



Positively impacting on the lives of vulnerable populations

Drs Christine Wekerle, Amanda Hudson and Sherry Stewart share a vision of fostering science knowledge exchange in areas with gaps, such as child sexual abuse. Here, they elaborate on their specific research endeavours and what they hope the positive impacts will be

Can you begin by providing a brief introduction to your respective backgrounds?

CW: My background is clinical psychology, with a specialisation in child and family. I have focused on conceptualisations and intervention as, broadly defined, it relates to parenting and family violence. I have been primarily interested in the impact of maltreatment on the adolescent period of development and the opportunities for positive change in this high-growth time frame. Adolescents are re-ordering their world, and relationships can be vehicles for risk or resilience.

AH: I'm a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Psychology and Neuroscience at Dalhousie University and a sessional instructor at the University of Prince Edward Island. I first became interested in addictions research during graduate school, when I collaborated on several projects in the Centre for Addictions Research at Dalhousie. My postdoctoral research has focused on several topics related to alcohol use and problems.

SS: My research primarily focuses on addictive disorders. As a clinical psychologist, I am most interested in understanding psychological mechanisms involved in the development of addictive behaviours such as personality factors, emotional distress and motivational contributions.

What inspires you about the work that you do?

CW: Being able to connect internationally with groups across the life of this team grant energises the research project development side, as the grant is positioned to fund pilot or feasibility work. The enthusiasm for collaboration and the consonance with the emergent science-health-practice-policy

landscape in different countries has been inspiring. What inspires me the most is brave individuals who express their story and find ways to become part of the solution.

AH: I'm interested in examining pathways that lead to alcohol use and problems, with a primary focus on motivations, personality and mood/emotional symptoms as explanatory factors. However, more recently I've become interested in extending this area of work to specific populations, including reproductive-aged women, youth involved with child welfare services, and victims of childhood sexual assault.

SS: Much of my work is aimed at identifying potential psychological targets for treatment, and understanding risk and protective factors in hopes that this knowledge will be used to develop more effective early interventions and prevention initiatives, as well as more effective treatments for those already affected by co-occurring emotional disorders and addictive problems.

Can you tell us about your current research goals?

CW: To be an effective catalyst for collaboration and to be focused on innovation in engaging and educating in child maltreatment, as well as to examine child sexual abuse in the context of child welfare-involved youth with the Maltreatment and Adolescent Pathways Research Study's secondary analyses. This will provide a stronger base to move forward with a better needs-to-service match and intervention studies.

AH: My main research goals involve identifying risk factors for alcohol-related problems, and recognising the similarities and differences in

risk factors for various populations, including differences between men and women.

SS: My current research goals are centred on furthering our understanding of the pathways that lead to (or protect against) emotional and addictive disorders.

Finally, what plans do you have for the future, on both a personal and professional level?

CW: I wish I could be a rock star! However, that would require my having a singing voice! For now, I'll remain content to craft my writing to the Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin and Robert Plant songs. You need a strong counter-balance to the misery of the reality of child abuse and neglect. I'd like to see child abuse prevention recognised as foundational to sustainable healthcare models, and I would be humbled to be a part of the realisation of the Peace and Justice Global Goal.

AH: I hope to continue to build my research programme to add to our current understanding of factors that confer vulnerability to (or establish resilience against) alcohol misuse and alcohol-related problems. I would like to see this research translated to clinical practice, in order to develop more fine-tuned treatments for addictive disorders. I would also like to become more active in knowledge dissemination efforts, and to continue to be an advocate for a sex- and gender-centred approach to addictions research and treatment.

SS: I'm interested in increasing my work on the link of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and addictive disorders (potentially extending to PTSD and cannabis misuse in the military), and continuing to extend and share my research findings with the community and practising clinicians.