Supervisor/Project Information Form

Comprehensive Research Experience for Medical Students
Summer Research Program 2021

Due February 24, 2021 by email to crems.programs@utoronto.ca

Supervisor Name:  Madison Aitken, Ph.D., C.Psych.

Project Title:  Changes in Parent-Youth Relationship Quality during a Psychosocial Intervention for Youth Self-Harm

Hospital/Research Institution: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

Email: madison.aitken@camh.ca

Field of Research (2 keywords): youth mental health; clinical trials

Department: Division of Child and Youth Psychiatry

School of Graduate Studies Appointment (IMS, LMP, IHPME etc)? Yes/No:  No

If YES, please name:
Brief Project Description (<300 words):

Self-harm, including suicide attempts and non-suicidal self-injury, is prevalent among youth, with 4% reporting that they attempted suicide in the past year and 17% reporting a history of non-suicidal self-injury. Rates of youth self-harm and completed suicide have increased in the last decade and intervention for youth self-harm remains a clinical challenge. In recent years, an increasing number of clinical trials have focused on family interventions in an attempt to improve outcomes.

Expressed emotion, the extent to which an individual expresses criticism and emotional over-involvement toward their family member with mental health difficulties, is an important indicator of problems in the relationship between youth and parents. High levels of parent expressed emotion are associated with more self-harm and suicidal ideation and predict recurrence of self-harm following hospital admission for a self-harm incident. This project will examine changes in parent expressed emotion during a psychosocial intervention for youth self-harm.

Using existing data from a large randomized controlled trial conducted in the United Kingdom (N = 832) comparing family therapy with treatment as usual (TAU) for youth self-harm, this project will: 1) identify trajectories of parent expressed emotion across treatment (baseline, 3-, and 6-months) using growth mixture modeling; and 2) test for differences in expressed emotion trajectories in family therapy vs. TAU. By understanding how parent-youth relationship quality changes across psychosocial intervention, we may be better able to personalize interventions for youth who self-harm based on identified challenges in the parent-youth relationship.

This project is fully remote capable. The student will learn basic and advanced data analysis skills, conduct a literature review, and co-author a manuscript and/or conference submission. Students interested in supplementing this experience can participate in data collection or fidelity observations for an ongoing, fully remote trial of a caregiver intervention for youth depression at CAMH.