

Bringing Research to LIFE

Upcoming Events

Café Scientifique

Breast Cancer Research: What does the future hold?

Tuesday, October 3, 2011
at 7:00 p.m.

McNally Robinson Booksellers
1120 Grant Avenue

Ethical Considerations in Research

Wednesday October 12, 2011
1:00 to 3:30 pm

Samuel Cohen Auditorium
St. Boniface Research Centre
351 Tache Avenue, Winnipeg

For more information, please contact: sorianor@cc.umanitoba.ca

Visionary Conversations

Livable Cities: 21st Century Perspectives

Tuesday, October 18, 2011

Reception: 6:30 to 7:00 p.m.
Panel Discussion: 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.

Robert B. Schultz Theatre
St. John's College
Fort Garry Campus

RSVP to: government_relations@umanitoba.ca

For more information, please visit: www.umanitoba.ca/about/vc/

6th Annual Undergraduate Research Poster Competition

Thursday, October 27, 2011
1:00 to 4:30 p.m.

Manitoba Rooms 210-224
University Centre, Fort Garry campus

Forms to be submitted by September 30, 2011, to:

Shellie Johannesson
207 Administration Building
Fort Garry Campus

For more information, visit: <http://umanitoba.ca/research/postercompetition/index.html>

Physical Punishment

Fuelling an informed debate



Photo by Dan Gwozdz

Dr. Tracie Affi, who joined the Faculty of Medicine in 2010 as an assistant professor, focuses her research on the mental and physical health correlates of physical punishment, resilience following child maltreatment, and effective family violence interventions.

BY MELNI GHATTORA

"You often will hear people say things like 'Well, I was hit when I was kid and I turned out fine, so it's fine.' Some people use their own personal experiences to determine if they believe it's safe or not safe to use physical punishment as a means of child discipline. This creates challenges in terms of changing peoples' minds about whether or not they should hit their children," says Tracie Affi.

In her line of work the taboo topic of conversation isn't religion or politics, instead Affi finds child maltreatment and child physical punishment a challenging area of dialogue.

"It's definitely controversial and I think the more we can communicate that child physical punishment is associated with poor mental health outcomes, that's something that could help to change peoples' mind on if they should be using physical force as a means of discipline," explains Affi.

The assistant professor in the Department of Community Health Sciences, focuses a large portion of her study on family violence, with a specific interest in child maltreatment, physical punishment and intimate partner violence. "I'm interested in the mental and physical health correlates of these types of family violence and I'm also interested in looking at prevention and intervention strategies," says Affi.

To determine how physical punishment is associated with mental and physical health outcomes, "we're looking at individuals who were only physically punished and didn't experience child abuse, which is a novel advance in the literature because often when researchers look at physical punishment they don't also consider whether or not the individuals were

abused," she explains. "Our research creates three groups: individuals who didn't experience child abuse or physical punishment, individuals who experienced physical punishment only, and then individuals who experienced child abuse, with or without physical punishment."

Affi feels there is a lot of debate around the use of physical punishment, generally speaking, in the academic literature. While some people think that it's not harmful to the individual as long as you're a loving parent who is using physical punishment as a form of discipline, others believe it is a harmful method of discipline that has consequences for the individual on the receiving end.

"We are trying to further this research by informing this debate. We are finding that physical punishment on its own, individuals who experienced physical punishment as a means of discipline but don't experience more severe forms of child maltreatment, have an increased likelihood of mental health problems compared to individuals who didn't experience child abuse or physical punishment," says Affi.

She adds, "It's definitely something we need more information and data on and certainly more discussion so that we can provide parents with alternate forms of discipline that do not include physical means. I think communicating these research findings to the general population within community forums is a really important key and that is something we will work to do once we have the findings complete."

Interestingly, the data used in her research is a nationally representative sample from the United States. To date, Canada does not have data on child maltreatment at a national level and in order to look at these types

of relationships Affi has to consult data that represents the American population.

She will publish findings this fall which speak to that problem.

"Child maltreatment is an understudied public health problem within Canada and we need to encourage Canadian data collection. Currently, we don't have anything that is equivalent to what is available in the United States," says Affi.

The findings also examine how collecting Canadian data can be done relatively easily with the resources that are already in place.

"Because we do collect a lot of great nationally representative information through institutions like Statistics Canada, for example, this could be implemented in surveys that are ongoing by just simply adding a child maltreatment module, as few as five questions," says Affi. "We hope that these questions will be included in national Canadian surveys in the near future."

Some Canadian data do exist such as the Canadian Incidence Survey of Reported Abuse and Neglect (CIS). These data are a rich and interesting source, but the records are limited and are not representative of child maltreatment within Canada.

Affi feels it is important to further this data collection within the province of Manitoba, something she plans to do in the future, but also to encourage a larger scale data collection within Canada.

"I've published many studies on child maltreatment and the majority of this work uses data from the United States, but what's really important for policy development and population-based intervention strategies are to further child maltreatment research within the Canadian context."