

2022-2023 Health Disparities Research Education Program (HDREP) SCHOLAR DIRECTORY



Luma Akil, PhD, MS, CPH

Assistant Professor, Occupational and Environmental Health
Department of Behavioral and Environmental Health
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**HDREP 2022
OHDR**

Dr. Luma Akil is an Assistant Professor at Jackson State University, School of Public Health, Department of Behavioral and Environmental Health. Her research program focuses on Environmental and Public Health with a special emphasis on food safety. She utilizes various statistical methodologies and modeling approaches to understand the effects of environmental and climatic changes on human diseases such as: foodborne illnesses, infectious diseases (such as: COVID 19), respiratory diseases, obesity and heart disease. Some of the modeling approaches she has used to forecast and predict these health effects include Neural Network models, GIS maps and Risk Assessment.



Reed Bratches, PhD, MPH, MALS

Postdoctoral Fellow
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**HDREP 2022
RCMAR**

Dr. Reed Bratches is a postdoctoral fellow at UAB's Center for Outcomes and Effectiveness Research and Education. Reed received his PhD from Dartmouth's Institute for Health Policy and Clinical Practice. His research focuses on family caregivers and triadic communication, with a particular interest in communicating information from clinic visits to patients and family caregivers. Outside the office, Reed can be found with his wife chasing their young son, or on the golf course.

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Victoria Churchill, PhD
Postdoctoral Fellow
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Dr. Victoria Churchill is originally from New England where she attended Smith College in Massachusetts, earning a bachelor's degree in Psychology and Theatre. She attended Boston University School of Public Health and graduated with her MPH in 2009. In 2018 she started the doctoral program at Georgia State University in Public Health. She defended her dissertation in 2022, which focused on issues of substance use and mental health.

Dr. Churchill is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Cancer Health Equity Center. She is interested in applying health communication strategies to develop and deliver targeted and effective messages to a variety of audiences, with the goal of reducing disparities in cancer prevention and treatment.

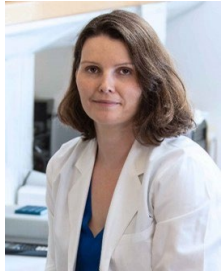


Chinenye R. Dike, MD
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**HDREP 2022
MHERC**

Dr. Chinenye R. Dike is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Pediatrics at UAB. She completed medical school in Nigeria, pediatric residency at the Children's Hospital of New Jersey at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center and pediatric gastroenterology fellowship at Stead Family, Department of Pediatrics University of Iowa. Currently, my research focuses on the use of nutritional interventions to improve outcomes in children with sickle cell anemia (SCA). I am interested in investigating and targeting the disparities that affect nutritional choices in children with SCA that would make implementation of a nutritional intervention challenging.

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Natalie Gassman, PhD
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Dr. Natalie Gassman is an Associate Professor in the Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology at UAB. She also holds a joint appointment in Nutrition Sciences. Her research examines the modulation of DNA repair from environmental and lifestyle exposures. She has developed a novel method for measuring DNA damage in tissue samples with the goal of integrating the DNA damage landscape with DNA repair dysfunction in cancers. Her work seeks to identify changes in DNA repair/DNA damage landscape of tumors to understand how exposures and comorbidities, like obesity and diabetes, influence tumor evasion and poor survival outcomes. Her current work examines how metabolic changes influence DNA damage and genomic instability to drive cancer initiation, progression, and therapeutic evasion in prostate and breast cancers.



