

2019 SIG Annual Report



sig



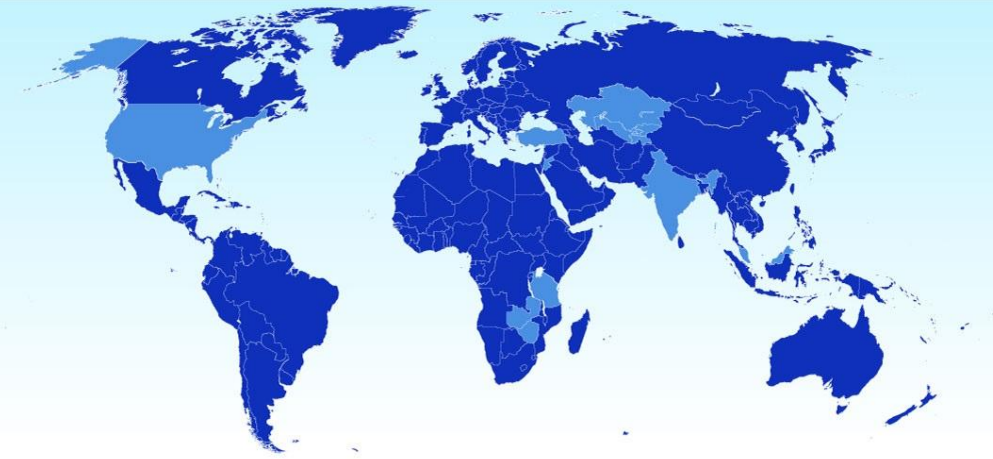
G L O B A L
SCIENCE
HEALTH
EQUITY

About SIG



COLUMBIA | SIG
SOCIAL INTERVENTION GROUP

The Social Intervention Group (SIG) was co-founded by Dr. Nabila El-Bassel within the Columbia University School of Social Work nearly 30 years ago. SIG has served as a global leader in intervention, prevention, behavioral, and implementation research on communicable and non-communicable diseases.



SIG operates globally

SIG conducts research and training in the United States and globally. SIG's evidence-based interventions have been identified as best practices by the Center for Disease Control, and have been disseminated and adapted nationally and globally.

Most recently, SIG is tackling the overdose epidemic through a major grant to support research intended to reduce overdose deaths across New York State. Dr. El-Bassel and her colleagues secured this major funding based on their community-focused public health interventions. This grant, the [National Institute of Health-funded HEALing Communities Study](#), launched in 2019.

**NIH
HEAL
INITIATIVE**

**HEALing
Communities
Study**

[Learn more about the first year of the HEALing Communities Study](#)

SIG continues to provide training for faculty, visiting scholars, students, and post-doctoral fellows, and has an NIMH R25 HIV training program funded in 2007 to train underrepresented scholars from universities across the country on HIV implementation science. SIG also manages a NIDA T32 training for pre- and post-doctoral scholars on implementation research for criminal justice-involved populations.

Mission and Vision

The Social Intervention Group (SIG) develops and implements evidence-based sustainable solutions to emerging health and social issues affecting diverse

populations domestically and globally and is training the next generation of scientists from underrepresented affected communities to address these issues.

Our vision is to scale up sustainable effective solutions to emerging health and social issues in low resource underserved communities domestically and globally through state-of-art intervention and implementation science research and to train a cadre of underrepresented researchers from affected communities who can continue advancing our mission.



SIG is part of the School of Social Work at Columbia University.

[Read more about SIG](#)



Dr. Nabila El-Bassel, Director of SIG

Letter from our Director

Dear SIG community,

For nearly 30 years, SIG has been involved in research to address the AIDS epidemic and co-occurring issues such as intimate partner and gender-based violence. I am proud that we continue

this evidence-based work both in the United States and globally at our Global Health Research Center of Central Asia through projects like UNI, Be Online, and BRIDGE, and locally with projects e-WORTH, WINGS, and our training programs T32 and HISTP, for which we welcomed four Fellows and seven remarkable Scholars this year.

Our additional global work to address the Syrian refugee crisis through Project ASPIRE continues, and our project to expand the field of social work in Uzbekistan, USWEEP, wrapped up after several successful training sessions to empower future social workers. Now, as we undertake our largest project to-date, the landmark HEALing Communities Study, aimed to reduce overdose deaths by 40% in just over three years, we reflect on the incredible teamwork that made it all possible.

