

Community Youth Study

New York University | Nathan Kline Institute

Staff Spotlight

Sharifa Williams | Biostatistician

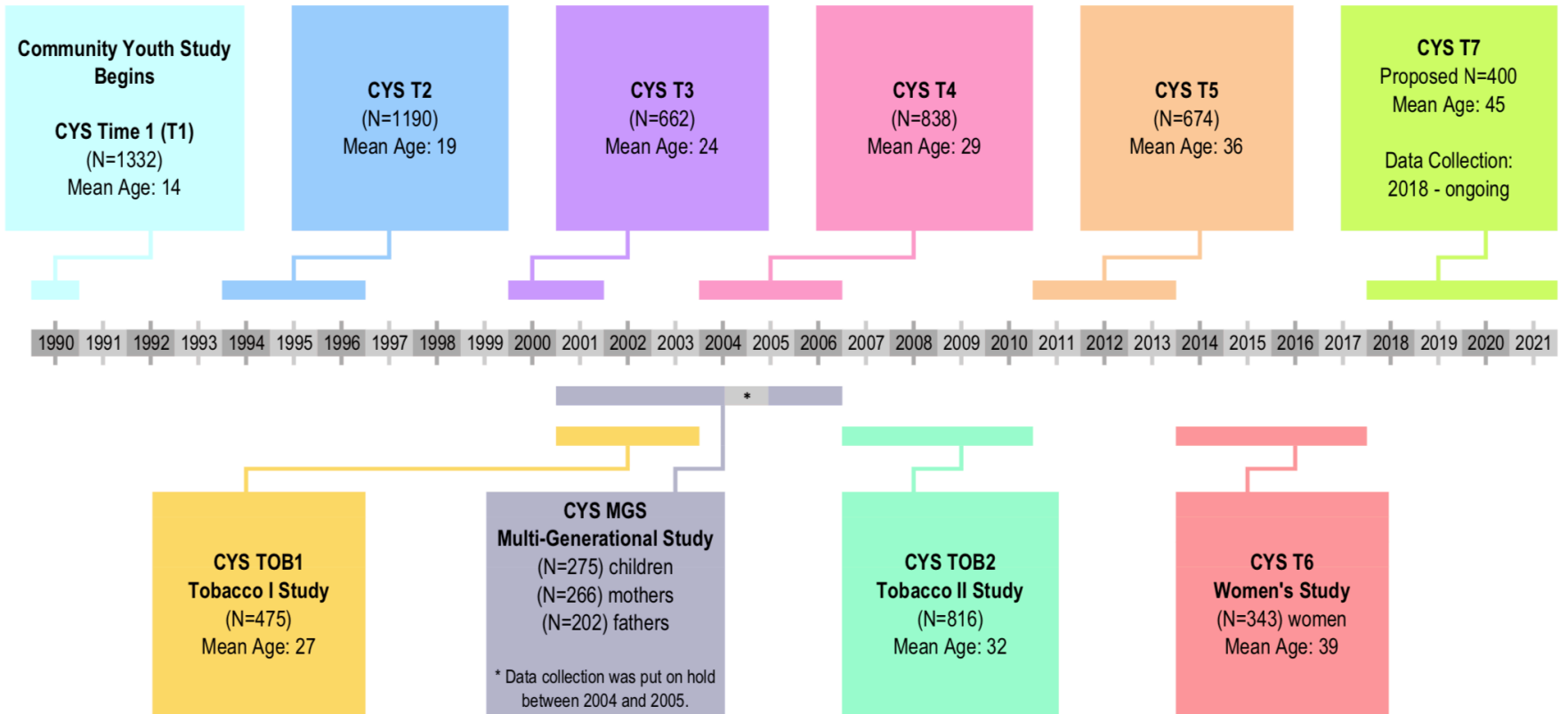


Sharifa (“Shar”) grew up on the tropical island of Jamaica and moved to the United States at the age of 17. Shar joined our Community Youth Study team after she graduated from Columbia University with a doctorate in Biostatistics in 2018. As the study biostatistician, she analyzes the study data to (1) identify patterns in experiences and exposures beginning from childhood and ending in adulthood, and (2) investigate how these patterns help to explain health or health disparities.

When she isn’t analyzing data, Shar loves to listen to music, watch track and field, spend time with friends and family, and walk her dog Catch. She especially loves to walk in nature and makes sure to visit the New York Botanical Gardens often—acres of trees and beautiful gardens in the midst of the hustle and bustle. She also volunteers as a math tutor for a small community elementary school and co-directs a children’s choir.



COMMUNITY YOUTH STUDY



The Community Youth Study started in 1990 when our research group was based at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in the East Harlem community. They were interested in including the life experiences of adolescents from our ethnically and racially diverse local community into our research program on adolescent development. At the time, ethnic and racial minority groups had been given very little attention in the national body of research on adolescent development. Thirty years later, we've completed nine waves of study and are currently enrolling for our tenth wave. Of these ten waves, seven have been open to the whole cohort who has participated over the years, while three waves of study were more specialized and had different eligibility criteria.