Luciana Giorgio, PhD, MSW
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**HDREP 2022
RCMAR**

Dr. Luciana Giorgio is an Assistant Professor at the University of Alabama School of Social Work. She studies how social and cultural contexts influence sleep and cardiovascular health among Latinx individuals with the aim to promote health equity. Her current research examines the association of sociocultural stressors, coping strategies, and sleep health outcomes in this population. In the long-term, Dr. Giorgio will focus on developing and tailoring family-based interventions that promote optimal sleep health and reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease among Latina women and their families. She obtained her PhD in Advance Practice in Social Work with a concentration in Psychology at Columbia School of Social Work. Before completing her PhD training, Dr. Giorgio received a Master of Science in Social Work from Columbia School of Social Work with a concentration in Advance Practice and Programming and received a bachelor's degree in Psychology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

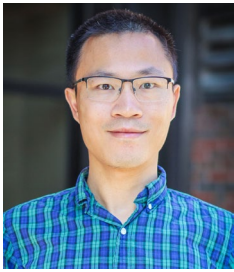
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Carrie Howell, PhD
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Dr. Carrie Howell is a behavioral scientist whose independent research focuses on using population health methodologies to explore how social determinants, particularly neighborhood level determinants, influence cardiometabolic abnormalities and disparities. She is specifically interested in integrating clinical, social determinant and health behavior data to inform the prevention of cardiometabolic disease to reduce health disparities among socially vulnerable, low SES populations. This includes incorporating SDoH data into risk prediction models to aide in stratifying populations based on both social and clinical parameters as well as exploring how social risks cluster within individuals.



Chen Huang, PhD
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Dr. Chen Huang is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Genetics at UAB. He earned his Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University and completed his postdoctoral training in the Baylor College of Medicine. He has been trained both in experimental biology and bioinformatics and has extensive experience in translating large-scale biomedical data into biological and clinical insights. Dr. Huang's long-term research is to develop innovative computational approaches to address the changes and maximize the opportunities presented by the multiomics data at different resolutions and scales and to drive the translational research for complex diseases, such as cancer.

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Dara James, PhD, MS

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**HDREP 2022
USA**

Dr. Dara L. James is an Assistant Professor and Research Faculty in the Community Mental Health Nursing Department in the College of Nursing at the University of South Alabama, and concurrently holds a position as Adjunct Faculty in the Edson College of Nursing and Health Innovation at Arizona State University. Dr. James received her doctorate in 2019, and completed her postdoctoral fellowship in 2022; both at Arizona State University. Dr. James' research focuses on health disparities, obesity and obesity-related diseases (i.e., dementia, cancer) through the lens of modifiable lifestyle interventions (i.e., diet, exercise). Currently, with her transdisciplinary team of mentors and Co-investigators at the University of South Alabama, University of Alabama and University of Alabama at Birmingham, Dr. James' research focuses on developing a culturally sensitive and racially-optimized intermittent fasting protocol to reduce obesity and related disease risk among minority populations in the Deep South.



Grace Jepkemboi, PhD

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**HDREP 2022
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Dr. Grace Jepkemboi is faculty at the UAB School of Education. Her ongoing interdisciplinary research focuses on health outcomes of adolescents who are at risk for HIV/AIDS in Sub Saharan African and the Caribbean. During this program, Dr. Jepkemboi will develop a grant plan to implement her interdisciplinary research with adolescents in Jefferson County, Alabama.

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Jabril Johnson, PhD
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Dr. Jabril Johnson is an Instructor in the Department of Microbiology, Biochemistry, and Immunology at Morehouse School of Medicine. Dr. Johnson attended Howard University where he received his doctorate in Human Genetics in 2016. He subsequently acquired higher education teaching certification through the National Science Foundation Alliances for Graduate Education and the Professoriate (NSF-AGEP) and Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) program. Dr. Johnson continued his training as a postdoctoral researcher at the National Institute of Health- National Cancer Institute, in Bethesda, MD and at the Beckman Research Institute at City of Hope, in Duarte, California. His postdoctoral training and expertise encompass cancer stem cell biology during mammary carcinogenesis and vitamin D impact on pathway signaling during prostate cancer development. Dr. Johnsons' research focuses on vitamin D immunomodulatory effects, immune signaling in the prostate microenvironment, and biomarkers in men at risk for or diagnosed with prostate cancer.