We could not do any of this work without our amazing team of employees, students, current and past fellows, and colleagues. Thank you for your ongoing support, well-wishes, and collaboration. We truly are part of a remarkable community.

Warmly, Dr. Nabila El-Bassel, Director, Social Intervention Group; Principal Investigator, HEALing Communities Study



Audience at November Introductory event for the HEALing Communities Study

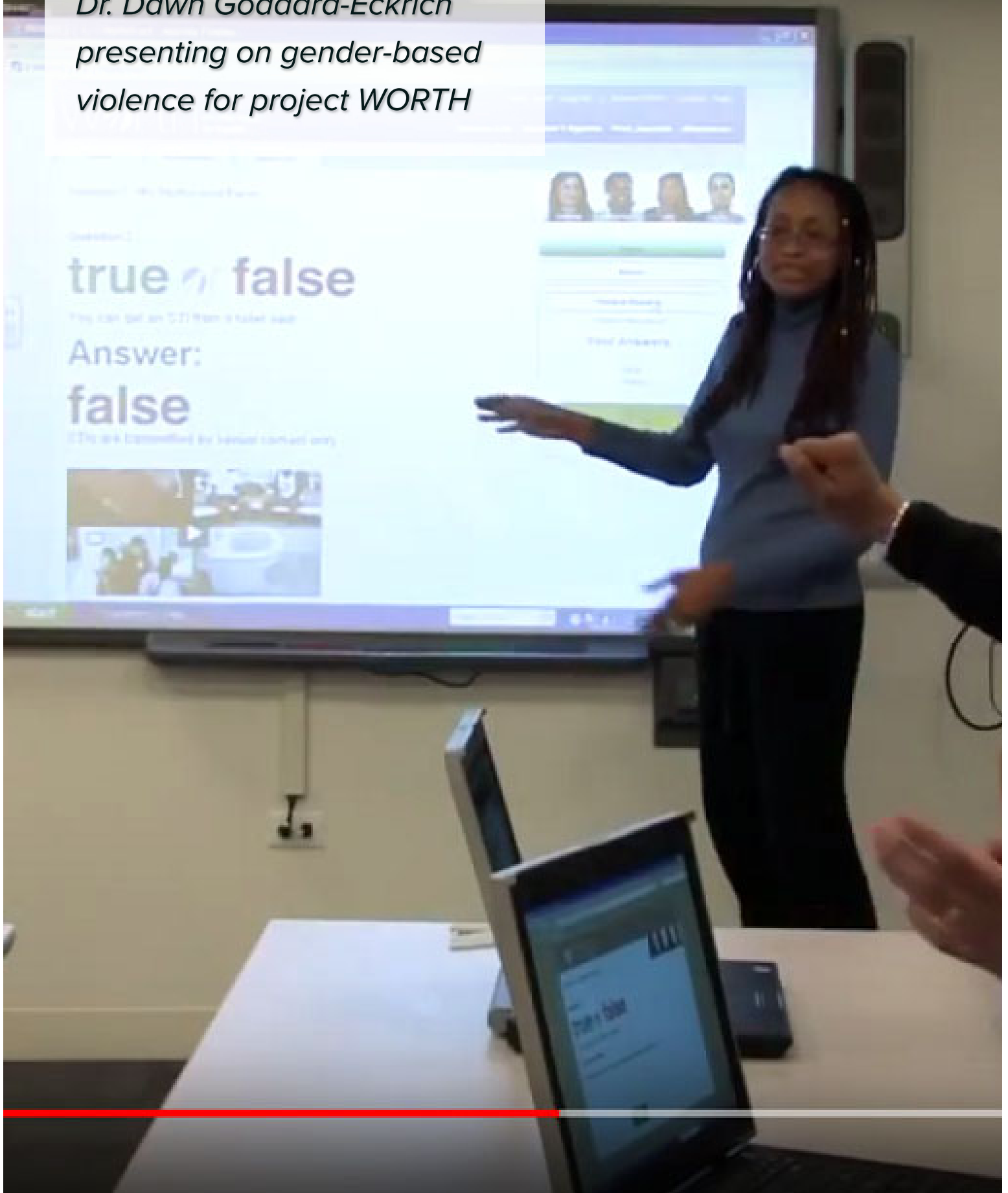
Impact

Impact on individuals

SIG works with the most stigmatized and underserved individuals and communities, including sexual and/or gender minorities, racial and ethnic minorities, individuals who engage in sex work, and women who are refugees. Populations are often substance and justice-involved, and/or individuals who have experienced intimate partner or gender-based violence.

