

# All Our Families Study

*Understanding Development Across the Lifecourse*

Fall 2021

## Greetings!

We have made the transition from summer to fall and all the changes that come with it. Some of these new routines are anticipated and exciting as we settle into school, sports and arts, and schedules. There are also challenges as we navigate the changing landscape of the pandemic- which now includes more 'work from home' and more restrictions. From the AOF team, know that we are thinking of you as we move through these times together.



Since our last newsletter in May, we completed our second COVID surveys. Thank you to all participants who took the time to complete the survey! 1,815 mothers and 893 youth responded. We are learning that the pandemic has created some changes that have lasted over time- including new routines and family hobbies. We also know that some of the financial challenges brought on the economy and the pandemic are lingering for many families. Check out some of the highlights in [Study Updates](#).

This fall, you will find another invitation to participate in a COVID pandemic questionnaire, and we are hoping you will continue to share your experience with us. Your past contributions have been shared with Alberta Health Services and numerous organizations in the not-for-profit sector to help structure recovery efforts- including those associated with the mental and emotional well being of your children.

In this Newsletter, we hear from Dr. Sheila McDonald, the Co-lead of the AOF cohort, who explains to us [what epidemiology is](#), and why it is so important. We also share some [updates of our team](#) – saying goodbye to some and welcoming others. In [Research to Real Life](#), we look at the relationship between reading and screen time with Dr. Brae Anne McArthur. We have also included some creative [recipes](#) for you to add to your Thanksgiving meal, and a spooky Halloween recipe for kids (and kids at heart).

This Thanksgiving, although we experienced numerous unanticipated events, I am deeply grateful for the health of my children and family, and for the gift of living in a place where nature is never far away. I also am inspired by my research team and trainees and appreciative of their dedication and commitment. Finally, I am deeply thankful to you, our participants, for your commitment to AOF, which allows us to contribute current information to decision makers to improve the lives of children and families.

Stay well,

Suzanne

## Study Updates

As mentioned earlier, thank you to all of the mother's and youth who responded to our second COVID survey.

### Here are some highlights from the reports:

- 63% of mother's said that they would consent to have their child vaccinated if a vaccine were available to their child. An additional 25% said they would maybe consent
- 83% of children returned to school in Fall 2020 and were still attending in-person classes at the time of the survey (March-April 2021)
- 29% of mother's reported that the pandemic has brought them and their partner closer together. Additionally, 45% of mother reported that the pandemic has made their relationship with their child closer
- 55% of youth reported reading for fun at least once per day and 85% report reading at least once per week.
- Of those that read for fun, 78% report on average reading at least 30 minutes per day



The pandemic has shifted timelines for many, including the All Our Families surveys! The originally planned 12-year survey was delayed in order to capture your experiences during the pandemic. You will be receiving a **COVID #3 survey near the end of November**, and the 13-Year Follow-Up Survey (formerly the 12-Year) in Spring 2022. Please keep an eye out for these in your inbox!

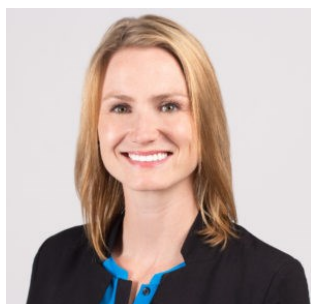


## Research to Real Life

### Recreational Screen Time in Children during COVID-19

Dr. Brae Anne McArthur, one of the All Our Families postdoctoral scholars, recently examined recreational screen time in young children, comparing use during COVID to their use pre-COVID. To answer her question, she looked at the data you provided on your child's screen time at 5 and 8 years to the data provided by the children themselves in the first Youth COVID Survey. She considered differences in household screen time rules as well as Mom's stress levels and awareness of their children's screen use. Overall, she found a significant increase in recreational screen time use in children since the beginning of the COVID pandemic, but it varied when the above factors were considered.

To learn more about the study and how your data was used, read the **full article [here](#)**



Dr. Brae Anne McArthur is a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Calgary in the Determinants of Child Development Lab. Dr. McArthur's program of research focuses on understanding individual and family level risk and resiliency factors that influence child development. Her current work focuses on understanding the impact of screen time on child development.

## Staff News

A lot has happened at AOF over the summer! It had been almost a year since the AOF team had been able to meet in person, and we were so grateful for the great weather we had at our team picnic!

After many years with us in administrative support, David Wudel has bid AOF farewell to pursue his passion in art and advocacy. We miss David and are so proud of him! Check out his company, [6 Wheel Painting Co.](#) - named for the six wheels that are underneath him. Additionally, Ada Madubueze successfully completed her masters, focusing on associations between maternal symptoms of prenatal anxiety and breastfeeding outcomes in the All Our Families cohort. Congrats, Ada!



We welcome three new faces to our team. Anjola Adeboye joined us this summer as an intern and has since begun her masters with AOF. We also have two Community Rehab Disability Study students completing their senior practicum. Welcome Leigha Grise and Vanessa Dang! Leigha has an interest in parentification in addition to proactive health approaches. Vanessa has an interest in working with children with disabilities and hopes to pursue a career in Occupational Therapy. They will also be helping us with the COVID survey follow-ups, so you may be meeting with them on the phone!