Seung-Yup (Joshua) Lee
Assistant Professor
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Dr. Seung-Yup (Joshua) Lee joined the Department of Health Services Administration as an Assistant Professor in July 2022. As a researcher in operations management and analytics, he has investigated methodologies to detect disproportionate resource use for individual patient-visits (i.e., reduced or increased use than other visits) and evaluated its implications through data-driven approaches. His study demonstrates evidence that disproportionate use of resource can compromise not only efficiency but also patient outcomes. He believes that the consideration of equity in resource utilization should be at the center of healthcare delivery with its significant implications on both efficiency and quality. Prior to joining UAB, Joshua was a Postdoctoral Fellow of Healthcare Analytics and Operations Management at Vanderbilt University Medical Center and the Owen Graduate School of Management at Vanderbilt. He earned MS and PhD in Industrial Engineering from Wayne State University.

2022-2023 Health Disparities Research Education Program (HDREP) SCHOLAR DIRECTORY



Sunila Mahavadi PhD
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Dr. Sunila Mahavadi received her PhD in Biotechnology from Acharya Nagarjuna University, India in 2010. She did an NIH postdoctoral fellowship in Gastrointestinal Physiology in the gastrointestinal group at the Medical College of Virginia/ Virginia Commonwealth University from 2010 through 2012. After completing her postdoctoral training, Dr. Mahavadi transitioned to faculty position, first as an Instructor in 2012 and then as a Research Assistant Professor in 2014 in the Department of Physiology and Biophysics at VCU. Dr. Mahavadi received an outstanding NIH/NIDDK early/new investigator R01 grant in 2021 and joined as a research associate professor in Tuskegee University.

Dr. Mahavadi's lab focuses on GPER expression via DNA methylation, which is negatively correlated with an increase in transcriptional repressor kaiso expression in male gastric adenocarcinoma, leading to tumor growth in African Americans versus European Americans, with collaboration from Dr. Douglas Morgan at UAB O'Neal Comprehensive Cancer Center. Dr. Mahavadi's lab is also interested in identifying differences in gastrointestinal (GI) smooth muscle function and intracellular signaling by estrogen receptor (GPER) in Type I (NOD) and Type II (db/db) diabetic mouse models.

Dr. Mahavadi is currently involved in training and guiding undergraduate, graduate, and post-doctoral fellows in Tuskegee University's RCMI group. She also assisted in the training and guidance of MS, PhD, and MD/PhD students, as well as post-doctoral fellows, in the GI group at VCU. She has also been involved in teaching GI Physiology in the DEBS 512 Physiology and Pathophysiology course for first year Dental students at VCU. Dr. Mahavadi has 50 publications as a co-author and 7 publications as the first author. She has been the recipient of the Young Investigator Award from American Neurogastroenterology and Motility Society in 2011. Dr. Mahavadi was awarded VCU CCTR grant and NIH/Augusta University, Diacomp Pilot and Feasibility Program grants in 2017, VCU VETAR grant in 2019, and TMCF|Novartis Faculty Research Grant in 2022.



Gabe H. Miller, PhD
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**HDREP 2022
RCMAR**

Dr. Gabe H. Miller is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. He earned a BA in Political Science and Africana Studies and PhD in Sociology from Texas A&M University. His research interests include political and policy determinants of health, population health and intersectionality, sexual and gender minority health disparities, and racial health disparities. Dr. Miller is currently funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) as a Health Equity Scholar for Action. His RWJF research broadly investigates political and policy determinants of sexual minority health and examines the impact of over 40 state-level LGBT-protective policies on a host of health outcomes for lesbian, gay, and bisexual people.

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Letisha Scott, DNP, CRNP, NP-C
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**HDREP 2022
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Dr. Letisha Scott is a Clinical Assistant Professor at The University of Alabama Capstone College of Nursing. She obtained her Master of Science in Nursing from the University of Alabama at Birmingham and her Doctor of Nursing Practice from The University of Alabama. Dr. Scott is a board-certified Family nurse practitioner with clinical expertise in primary care for pediatrics and adults, emergency nursing, and critical care nursing. Her research focuses on improving cardiovascular health across the lifespan. Dr. Scott is interested in implementing evidence-based-practice concepts to decrease minority health disparities especially in the areas of cardiovascular health, lupus, and cancer screenings.