Road to Health

*Dr. Dawn Goddard-Eckrich
presenting on gender-based
violence for project WORTH*



Above and beyond research striving to create equity, SIG research projects have trained hundreds of organizations and individuals globally in the field of social work, trained organizations to administer interventions and HIV prevention research, and referred hundreds of individuals to care for gender-based violence.

National impact



Audience at the introductory event to the HEALing Communities Study



Dr. Nabila El-Bassel addressing the audience at the event

Healing Communities Study Award

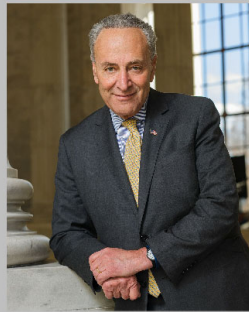
The HEALing Community Study (HCS) grant was awarded to the Columbia University School of Social Work in 2019. The grant, one of Columbia’s largest ever, brings together the School of Social Work with the Department of Psychiatry, the Mailman School of Public Health, the Data Science Institute, as well as researchers from Albert Einstein School of Medicine/Montefiore School of Medicine, City University of New York, Weill Cornell Medical College, New York University School of Medicine, University of Miami, and the Yale School of Medicine.



Photo of Lee Bollinger courtesy Office of the President

“The opioid epidemic is a national crisis that is causing devastation throughout society. With this grant,


Professor El-Bassel and her team are providing thoughtful and necessary leadership on this critical issue, working with government and academic partners to put in place effective, proven interventions that will save lives.” --Columbia University President Lee C. Bollinger



**US Senator
Charles
Schumer**

Photo of Senator Charles Schumer courtesy Office of the Senator

“Columbia University has long been a leader in tackling the most intractable problems facing our nation, so it is only fitting that the NIH should support their cutting-edge



research on opioid intervention. Our institutions of higher learning are laboratories for public policy. With this vital funding, Columbia's School of Social Work can further bolster our shared work of reducing deaths by opioid addiction across New York. I am proud to support Columbia in this important work." --U.S. Senator Charles Schumer



HEALing Communities Study team (in part)

COLUMBIA
UNIVERSITY



“I am delighted to be leading this extraordinarily innovative study with such an outstanding group of scientists.
Our goals are ambitious. There is no time to waste;
we have lost far too many people to this widespread epidemic.”

– Dr. Nabila El, Bassel

University Professor,

Willma and Albert Musher Professor of Social Work



Introductory event for the HEALing Communities Study, November 2019

Global impact

ASPIRE

ASPIRE -- Advancing Solutions in Policy, Implementation, Research and Engagement for Refugees -- is an initiative that takes a multidisciplinary approach to responding to the Syrian refugee crisis.



Participants in the Women ASPIRE dissemination event [gather at the Columbia Global Center | Amman](#) after the event. Pictured here - leadership from the University of Jordan School of Medicine, Al-Balqa' Applied University, Institute for Family Health, International Medical Corps, and Columbia University School of Social Work

Members of the ASPIRE team traveled to Jordan to work with collaborators to interpret findings from the Women ASPIRE study, disseminate results, and

continue to build a strong network of Non-Governmental Organizations in the region. (See more below on the grant award to ASPIRE from The American Assembly making this work possible.)



ASPIRE team with University of Jordan medical students, back row L-R Dr. Justin Amarin, Mahmoud Abu Al-Samen, Mohamad Adam Brooks, Melissa Meinhart, Ajita Singh, Dr. Haya Suradi. Front row, L-R, Raghad Kafawin, Dr. Anindita Dasgupta, Dr. Maysa' Khadra, and Dr. Raeda Al-Qotob

