

Meet the Speakers

MSU Autism Conference - 2021

"MSU Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disabilities Family and Professionals Day"



ZAKIA ALAVIA, MD

Michigan State University, CHM Department of Pediatric and Human Development

Zakia Alavia will be presenting "MC3 Connect Grant"

Zakia Alavi MD is a Diplomat of American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology in general psychiatry and child & adolescent psychiatry. Dr. Alavi obtained her medical education Dow Medical University, Pakistan. She completed her residency in psychiatry, followed by a fellowship in child psychiatry, from Wayne State University. Currently, Dr. Alavi is engaged in providing psychiatric services through the Community Mental Health clinic in Jackson Michigan. Dr. Alavi is the chief medical officer for Midstate Health Network, which is a Medicaid Managed Care Organization, providing behavioral health services for 21 counties in Michigan. In 2009, Dr. Alavi served as the Medical Director for Children Services- Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. Here, Dr. Alavi developed and implemented health coordination for all foster children in Michigan. In 2012, Dr. Alavi joined the academic faculty at Michigan State University, College of Human Medicine, which has since, become her academic home.

Dr. Zakia Alavi is currently serving as an Associate Professor in the Department of Pediatrics and Human Development. Her academic responsibilities include teaching medical students integration between basic and clinical sciences. For the Dept. of Pediatrics, Dr. Alavi is involved in developing a telemedicine pilot, which will provide psychiatric and neurodevelopmental consultation to pediatricians in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Dr Alavi is also a co-moderator for the International Collaborative Office Rounds 2(ICOR2), an Inter-professional monthly meeting of US and international clinicians, that includes Primary Care Pediatricians, Developmental Pediatricians and Child psychiatrists. Dr. Alavi has published several peer reviewed articles ranging from polypharmacy in foster children to more recently, about COVID-19 and its impact on the patients served by the community mental health systems.



B. Keith English, MD

Professor and Chair, Department of Pediatrics and Human Development, MSU College of Human Medicine

Dr. English is the Professor and Chair of the Department of Pediatrics and Human Development in the College of Human Medicine at Michigan State University. Prior to this, Dr. English spent 23 years on the faculty at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center in Pediatric Infectious Diseases and served as Director of Pediatric Infectious Diseases at Le Bonheur Children's Hospital for 17 years. His laboratory in Memphis focused on innate immunity - primarily macrophage responses to Gram-positive bacteria and their products. Dr. English served as the laboratory research mentor for more than 20 post-doctoral fellows (Pediatric Infectious Diseases, Pediatric Critical Care Medicine, Pediatric Emergency Medicine, Neonatology) over the past two decades and developed and ran a faculty mentoring program for pediatric faculty at UTHSC before moving to Michigan. Additionally, Dr. English was extensively involved in the Memphis-area response to the 2009 H1N1 flu pandemic (and was honored for these efforts with several awards, including the Tennessee chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics' "Pediatrician Of The Year" award in 2010).

Dr. English came to MSU because of the opportunity to build pediatric research in partnership with the expansion of academic pediatrics in Grand Rapids (in partnership with Helen DeVos Children's Hospital) and with basic and social science colleagues in East Lansing. He played a major role in the development and expansion of pediatric research in Memphis before moving to Michigan and served in many leadership roles (including President) in the Southern Society for Pediatric Research. There are two major focuses of our expanding pediatric research program at MSU -- developmental biology and precision/genomic/omic medicine.



MARISA FISHER, PHD

Michigan State University, College of Education

Dr. Marisa Fisher will be presenting “Descriptions of Bullying Experiences of Adolescents with ASD: Differences between Parent and Student Report”

Marisa Fisher is an associate professor of special education and a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst- Doctoral (BCBA-D). Her research focuses on understanding and decreasing social vulnerability among individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and supporting the social acceptance of individuals with IDD in the community. She is specifically interested in measuring the various types of victimization experienced by individuals with IDD and in designing interventions to decrease vulnerability. She has studied victimization in the forms of child abuse, bullying, stranger danger, and exploitation across the lifespan. She is currently completing a study to develop a self-report bullying assessment that is easy to understand and accessible for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to complete.