Julia Ye-Jin Shin, EdD, MS, OTR/L, CKTP
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**HDREP 2022
Creighton**

Dr. Julia Shin is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Occupational Therapy at Creighton University. Her primary responsibilities include teaching in the foundational research courses for both the Entry-Level and Post-Professional Doctor of Occupational Therapy Programs, representing the department in the Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Standing Committee within the School of Pharmacy and Health Professions, and serving as a faculty advisor for the Coalition of Occupational Therapy Advocates for Diversity (COTAD) Chapter. Prior to joining Creighton University in 2017, Dr. Shin has provided family-centered occupational therapy services for children with various disabilities from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds in home, school, and clinic/hospital settings. As a bilingual/bicultural practitioner and researcher, Dr. Shin brings unique experiences and perspectives to promote culturally effective clinical practice and research processes. Most recently, Dr. Shin co-founded the Creighton University Culturally Effective Care (CEC) Lab that brought together an interdisciplinary team of experts in occupational therapy, physical therapy, and health services research. The CEC Lab has multiple on-going research projects that address racial-ethnic health disparities in rehabilitation, including a scoping review of available assessments measuring culturally effective care in rehabilitation practice. Dr. Shin is excited to share about her on-going work in this area as well as her insights gained from embracing culturally effective care as a clinician, educator, and researcher.

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Theodore Tomeny, PhD
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**HDREP 2022
RCMAR**

Dr. Theodore Tomeny is an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at The University of Alabama and core faculty in the Clinical Child concentration of the Clinical Psychology graduate program. He received his Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from The University of Southern Mississippi and completed his internship at Indiana University School of Medicine with an emphasis in autism. His research primarily focuses on the experiences of family members of individuals with autism spectrum disorder and other intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), with a particular focus on siblings and caregivers. Dr. Tomeny is interested in exploring long-term care for aging families of adults with IDD, including identifying barriers to planning for and obtaining said care.



Teneasha Washington, PhD, MPH, MBA
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**HDREP 2022
OHDR**

Dr. Teneasha Washington's current research focuses on serving as the lead of community engagement efforts for the Mindfulness, Exercise, Nutrition, to Optimize Resilience (MENTOR) program. In this role, she develops micro-funding announcement opportunities for local communities to implement programs relevant to their needs. In addition, she develops and provides in-person and online trainings focused on community engagement, program implementation, and building sustainable partnerships among communities, non-profits, and academia. She is a QM-certified professor teaching undergraduate and graduate students in the UAB School of Public Health on community organizing, social and behavioral sciences, intervention development, and research metho

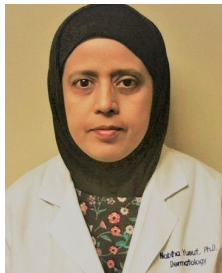
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**HDREP 2022
MHERC**

Dr. Lece Webb is an Assistant Professor in the Division of Pediatric Critical Care at UAB. She earned her medical degree from the University of Louisville. Dr. Webb completed her residency in Internal Medicine and Pediatrics at Greenville Health System/University of South Carolina at Greenville. She went on to complete her fellowship in Pediatric Critical Care at UAB. Her research interest is in understanding the impact of demographic, socioeconomic, and environmental factors on patient outcomes in critically ill children with the goal of developing strategies to reduce disparities in this population.



Nabihah Yusuf, PhD
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**HDREP 2022
OHDRC**

Dr. Nabihah Yusuf is a newly promoted Professor in UAB's Department of Dermatology, Heersink School of Medicine, University of Alabama at Birmingham. She also has a secondary appointment in Epidemiology. She received her Master's in Microbiology and PhD in Immunology from India. She also graduated with an MSPH degree in Epidemiology from UAB. She is a basic science researcher by training, trying to develop her portfolio in population studies. Her goal is to perform epidemiological studies with correlative biomarkers in population with inflammatory diseases and cancer. Besides research, she is involved with teaching and mentorship programs in the schools of Medicine and Public Health at UAB. Currently, she serves as the liaison for diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) for her department and as Chair for the UAB faculty senate DEI committee.