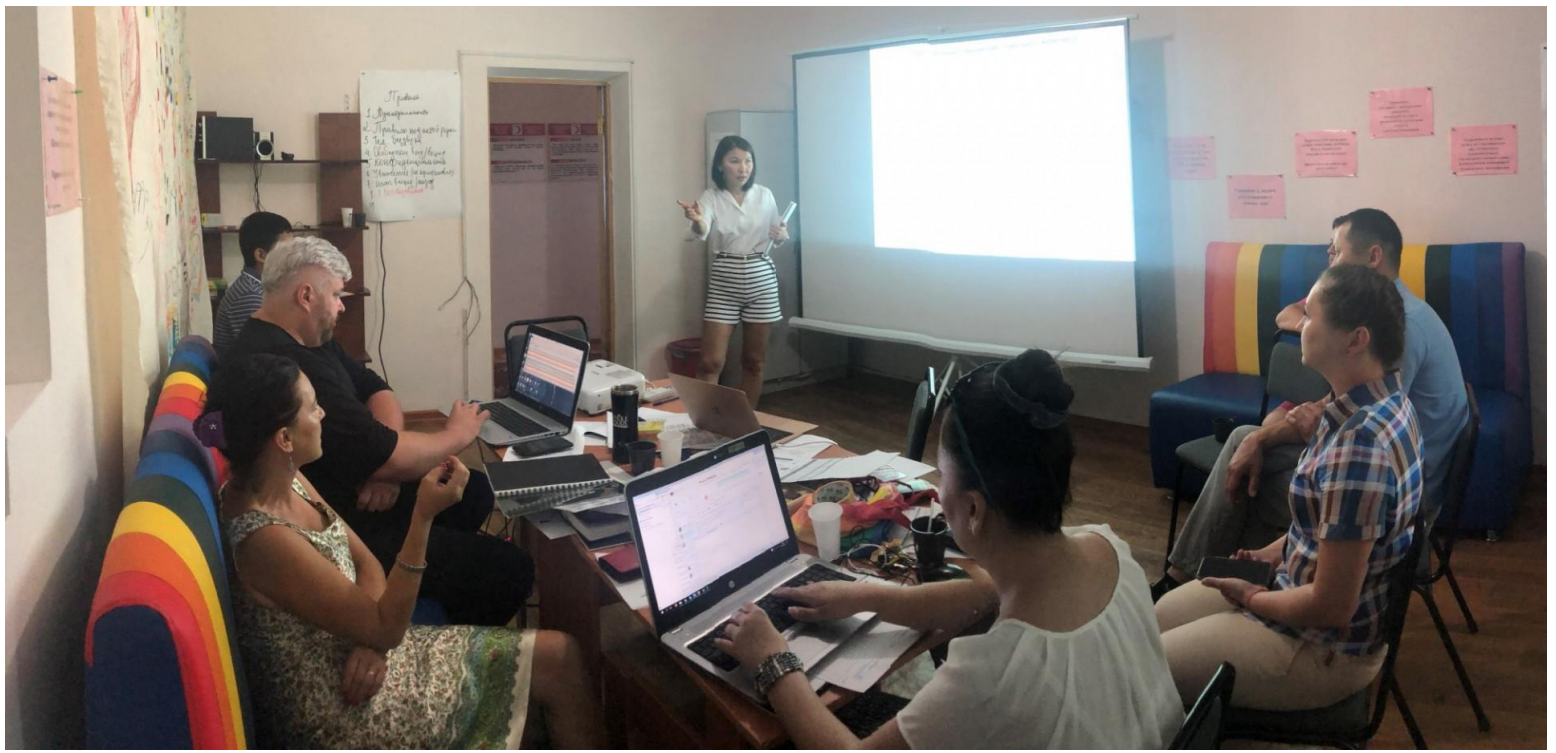
USWEEP



Celebrating the USWEEP "train the trainer" in social work program with Regional Director of UNICEF, Dean of the National University + its School of Social Work, head of the Oila Center, & program graduates

USWEEP Project Manager Lyudmila Kim and Principal Investigator Dr. Timothy Hunt [completed the third and final round of "train the trainer"](#) for local providers to continue their efforts to support the growth of the social work field in Uzbekistan.

UNI



UNI Project Director Gulnara Zhakupova [role-playing as an intervention facilitator at the Global Health Research Center of Central Asia \(GHRCCA\)](#)

UNI -- a project aiming to help hundreds of men of sexual and gender diversity through peer-led promotion of engagement in HIV care -- continues to expand in Kazakhstan. UNI is based at SIG's Global Health Research Center of Central Asia (GHRCCA). Leveraging the power of peer influence, the UNI Project intervention, “UNI Innovator Gate,” aims to help hundreds of men of sexual and gender diversity through peer-led promotion of “HIV care continuum engagement” which includes antiretroviral medication adherence and HIV testing. In 2019, UNI launched in its second city: Shymkent, Kazakhstan.



Summer 2019 [UNI Intervention Training participants](#) in Shymkent, a UNI Project study site.

GHRCCA

The Global Health Research Center of Central Asia (GHRCCA), founded in 2007, manages several research projects and initiatives in Central Asia. It is Directed by Dr. Nabila El-Bassel, co-Directed by Drs. Louisa Gilbert, and Elwin Wu. GHRCCA's Regional Director is Dr. Assel Terlikbayeva, and the Deputy Director is Sholpan Primbetova.