## Ask an Expert

The pandemic has shone the spotlight on science, and in particular, Epidemiology. In popular culture, we have seen Epidemiologists in film, such as Kate Winslet and Marion Coulittard's characters in the film *Contagion*, or Matthew Modine's character in the movie *And the Band Played On*. But what is the science of Epidemiology? All Our Families study Co-Investigator Dr. Sheila McDonald is here to explain it to us.

### **You completed your PhD in Lifecourse Epidemiology – can you explain what epidemiology is?**

Yes, I will try! As we know, Epidemiology is in the news of late due to the pandemic. In general, epidemiology is a science that uses different scientific approaches and tools to better understand the distribution of disease outcomes, along with risk and protective factors, to inform both decision-making at the population level and to better understand the history of a particular disease or outcome in terms of people, place, and time.

### **Epi sounds a lot like crunching numbers. How is Epi used in everyday life?**

Great question. In everyday life Epi is behind decisions and policies such as 'smoking is bad for your health', and 'helmets are recommended to reduce injury in minor hockey', etc. A lot of health decisions and guidelines come from epidemiological and clinical studies on a particular outcome. In short, Epi gives guidelines on the average effect in a particular population; tailored guidance for an individual in a doctor's office would use the Epi evidence as well as clinical guidance for a more personalized approach (for example, a doctor would prescribe a particular medication for you based on the Epi evidence, their own medical knowledge and their relationship with you).

### **What got you interested in Epi?**

This actually is a funny story! I trained as a pre-med student and then did a Master's degree in Psychiatry looking at attachment styles! Attachment styles refer to relationships with early caregivers and how that may influence mental health and future relationships. I developed a questionnaire to tap into different attachment styles in adolescence. Then I worked at a Hyperactivity Clinic in Montreal for a few years and dabbled in one or two stats courses along the way. Lo and behold, the stats courses led me to investigate Epidemiology as a career! I loved the critical thinking behind the science and the rigor that went into studies to examine everyday questions on risk and protective factors for different outcomes. My studies examined family structure and adolescent behavior, followed by risk factors for preterm birth, to my current passion, which is 'what is the intersection between early life events and child development over time, and how can we identify antecedents of resilience, flourishing, and well-being, especially during changing times'.



## The All Our Families study is seen through a longitudinal, life course lens - what makes that different from other types of studies?

Another great question! Many of you may have heard of trials, or randomized controlled trials, or RCTs. These types of studies tend to be the gold standard in determining the effectiveness of, say, one drug vs. another. The AOF cohort is another type of study design that can also answer important causal questions (what can cause what?). The key premise of life-course and longitudinal observational studies, like ours, is that we can answer questions that need a time component – so we can look at what happens during pregnancy or in the first five years of life and how this may influence what is happening 10 years after birth! And because we collect key data elements, we can design and analyze the information to reduce bias to better ensure we are really teasing out the influence of a particular exposure (e.g., breastfeeding) with an outcome (e.g., child development).



## The public is hearing more and more about Epidemiology because of the current pandemic, where experts in Epi are in the news. How is Epi being used during the pandemic?

The AOF team actually is conducting a COVID-19 Impact study and has done so since the start of the pandemic. We are looking at the impact of the pandemic and public health measures on mental health, social relationships, screen time, work-life balance etc. Other epidemiologists are looking at infection rates, hospitalization numbers, and vaccine roll-out, to name a few. The numbers behind the decisions being made are due to the work of epidemiologists, data analysts, and content experts in the field. The epidemiologists are working together across the board – and we are diverse, but the common objective is to promote optimal population health.

## What types of careers are open for Epidemiologists?

There can be various careers in Epidemiology. Researchers, Scientists, and Data Analysts can inform the work that our Medical Officers of Health do, as well as inform community partners such as Big Brothers Big Sisters and the new Youth Mental Health Centre at the U of C. We are the people behind the scenes, bringing evidence to the table and hoping to answer the questions that matter to the public, clinicians, and decision makers...about 'health and well-being: physical, social, and mental'. I love what I do and I am amused when I look back on the trajectory to where I got here – but it all makes sense, and I hope to contribute to helping understand and improve health outcomes for Albertan families and beyond.



Dr. Sheila McDonald is a Research Scientist in Maternal Child Health in the Department of Research and Innovation, Provincial, Population & Public Health at Alberta Health Services. She is also an adjunct Assistant Professor in the Departments of Community Health Sciences and Paediatrics, Cumming School of Medicine at the University of Calgary, and Co-PI of the longitudinal All Our Families cohort. Dr. McDonald's research program focuses on the influence of early adversity on trajectories of health and development and risk and resilience factors for child development.

## Fall Recipes

Looking to change up or add to your Thanksgiving meal, or make a creative Halloween treat? Look no further! Check out the **Brussel Sprout Pecan Salad** for a side dish (can include bacon!), **Pumpkin Pie Twists** for a fun 'twist' on the traditional favourite dessert, **Autumn Punch** for a pumpkin spiced drink that can be both kid and adult friendly, and finally **Dracula Cookies** to spook up your evening!

