

Jacinda Dariotis, Ph.D.

*University of Cincinnati, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg
School of Public Health*



Dr. Dariotis is a multidisciplinary family researcher and developmentalist focusing on understanding family formation decision-making (in terms of fertility and romantic unions) and risk-taking tendencies (sexual and substance use) across the lifespan beginning in childhood through middle adulthood. Of particular interest are the biological and familial determinants of fertility and romantic relationship intentions in youth and how life-course competition variables influence those intentions and subsequent behaviors over time. She has been involved in numerous state-wide prevention and intervention program evaluations while completing her graduate degrees in Human Development and Family Studies as well as Statistics. As a mixed-

methodologist she focuses on both quantitative (parametric and nonparametric statistics) and qualitative paradigms.

Panel: Cultivating Mindfulness with High-Risk Youth

Student and Teacher Qualitative Perspectives on a School-Based Mindfulness and Yoga Program

3:15pm – 5:00pm on Friday, April 17, 2015

Sound Room, Bell Harbor International Conference Center

Background: This presentation addresses two limitations of previous studies of school-based mindfulness and yoga programs: (1) heavy reliance on program developer and implementer reports and (2) primary focus on quantitative measurement of program outcomes. The perspectives of two key stakeholders – students and their classroom teachers – critical for identifying implementation barriers and facilitators, merit attention. And, qualitative methods reveal processes and outcomes that quantitative methods may not adequately capture. Combining findings from three studies, this presentation reports qualitative perspectives of fifth and sixth grade participants in a 16-week school-based mindfulness and yoga program in three highly disadvantaged urban schools and their classroom teachers on three related topics: (1) mindful yoga program skills youth recall and use in their daily lives, (2) urban youths' and teachers' perspectives on stress and stress responses following a mindful yoga program, and (3) students' and teachers' implementation recommendations to ensure that programs have the intended impact on participants.

Methods: Six focus group discussions were conducted among 22 fifth (n=14) and sixth (n=8) grade students (age range: 10 to 13; median age = 11) across three intervention schools. Students' classroom teachers (n=9) – who did not participate in the program – participated in focus groups and interviews; only two classroom teachers were not available during data collection times. Focus groups and interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. All transcripts were independently inductively coded, using thematic analysis, by three team members.

Results: Themes are reported for (1) skills youth recalled and used; (2) perspectives on stress; and (3) lessons learned regarding program implementation barriers and facilitators. First, four major themes related to skills learning and application emerged: youth retained and utilized program skills involving breath work and poses; knowledge about health benefits of these techniques promoted self-utilization and sharing of skills; youth developed keener emotional appraisal that, coupled with new and improved coping skills, helped de-escalate negative emotions, promote calm, and reduce stress; and youth and teachers reported realistic and optimistic expectations for future impact of acquired program skills. Second, four themes emerged related to students' and teachers' perspectives on stress and program implications: youth conflated stress with negative emotions; peer and family conflicts were common youth stressors; youth reported improved impulse control and emotional regulation following the program; and teachers reported mindfulness may reduce youth behavior problems. Third, four themes related to program implementation barriers and facilitators emerged: program delivery factors, program buy-in, implementer communication with teachers, and instructor qualities.

Discussion: We discuss implications of these findings for guiding future research and practice in terms of what skills students learned, retained, and utilized outside the program as well as what changes classroom teachers expect and observe among program recipients. Qualitative findings related to stress have potential to augment quantitative measures, identify additional outcomes of interest, and clarify intervention mechanisms. And, feedback from students and teachers about implementation is discussed in the context of informing implementation, adaptation, and future development of successful school-based programming in urban settings.