GHRCCA staff retreat

The Elton John AIDS Foundation announced new funding opportunities and visited Global Health Research Center of Central Asia (GHRCCA) offices.



Assel Terlikbayeva, Regional Director of GHRCCA, at the Elton John AIDS Foundation office

[More about GHRCCA & EJAF](#)

Awards & Honors



Dr. Nabila El-Bassel
Named University Professor,
Columbia University's Highest
Academic Honor

Dr. Nabila El-Bassel was appointed to the rank of University Professor, the highest academic honor at Columbia University. She was the first faculty member from the School of Social Work to be named a University Professor. Columbia University President Lee Bollinger stated:

"A University Professor appointment is a rare and distinguished honor among our faculty. Not only does it signify scholarly merit of the highest caliber, it also designates the recipient as a professor of the entire

University who can teach across schools and departments. Professor El-Bassel has devoted her career to the pursuit of knowledge and innovation that can strengthen communities and improve the human condition. She has established social work as a recognized profession in countries where it previously did not exist and has mentored generations of new researchers in a field that has had a transformative effect on the lives of at-risk populations."



THE AMERICAN ASSEMBLY
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

ASPIRE -- Advancing Solutions in Policy, Implementation, Research and Engagement for Refugees -- was [awarded a grant from The American Assembly](#) to increase its impact in addressing the

Syrian refugee crisis by conducting a strategic dissemination event in Jordan bringing together scholars, health care professionals, policymakers, and local partners to interpret findings from the [Women ASPIRE study](#) and create policy and programmatic recommendations for health agencies in Jordan to meet the health needs of Syrian refugee women living outside of camps.

Research Dissemination and Influence: Media, Events, Publications

Media

PRESS



30

**ARTICLES
ABOUT HEALING
COMMUNITIES,
THE OVERDOSE
EPIDEMIC, AND SIG**



The SIG team played a crucial role in furthering the conversation about the connection between violence against women and the opioid epidemic, including an Op-Ed in The Conversation: [Violence against women is overlooked in its role in opioid epidemic](#). Here, Dr. Nabila El-Bassel, Director of the Social Intervention Group, explores how violence impacts women in the opioid epidemic by sharing the voices of women she and her research teams have interviewed over the past three decades in her latest article that was shared almost 1,000 times.

BUSTLE

The logo for Bustle, featuring the word "BUSTLE" in a bold, black, sans-serif font. Below the text is a thick black horizontal line that has a small, downward-pointing V-shaped notch in the center.

The opioid epidemic was further explored in the popular Bustle publication, which quoted SIG Director Dr. El-Bassel in an article: [How The Opioid Epidemic Affects Women Differently](#).

DAILY NEWS

NYDAILYNEWS.COM

Director Dr. El-Bassel as well as former SIG T32 fellow and current post-doctoral fellow at the Department of Psychiatry at Yale University, Dr. Philip Marotta, published an article in the New York Daily News on the seven steps needed in the wake of the new bail reforms in New York State: [When bail reform comes, we must do far more to help people who use drugs](#)

COLUMBIA MAGAZINE

Columbia Magazine published an article about
HEALing Communities Study: [School of Social
Work to Lead \\$86 Million Opioid Response in New
York State](#)



Dr. El-Bassel was [interviewed on WNBC](#) about the landmark HEALing Communities Study and Columbia Magazine highlighted the accomplishment in an article entitled [School of Social Work to Lead \\$86 Million Opioid Response in New York State](#).



[See the interview](#)

THE CHRONICLE of Higher Education

Diversity Is Central to This Research Program. How Does Yours Compare?

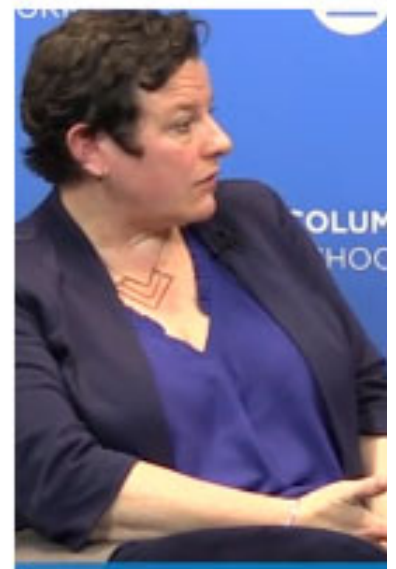
By *Alexander C. Kafka* | MARCH 24, 2019 ✓ PREMIUM