What is Epigenetics?

Epigenetics is the field of study that looks at DNA modifications and the expression of genes. Epigenetic modifications to our genetic makeup can be inherited from past generations and can be affected by environmental influences, such as neighborhood stress, exposure to pollutants, experiences of trauma, and chronic stress. In turn, these epigenetic changes to our genes are linked to disease progression and illnesses, such as cancer and cognitive dysfunction. While our current study looks at factors related to chronic stress and how stress burden affects your well being over time, we are interested in how epigenetics ties into this and plan to look at this in future waves of study.

Over thirty percent of participants experienced or witnessed an extremely stressful or traumatic event.

More than 40% said that it was not at all true that there are plenty of safe places to walk or play outdoors in their neighborhood.

Over 32% of participants said that it was very true that there was some violence in their neighborhood.

While over a quarter of participants reported worrying about money-related issues all of the time, nearly 15% reported experiencing money problems almost always.

Twenty-one percent of participants said they did not have any form of health insurance, while over 6% reported having poor or very poor general health.

While the mean age of the cohort was 36 years old at the time of T5 data collection, over 6% already reported having been diagnosed with diabetes, 16% with hypertension, and 3% with heart disease or other vascular problems.

Sources:

1. Community Youth Study, T5 Data [2011 - 2013]
2. NIH U.S. National Library of Medicine. (2020) What is epigenetics. Retrieved from <https://ghr.nlm.nih.gov/primer/howgeneswork/epigenome>.
3. Weinhold B. Epigenetics: the science of change. *Environ Health Perspect.* 2006;114(3):A160-A167. doi:10.1289/ehp.114-

How We Protect Your Private Health Information

Since this study began 30 years ago, we have never had a data breach affecting your private contact information or private health information. We strive to protect your health information like it is our own, and we take many precautions to ensure the safety and confidentiality of your private health information, while keeping our study in ethical compliance with both New York University and Nathan Kline Institute.

We never share information about your identity or your contact information with anyone outside the study team.

For our current wave of study, participants are assigned a three-digit unique identifying number called a wave ID number.

All hardcopies of your consent forms, paper surveys, and other hardcopy health information is kept behind three locked doors, as mandated by our Institutional Review Board.

When you were first enrolled in the Community Youth Study back in 1990, you were assigned a unique identifying number, called a study ID number, that we have used to link all of your surveys and study information from past waves of study.

All electronic copies of your survey data, biomarker results, and other electronic versions of your health information are kept on New York State regulated and protected network drives.

All study team members must undergo research ethics training and approval by the Institutional Review Board before they can work on this research study, and all communications on the study will come from the Principal Investigator or the study team.

When we send your biological samples to our third-party labs to analyze the samples, they never receive any personal identifying information and only receive your unique three-digit wave ID number.

Meet the Team



Kerstin ("Tina") Pahl
Principal Investigator



Sharifa ("Shar") Williams
Biostatistician



Linda Capobianco
Project Administrator



Lisa Wang
Project Manager



Pedro Batista
Field Supervisor



Daniela Galvez
Field Assistant



DeVante ("DJ") Cunningham
Field Assistant



Parichat ("Chat") Pintong
Field Assistant



Ariadna Capasso
Pre-Doctoral Intern

Joy Settembrino-Debus
Recruitment Specialist

Russell Tobe, MD
Medical Personnel

Sheela Sajan, RN
Medical Personnel

Please Note: We also may train other undergraduate and graduate level interns on study procedures and protocols. All interns undergo the same ethics training and approval that our paid staff undergo.

Participate in Our Current Study

“Longitudinal Effects of Socioeconomic Disadvantage and Racial Discrimination on Health Among African Americans and Puerto Ricans”

Our current wave of study, funded by the National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities, is examining how social conditions influence stress burden, well-being, and health over time, with particular interest in:


1. Stressful experiences, including discrimination and socioeconomic disadvantage
2. Individual characteristics and resources that may help you cope with these experiences

For this study, we are conducting surveys like we have done in the past. In addition, we are collecting measurements assessing cardiovascular and metabolic health and collecting a few biological specimens to assess biomarkers of your metabolic health, endocrine and immune system function, and stress reactivity. If you have not already participated, please contact us. We are recruiting for this study for the next few years and would be happy to tell you more about this study and discuss your participation. You would be compensated \$150 in cash the day of the visit, and we would also enter you into a prize drawing for a 1-in-50 chance of winning a \$500 gift card.

If you haven't participated in this latest study, which began August 2018, you may be eligible to participate.

CONTACT US

If you have any questions, would like to give us any feedback or suggestions of what you'd like to hear from us, or are interested in participating in our current study, please call, text, or email us.

 (917) 938-4647

 CYS@NKI.rfmh.org



We've seen

160

participants
so far for this
current
study.

We've had

3

winners of
gift card
drawings of
\$500 each for
the current
study.

We plan to
interview

240

more
participants
for our
current
study.