MIRA JOURDAN, PHD

Michigan State University, College of Human Medicine, Psychiatry

Dr. Mira Jourdan will be presenting on “From Friendships to Romantic Satisfaction: Supporting Autistic Young Adults”

Dr. Mira Jourdan (Krishnan) is a board-certified neuropsychologist with more than five years of independent practice experience. She is clinically trained in diverse areas, including neurological disorders, acquired brain injury, neurodevelopmental disorders, and impacts of complex trauma. Dr. Jourdan has devoted a significant portion of her clinical practice to autism evaluation and treatment planning.



REBECCA KNICKMEYER, PHD

Michigan State University, CHM Department of Pediatric and Human Development

Rebecca Knickmeyer is an associate professor in the Department of Pediatrics and Human Development in the College of Human Medicine and a member of the Institute for Quantitative Health Sciences. She received her Ph.D. in Experimental Psychology from the University of Cambridge (U.K.) in 2005 and completed her postdoctoral training in the Neurodevelopmental Disorders Research Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Dr. Knickmeyer has 20+ years' experience working at the cutting-edge of cognitive developmental neuroscience. She is the author of over 80 scientific publications including manuscripts in high impact journals such as *Science*, *PLOS Biology*, and *Biological Psychiatry*. She is director of ORIGINS (the Organization for Imaging Genomics in Infancy), serves on the editorial board of *Molecular Autism*, and is internationally recognized for her research, which seeks to identify genes and molecular pathways associated with altered brain development in infancy and early childhood through the integration of pediatric neuroimaging with cutting-edge techniques in genomics, metagenomics, and analytical chemistry.



JOEL MAATMAN

Maatman and Associates

Joel Maatman will be presenting "Ways to communicate with Law Enforcement"

Maatman and Associates is a limited liability company run by Joel Maatman . The business specializes in police training from Autism for first responders to Michigan PA 330 certification and yearly PA 330 re-certification training. Maatman is a retired 40+ year law enforcement professional who currently trains many police agencies as well as PA 330 agencies.

During his 40+ years in Law Enforcement, Joe worked for the Ottawa County Sheriff's Office as a reserve deputy, the Allegan County Sheriff's Office, the Lansing Police Department, Lansing School District Public Safety Office and the Ingham County Sheriff's Office. He is also an Adjunct Professor for Lansing Community College, working in Academics, Homeland Security training and In-Service Law Enforcement training for over 30 years.

Joel certified the Lansing School District Public Safety Office, in PA 330 training in 2005. The Unit became the first public school safety unit to be licensed and certified under PA 330 in the state of Michigan. Joel continues to train them annually under PA 330 yearly re-certification program. In 2021, Joel certified several new Lansing School District Public Safety Officers and Sparrow Security Officers under MCOLES certification training.

Joel's police experience from patrol to police administrator, his long Community College instruction experience and his Autism and PA 330 certification training is recognized by MCOLES.



STEVE PASTYRNAK, PHD

Spectrum Health, Helen DeVos Children’s Hospital

Dr. Steve Pastyrnak will be presenting “Sexuality and Boundries”

Steve Pastyrnak, Ph.D. is the Section Chief for the Pediatric Psychologists at Spectrum Health, Helen DeVos Children’s Hospital. He also maintains an academic affiliation as an adjunct associate professor with the Michigan State University College of Human Medicine and an academic affiliation with Grand Valley State University. Dr. Pastyrnak is celebrating his 24th year working in the Grand Rapids area. His clinical and research interests have included developmental follow up of high risk newborns, autism spectrum disorders, anxiety, ADHD, dyslexia and child development.



MANDY SOSNOSKI

Parent from C-RAIND Research

Mandy Sosnoski will be presenting “Approximately 20% of school age children report being bullied in the last year. Children with neurodevelopmental differences such as autism, learning disabilities, ADHD are at higher risk of being bullied and bullying other children. Of those who are bullied, only 30% tell an adult about it.”

As a parent of a child with autism I cannot begin to tell you how painfully difficult it can be to know and see that your child has been bullied. As stated, the percentage of children with neurodevelopmental differences who report being bullied is 30 percent. The 30 percent likely represents those children who are verbal and have some ability to advocate for themselves. The truth of the matter is that even when a child with autism is verbal and can advocate for themselves, they often struggle with the proper emotion and language to do so. My discussion will explore why this is and how children with ASD can be supported by peers and adults if they are being bullied.