Dr. Elwin Wu and Dr. Nabila El-Bassel, Co-Director and Director of HISTP

The Chronicle of Higher Education wrote an in-depth feature about our HIV Intervention Science Training Program for Underrepresented Scholars (HISTP): [Diversity Is Central to This Research Program. How Does Yours Compare?](#)

Events



The SIG team hosted, presented, or participated in over 20 events in 2019 to disseminate their research to the global community, including ten specifically about the overdose epidemic and the HEALing Communities Study. Of the events, SIG hosted or co-hosted eight.

Research dissemination highlights: 2019 Events



Panelists at the event. L-R: Dr. Louisa Gilbert (co-Director of SIG), Bethany Medley, Dr. Frances Levin, moderator Maia Szalavita, Dr. Katherine Keyes, Dr. Smaranda Muresan

[HEALing Communities: Columbia Scientists Tackle Opioid Crisis in NY State](#)

At this breakfast panel, moderated by journalist Maia Szalavitz, author of *Unbroken Brain: A Revolutionary New Way of Understanding Addiction*, with Bethany Medley, a Columbia School of Social Work graduate with lived experience, Dr. El-Bassel and members of her research team from across Columbia University answered questions about their major NIH-sponsored study into reducing fatalities from opioid overdoses across New York State. The panel was introduced by Dean Melissa Begg and followed by a panel discussion with four members of the HEALing Communities research team within Columbia University: Dr. Louisa Gilbert, SIG and School of Social Work, Dr. Frances Levin, Department of Clinical Psychiatry, Dr. Katherine Keyes, Mailman School of Public Health, and Dr. Smaranda Muresan, Data Science Institute.

[Harm Reduction International Conference](#)



Dr. Dawn Goddard-Eckrich at the Harm Reduction Conference with colleagues

Dr. Louisa Gilbert, co-Director of SIG, hosted a workshop on Project WINGS to engage participants in identifying different types of gender-based violence that women who use drugs experience, and identify gaps in services for women. Dr. Gilbert shared how WINGS can be implemented to respond to this gap.

In addition, Associate Research Scientist Dr. Dawn Goddard-Eckrich presented a session about WINGS and highlighted the importance of adapting proven

interventions (like WINGS), addressing high rates of police abuse, funding solutions to gender-based violence, and conducting implementation research.

[The Opioid Crisis: Medical Examiner Roles and Strategic Innovations](#)

SIG's T32 program hosted New York City's First Deputy Chief Medical Examiner Jason Graham, who discussed the role of the medical examiner in helping to combat the epidemic of opioid overdose deaths facing New York City and the nation.

[Syrian Refugee Health & Health Service Delivery](#)

Investigators based in the U.S., Jordan, and Turkey presented findings from the ASPIRE Project's first two studies, Women ASPIRE and Providers ASPIRE, on the health concerns of Syrian refugees. Panelists included Drs. Nabila El-Bassel, Neeraj Kaushal, Maysa' Khadra, Deniz Yukseker, Anindita Dasgupta, and Melissa Meinhart.

[The Opioid Epidemic: Where Do We Go from Here?](#)

SIG's T32 program hosted Dr. Chinazo Cunningham, who has decades of providing care, developing

programs, and conducting research with marginalized populations who use drugs with, or are at risk for, HIV infection. She presented community-based strategies for improving access to care and health care services for people with opioid use disorder.

[HISTP Presents Dr. Smaranda Muresan](#)

Dr. Smaranda Muresan presented "Computational Models for Understanding Language In Social Context" as part of the HISTP event series.

[How would you like your PrEP? The fit of new HIV prevention tools to lived sexual lives](#)

Dr. Chris Beyrer, the inaugural Desmond M. Tutu Professor in Public Health and Human Rights at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, presented this event co-sponsored by the HIV Intervention Science Training Program (HISTP) and the T32 Training program.



David and Ruth Musher with Dr. Dasgupta and Dean Melissa Begg after the annual Albert & Willma Musher Talk

[Inaugural Albert & Willma Musher Talk](#)

Dr. Anindita Dasgupta presented research from ASPIRE in the session “Evidence-based Practice in Humanitarian Crises: Examples and Lessons from the Field.”

