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## PROFESSIONAL AND RESEARCH INTERESTS

child and adolescent mental health

suicide prevention and intervention development with attention to minoritized youth

development of equitable policy solutions to improve access to care for underserved populations

## EDUCATION

Bryn Mawr College, Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research

**PhD Candidate**

Expected May 2026

Columbia University School of Social Work

**Master of Social Work**

May 2015

Concentration: Advanced Clinical Practice

Method: Health, Mental Health, and Disabilities

Stony Brook University

**Bachelor of Arts in Political Science, Minor in Journalism**

May 2013

Honors Thesis: "What Kept the American Soldier Going: Troop Motivators"

## LEADERSHIP TRAINING/FELLOWSHIP

Health Policy Research Scholar Program

2022-Present

- Health Policy Research Scholars is a multi-year leadership development program in health policy that occurs simultaneously with my doctoral program and is administered by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.
- The program includes activities for developing competencies in building a Culture of Health and health equity, health policy, leadership, and communication.
- Funded through the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (*Award: \$120,000/4 years*)

## AWARDS/DISTINCTIONS

L. Diane Bernard Fund for LGBT and Human Sexuality Projects

2024

Mary Q. (Molly) Frantz MSS 1970 GSSWSR Scholarship Fund

2022

Columbia School of Social Work Student Ambassador

2014

SUNY Chancellor's Award for Student Excellence

2013

Undergraduate Award for Academic Excellence

2013

Stony Brook University Student Ambassador

2012

Pi Sigma Alpha Honor Society

2012

Golden Key International Honour Society

2012

National Society of Collegiate Scholars

2010

## RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

The Family-Based Crisis Intervention: Adaptation for Inpatient Care

2021 – Present

(PI: A.Ross, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Grant YIG-1-140-19)

### Project Coordinator

The purpose of this project was to adapt a brief Emergency-Department based intervention focused on suicidal youth and their families for use in inpatient psychiatric settings. The first phase consisted of interviews with youth, caregivers, and providers (N=45) followed by a pilot randomized clinical trial (N=25).

- Conduct interviews with parents and youth recently discharged from the mental health unit at the Children's Hospital of Orange County, CA
- Lead qualitative analysis of Phase 1 interviews utilizing Atlas.ti

- Collaborate with research team on development of intervention adaptation
- Conduct interviews and follow up measures with parents and youth participants of phase 2 RCT

Validation of the Ask Suicide-Screening Questions (ASQ) with Youth Primary Care 2015 – 2016  
(PI: L. Horowitz, National Institute of Mental Health, no grant number)

### **Research Social Worker**

The purpose of this project was to test the validity of the ASQ measure with youth in primary care settings and to identify those at increased risk of suicide.

- Engaged in weekly meetings with NIMH team
- Recruited study participants (ages 10-21)
- Administered screening measures and managed positive screens

### **PEER REVIEWED JOURNAL ARTICLES**

Afzal, S., Geddings, W., Gunnison, C., Rudofker A., Esposito, J. (2025). Stabilizing Pediatric Patients During Psychiatric Boarding: A Quality Improvement Project. *Pediatrics*. doi:  
<https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2023-063262>

### **PEER REVIEWED JOURNAL ARTICLES: IN PREPARATION**

Afzal, S., Tarantino M., Ross, A.M. *Perspectives of Queer Youth, Caregivers, and Providers on Inpatient Treatment Following a Suicide Attempt*

DeVinney A, Field J, Kelly M, Afzal S, Dean S, Li L, Berman L, Wilcox HC, & Nestadt PS. *Proximal Social Interaction Risk Factors for Suicide Among Adolescents: A Psychological Autopsy Study*.

### **PRESENTATIONS**

Afzal, S., Hong, I., Ross, A.M. (January 2025). *Preventing Youth Suicide by Improving Care: Adapting the Family-Based Crisis Intervention for Use in Inpatient Psychiatric Settings*. Oral Presentation at the Society for Social Work and Research Annual Meeting. Seattle, WA

Afzal, S., Tarantino, M., Ross, A.M. (January 2024). *"Being Able to be Myself": Useful Aspects of Inpatient Psychiatric Care from Perspectives of LGBTQ Youth Previously Hospitalized for Suicide Attempts*. Oral Presentation at the Society for Social Work and Research Annual Meeting. Washington D.C.