AKSHEYA SRIDHAR, MA

Michigan State University, Clinical Psychology Program

Aksheya Sridhar "We're Black first and everything else is next": At the intersection of anti-Black racism and autism.

Aksheya is a 3rd year doctoral student in the Clinical Science program in Psychology at Michigan State University. As a graduate student in the Accessing Community Treatments (ACT) lab, her research aims to increase the implementation and utilization of evidence-based practices developed for children with ASD in community-based and low-resource settings. Her research specifically focuses on methods for addressing barriers to implementation, through the use of implementation guides and evidence-based implementation strategies. Overall, her research aims to bridge the research-to-practice gap by using implementation science to increase access to ASD interventions for children receiving services in community-based organizations, with the ultimate goal of improving conditions for this population. In addition to this line of research, Aksheya's clinical training includes working with children and families with autism, anxiety, depression, and general behavioral concerns.



MANDY STEWART, PHD

Superintendent of Charlotte Public School

Dr. Mandy Steward will be presenting on "How Public Schools Respond to Bullying Behaviors?"

Dr. Mandy R. Stewart has worked in education for more than 20 years as a teacher, Principal and currently as the Superintendent of Charlotte Public Schools. She earned her Ph.D. from Wayne State University and is passionate about bringing that knowledge back to the public school system that directly influences our children. Mandy's research experiences connect with her areas of interest: acceptance of diversity in our school system and socio-economic disparities in academic success. She was appointed to the Governor's Educator Advisory Council in 2020, and currently serves as Vice-Chairperson. The GEAC has advised our Governor on topics like: Recruitment and Retention of Educators of Color, Creation of a MI Poet Laureate, Professional Development for Educators, 3rd grade Reading Law, Michigan Merit Curriculum, and Social Justice and Anti-Racist materials. In her free time, Mandy enjoys reading, spending time with her family, and volunteering as a proud baseball mom.



DIONDRA STRAITON, MA

Michigan State University, Clinical Psychology Program

Diondra Straiton will be presenting "We're Black first and everything else is next": At the intersection of anti-Black racism and autism.

Diondra Straiton, M.A., is a doctoral student in Michigan State University's clinical psychology program. She holds a master's degree in clinical psychology from Michigan State University and a bachelor's degree from Swarthmore College in psychology and educational studies. Her research focuses on using implementation strategies like consultation to support providers in using evidence-based practices for ASD in community settings, with an emphasis on lower-resourced settings. Her recent work has focused on supporting applied behavior analysis providers to use parent training interventions for autistic youth within the Medicaid system



Barbara Thompson, PHD

Michigan State University, CHM Department of Pediatric and Human Development

Barbara Thompson, Assistant Professor in the College of Human Medicine's Department of Pediatrics and Human Development, studies social and emotional neurodevelopment. As a trained behavioral neuroscientist, Dr. Thompson uses behavioral, molecular, and physiological techniques to study the impact of environmental and genetic perturbations on brain development. Having extensively studied limbic circuitry and how disruptions alter affective processing, as well as how prenatal disruptions in reward circuitry lead to significant changes in behavior and cellular functions throughout development, Dr. Thompson now merges these interests in her own laboratory. Her research program explores the neurobiological underpinnings of neurodevelopmental disorders in which disruptions in both affect and reward can have detrimental effects. Utilizing a combination of techniques in basic science and clinical research, Dr. Thompson's laboratory explores functional disruptions in behavior and attempts to elucidate the underlying neural changes responsible for these disruptions. The long-term goals of her studies are to better understand these functional disruptions and responsible neural circuitry, thereby allowing for the design of individualized interventions for individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders.



CHIOMA TORRES, MD

Michigan Medicine, University of Michigan

Dr. Chioma Torres will be presenting "Disparities in diagnosis and management for children with ASD"

Chioma is a graduate of Michigan State University College of Human Medicine in 2010. She completed residency at Phoenix Children's Hospital/Maricopa County Pediatric Residency Program in 2013. She then practiced both in private practice and in academic pediatrics for 5 years prior to starting fellowship at University of Michigan in Development and Behavioral Pediatric in 2018. She has a specific interest in inequities in medicine and children with disabilities.