[HEALing Communities Event Series](#)



L-R, Joey Thompson, Research Coordinator for HEALing Communities Health Economics in NY; Drs. Robin Kerner, Laura Starbird, Bruce Schackman, and Nabila El-Bassel following the event

Drs. Bruce R. Schackman and Laura Starbird presented “Economic Evaluation of Integrated Opioid Overdose Reduction Interventions in the HEALing Communities Study” at the inaugural event for the HEALing Communities Study event series, sponsored by SIG.

Social Impact LIVE

Members of the SIG team presented at three sessions of the virtual series Social Impact Live, hosted by the Columbia University School of Social Work.

[Social Impact Live: Reducing Opioid Deaths in NY State](#)



Dr. El-Bassel with host Richard Hara

Dr. Nabila El-Bassel presented the HEALing Community Study's initial steps and discussed the necessity of involving multi-disciplinary experts as

well as the community, the challenges of executing a state-wide research initiative, and her highest hopes are for the project.

[Social Impact Live: Update on Columbia's NYS-wide Opioid Study.](#)



Dr. Aimee Campbell discussed the challenges of carrying out a major state-wide study of the nation's opioid crisis.

[Social Impact Live: Global Social Work and Kazakhstan](#)



Tara McCrimmon, Project Director of two Almaty-based health interventions in Kazakhstan and Sholpan Primbetova, Deputy Director of GHRCCA in Kazakhstan, with host Richard Hara.

Tara McCrimmon and Sholpan Primbetova discussed progress in tailoring Columbia’s epidemiological and intervention research on HIV, STDs, migration, women, and violence to the needs of vulnerable groups in Kazakhstan and Central Asia.

The Opioid Crisis: Prevention, Treatment and Recovery

Dr. Timothy Hunt presented as part of a session entitled: “Stakeholder Engagement in Managing the Crisis: The Patient, Family, and Community.”

12th Academic & Health Policy Conference on Correctional Health

Dr. Timothy Hunt presented research findings from WORTH Transitions with Dr. Diane Morse (University of Rochester) and Dr. Lisa Puglisi (Yale University).

International Congress of Education in Brasil



Dr. Timothy Hunt presented a session at the Internationalization Of The Basic And Higher Education: Challenges, Perspectives And Experiences.

[STI & HIV 2019 World Congress](#)



Above, Dr. Alissa Davis with Dr. Barbara Van Der Pol, president of the American Sexually Transmitted Diseases Association. Dr. Davis is holding "syphilis" and Dr. Van Der Pol is holding "gonorrhea."

Dr. Alissa Davis presented research she conducted with the NYC Department of Health and Mental

Hygiene Bureau of Sexually Transmitted Infections, entitled Prevalence of Bacterial vaginosis among Women Attending sexual health clinics in New York City, 2017-2018.

American Sociological Association

Dr. Brooke West hosted a pre-conference at the annual event: Global Health Research Since the Start of the HIV Pandemic.

IAS Conference on HIV

Dr. Brooke West co-presented research in a poster session entitled ““Sex work as a mediator between female sex and incident HIV infection among people who inject drugs in Tijuana, Mexico.”

New York Academy of Medicine 2019 Opioid Symposium

Dr. Nabila El-Bassel, Director of the Social Intervention Group, co-presented on the panel "Moving from Innovation to Action: Making it Happen."

The Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies 53rd Annual Convention

Postdoctoral T32 Fellow Dr. Slavin joined other researchers presenting research on the topic "Gender Differences in the Relationship Between Sexual Abuse and Hypersexuality."

Columbia University Postdoctoral Research Symposium

Dr. Anindita Dasgupta presented a poster session entitled "Examination of gendered health concerns of Syrian refugee women living in urban settings in Jordan."

Association of Foreign Correspondents of the USA

Dr. Robin Kerner presented as part of the US Opioid Crisis: Emerging Interventions & Policy Implications event on the "Implications for policymakers public health advocates & governments" panel.

Perspectives on the Problems of the "Social" in the Neoliberal Age

Two members of the ASPIRE team presented as part of "Perspectives on the Problems of the "Social" in the Neoliberal Age." Melissa Meinhart presented "Historical Precedence for Social Work Practice in the United States" and Dr. Anindita Dasgupta presented "Evidence-based practice in social work: current state of the field, and directions forward.



