacts of this global pandemic on pregnant women in Ma'anshan, China. This first part of the study will be assessing depressive symptomology felt amongst these women, with the aim to implement a perinatal depression screening and management program. Following this, the team will evaluate the efficacy of a cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) intervention in reducing these mental health concerns. This study will then go beyond this intervention to explore potential adverse birth outcomes such as preterm births and various complications that may result from births during and after COVID-19. Similarly, anxiety in healthcare providers will then be assessed to further understand perinatal health care not only from the patient perspective, but also from that of the provider. By studying pregnant women, infants, and healthcare providers, this study will illuminate how COVID-19 continues to impact some of the most vulnerable members of our communities and healthcare systems during this global pandemic.



Copyright © 2020 Miguel Medina  
Contributor/Getty Images

### **Understanding and mitigating real-time differential gendered effects of the COVID-19 outbreak**

Principal Investigators: Drs. Kelley Lee, Julia Smith and Clare Wenham  
Institution: Simon Fraser University

Those identifying as women are disproportionately affected by the impact of public health policies related to COVID-19. Researchers at Simon Fraser University are working to make gender and health a spotlight in their conversations about the current viral pandemic. Using a gender analysis to understand the differential effects experi-



enced by women, this project hopes to map infection and mortality rates in Canada. With approximately 70% of global healthcare workers being female, it is predicted that COVID-19 will disproportionately affect women. This project is being done to identify these gendered gaps in healthcare and our social response to COVID-19, in an effort to address these inequalities a priori, rather than post-pandemic. In collaboration with public health, this project will document gendered differences and patterns within the data through chatroom and social media analyses. Even further, an analysis of national and global responses will then be done to understand how these effects interact with policies made here in Canada, and around the world. The cumulative work produced will help create an online tool; the COVID-19 Gender Matrix, which will help inform future policies and public health bodies as they respond to global pandemics and potential outbreaks.

