Honoring Emerging ADHD Researchers

TWO OUTSTANDING EMERGING ADHD RESEARCHERS—Melissa Dvorksy, PhD, and Samantha Margherio, MA—received CHADD's 2021 Young Scientist Research Awards during the Virtual International Conference on ADHD in November. Several exceptional applications were received for the competition, and these two researchers received the highest marks from reviewers.

ADHD experts, including CHADD's resident expert and members of the organization's professional advisory board, reviewed the applicants' academic records as well as their published and ongoing research studies. Each applicant also submitted one research study or program that was examined for significance, rigor of methodology design, clarity of problem, adequacy of literature review as well as data analysis, and contribution of new knowledge.

Both of the 2021 award recipients provide summaries of their winning research papers here.

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Optimizing Treatment for Adolescents with ADHD by Leveraging Technology

Melissa Dvorsky, PhD

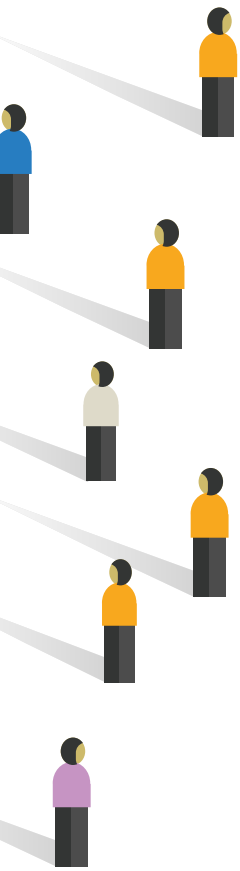
While organization, time management, planning skills interventions are well established as effective for adolescents with ADHD, many adolescents struggle to use these skills or maintain progress after treatment ends. Low motivation, variable skills practice, inconsistent rewards, limited social support, and low family involvement often contribute to limited improvement. Melissa Dvorsky, PhD, is working to leverage mobile technology to develop and pilot an innovative tool for overcoming these notorious challenges impeding treatment engagement for adolescents with ADHD.

Dr. Dvorsky developed the Advanced Tools for Organization Management (ATOM) tool, which is intended to support organization skills interventions for adolescents with ADHD. The ATOM tool promotes in-the-moment skills practice, personalizes treatment goals, motivates adolescents with digital rewards, and provides immediate positive reinforcement.

Dr. Dvorsky is currently evaluating ATOM with an organizational skills intervention delivered in middle schools in Washington, DC, Maryland, and Virginia. School clinicians meet with students in brief check-in meetings during the school day and the student uses ATOM between meetings to practice organization, time management, and planning skills. Students, parents, and schools use ATOM to monitor skills, track students' progress, and provide rewards to motivate students.

The ultimate goal of Dr. Dvorsky's research is to develop an effective intervention tool that delivers personalized strategies and optimizes adolescent treatment engagement.

Melissa Dvorsky, PhD, *is an assistant professor of psychiatry, behavioral sciences, and pediatrics at George Washington University and director of the ADHD and Learning Differences Program at Children's National Hospital in Washington, DC. Her research focuses on ADHD in adolescence, risk and resilience, school interventions, and leveraging technology to optimize treatment.*



Effects of a Training Intervention for ADHD on Long-Term Alcohol Use

Samantha Margherio, MA

Adolescents with ADHD are at risk of a problematic course of alcohol use. Our team previously implemented a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of a training intervention, known as the Challenging Horizons Program (CHP), for adolescents with ADHD that targets potential risk factors for alcohol use. Preliminary results from this RCT showed significant reductions in alcohol use among youth assigned to the treatment compared to youth in the control condition, making the CHP the first intervention for youth with ADHD to demonstrate promising effects on alcohol use. The proposed project will examine the durability of these promising effects into early adulthood, a time when alcohol use peaks.

Further, research has shown that the pathway from ADHD to substance use may be, in part, due to ADHD-related difficulties in emotion dysregulation (ED), or experience and expression of emotion in a manner consistent with one's goals. Thus, in this study, we will examine whether intervention-related improvements in alcohol use over time are spurred by intervention-related gains in ED. Such exploration may help identify treatment targets to help reduce alcohol-related problems experienced by youth with ADHD.

Sam Margherio, MA, *is a graduate student in clinical psychology at Ohio University. Her work focuses on intervention development and evaluation for youth and families experiencing ADHD and/or substance use difficulties, with a particular focus on improving the cost effectiveness of these interventions.*