



## CFS' Rachel Razza Awarded Research Grant from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

*Research findings can assist future interventions aimed at improving children's school readiness*

October 16, 2009—Assistant professor of child and family studies Rachel Razza has been awarded a research grant from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) to study components of children's effortful control (EC). The investigation associated with social and academic competence in early childhood will provide insights into future interventions that may be able to improve a child's readiness for school.

EC reflects the self-regulatory aspect of temperament and is defined as the ability to withhold a dominant response to carry out a subdominant or less salient response. EC becomes increasingly coherent and stable during the early childhood years.

This study focuses on two components of EC: delay of gratification and motor control. The ability to delay gratification allows children to comply with demands, such as suppressing the urge to immediately touch an intriguing toy and waiting until an adult grants permission to do so, while motor control refers to the ability to inhibit impulses toward fast motor movement when aroused.

The primary objective of this grant is to better understand the contextual predictors of children's EC. In particular, the investigators will examine associations between EC and characteristics of the mother-child relationship, the family, and the neighborhood.

"Children's EC is a worthy target for future interventions aimed at improving children's school readiness. To design effective intervention strategies, however, more information regarding the specificity of the pathways encompassing EC is critical," said Razza.

This study addresses three key limitations of the existing research on EC. First, previous studies have examined only a few potential predictors of EC, such as parenting style. A bio-ecological model of human development views lives in context, and as such, conceptualizes child development as the outcome of dynamic

interactions among multiple contexts that change over time. Thus, using data from a rigorously designed multilevel study, the grantees will examine the influence of multiple factors on children's EC across three contexts: mother-child relationship, family, and neighborhood. Second, virtually nothing is known concerning whether some children are more vulnerable than others to family and neighborhood characteristics that threaten EC. In particular, the researchers will examine whether children exhibiting high reactivity in infancy may be differentially impacted by certain contextual risks. Third, most research relies on a composite measure of EC, but the evidence suggests that its component skills may have differential predictors and consequences.

The grant's activity will include secondary data analysis grant using data from the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN), the preeminent study of neighborhoods and families in the U.S. The PHDCN dataset is rich and diverse in its measures, including parenting and family functioning, and properly constructed measures of neighborhood-level characteristics and processes.

As a co-principal investigator on the project, Razza will be working with colleagues at the National Center for Children and Families, Teachers College, Columbia University, on analyses.

"We often assume that developmental pathways are universal across all children and this is an opportunity to expose differential vulnerabilities with respect to the children's EC," concluded Razza.

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