Afzal, S. Bunting, J. Ross, A.M. (January 2024). *"You Just Try to Hang in There..." Experiences of Parents with a Child in Suicidal Crisis during the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Poster presented at the Society for Social Work and Research Annual Meeting. Washington D.C.

Afzal, S., Tarantino, M., Ross, A.M. (October 2023). *"You Can Be Yourself Here:" Perspectives of Queer Youth Previously Hospitalized for Suicide Attempts*. Poster presented at the International Summit on Suicide Research. Barcelona, Spain.

Afzal, S. John-Mora, L. Bunting, J. Ross, A.M. (January 2023). *How Much Is Enough and Who Should Decide? Opinions of Pediatric Youth Suicide Attempt Survivors, Their Caregivers, and Providers about the Appropriate Level of Family Involvement during Inpatient Psychiatric Treatment Stays*. Poster presented at the Society for Social Work and Research Annual Meeting. Phoenix, AZ.

Afzal, S. Bunting, J. John-Mora, L. Ross, A.M. (January 2023). *Practical and Ethical Risk Management Considerations for the Conduct of Remote Research with Youth Who Have Recently Been Hospitalized for a Suicide Attempt: Lessons Learned from the (virtual) Field*. Oral Presentation presented at the Society for Social Work and Research Annual Meeting. Phoenix, AZ.

Afzal, S. John-Mora, L. Bunting, J. Ross, A.M. (November 2022). *Conducting Research Virtually with Youth Suicide Attempt Survivors Recently Discharged from an Inpatient Psychiatric Facility: Lessons Learned from the Field*. Poster presented at the American Public Health Association Annual Meeting, Boston, MA.

Afzal, S., Gunnison, C., Figueroa, J., White, K., Rudofker, A., Fu, A., Geddings, W. (2021). *A Multidisciplinary Approach to Caring for Boarding Patients*. Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Patient and Family Services Poster Day. Philadelphia, PA.

## POSTGRADUATE TRAINING

Boston Children's Hospital

**Social Work Fellow-Department of Psychiatry** 2015 – 2016

- Conducted diagnostic evaluations and engaged children/adolescents in a range of therapeutic interventions
- Completed crisis assessments in the emergency room, assisted with de-escalation needs
- Engaged in a clinical education program alongside psychiatry and psychology trainees

## CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

**Emergency Department/Extended Hours Clinician** 2016 – Present

- Complete assessments on patients presenting with a range of needs including behavioral health crises, sexual/physical assault, child protective concerns, and medical trauma
- Developed an educational program for patients/families admitted on medical units awaiting psychiatric placement
- Created and deliver a CEU training on suicide assessment and safety planning
- Supervise and train second year social work interns
- Collaborate with other disciplines toward creation of a pilot project focused on stabilizing boarding psychiatric patients

University of Pennsylvania Counseling and Psychological Services

**Therapist** 2021-Present

- Provide brief therapy services to students with emphasis on improving coping strategies and psychoeducation
- Assess and support students during walk in clinic hours

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Delaware State University

**Adjunct Instructor – Advanced Generalist Practice II** 2019 – 2021

- Developed syllabus for graduate level social work course, utilized both in class and online instruction methods, administered all grading
- Course focused on therapeutic intervention and treatment modalities for individuals and families

## VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

Society for Social Work and Research Doctoral Student Committee

2023-2024

**Communications Subcommittee Member**

Make-A-Wish— Philadelphia Delaware, & Susquehanna Valley

**Wish Granter**

2018

## PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Society for Social Work and Research

2022-present

**SAIRA RABIA AFZAL**

American Public Health Association

Pennsylvania Society for Clinical Social Work

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2022-present

2020

**LICENSURE**

LCSW in Pennsylvania (License# CW020126)