In recognition of National Gay Mens Awareness Day, [SIG shared research and strategies to address disparities from both Drs. Andrea Norcini Pala and Elwin Wu.](#)

Scholarly publication highlights

In 2019, SIG staff were authors on several scholarly publications. Below, a few highlights. [See more SIG](#)

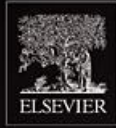


[It Takes Two to Combat the HIV Epidemic:
Effectiveness of a Couple-Based HIV and STI
Prevention Intervention](#)

“I cannot overstate the significance of this study. By bringing men from community supervision programs and their female partners to learn together as a dyad about safe sex practices, and to build communication skills and healthy

relationships, they reduced their sexual risk behaviors and improved communication skills. These outcomes indicate that it takes two to combat the HIV epidemic.” --Dr. El-Bassel, first author

Read the entire article about the JAMA publication on the [School of Social Work site](#), including a link to an article on Reuters / Medscape Health.



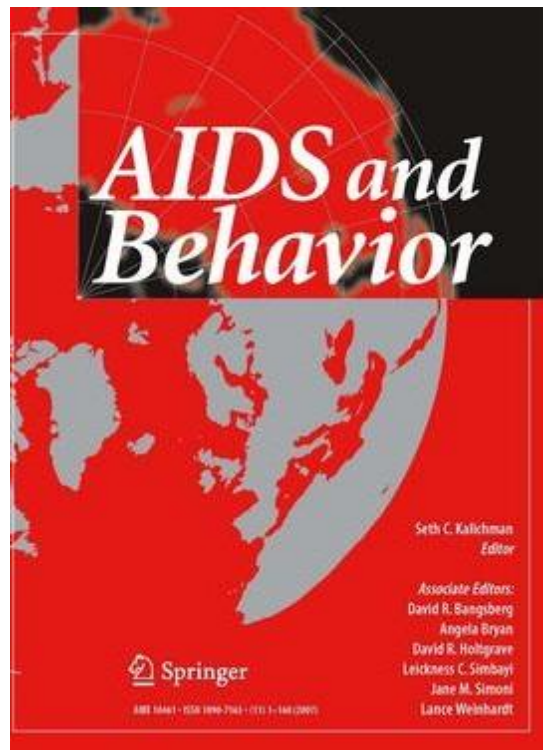
Volume 66 April 2019 ISSN 0955-3959

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
DRUG
POLICY

[Attitudes towards people living with HIV and people who inject drugs: A mixed method study of stigmas within harm reduction programs in Kazakhstan](#)



[Drug overdose among women in intimate relationships: The role of partner violence, adversity and relationship dependencies](#)



[If You Build It, Will They Use It? Preferences for Antiretroviral Therapy \(ART\) Adherence Monitoring among People Who Inject Drugs \(PWID\) in Kazakhstan](#)

SIG Team (2019)

In 2019, SIG was fortunate to add talent to the team working in a variety of projects and programs,

**including the T32 program, the
HEALing Communities Study,
ASPIRE, eWORTH, and Smart
Couples II.**

WELCOME!

Robin Kerner
Jodi-Kaye Watson
Marguerite Burns
Ajita Singh
Brandy Henry
Karli Hochstatter
Tiffany Hamidjaja
Samantha Lang
Mia Christopher
James David
Melissa Slavin
Jenny Komos Hartmann
Emily Voorhees
Phoebe Kelleher
Qicheng Yang
Yifan Liu
Hui-Ching Wu
Sara Elizabeth Landers
Sandra Rodriguez
Melika Behrooz

SIG Team

- Nabila El-Bassel

- Elwin Wu
- Louisa Gilbert
- Timothy Hunt
- Dale Alexander Acevedo
- Christina Aivadyan
- Jasmine Akuffo
- Chermaine Black
- Adam Brooks
- Maria Cedeno
- Mingway Chang
- Anindita Dasgupta
- Alissa Davis
- Greer Ellis
- Dawn Goddard Eckrich
- Jenissia Jeanty
- Urchin Kennedy
- Yong Gun “YG” Lee
- Tara McCrimmon
- Charlotte McCullagh
- Melissa Meinhart
- Andrea Norcini Pala
- Irene Perez Ibarra
- Ariel Richer
- Zhanjie Si
- Minh Ta

- Eleni Vlachos
- Audrey Ward
- Brooke West
- M. Adam Brooks

Read more about each of these individuals on our People page: [Current SIG team and affiliates](#)

Student accomplishments



“ Working with SIG and GHRCCA’s BRIDGE Program for two months in Kazakhstan this summer was a wonderful opportunity to experience public health and social justice in action. ”

Sophia Kiselova (center) on her summer practicum/internship working in the field in Shymkent for the Global Health Research Center of Central Asia (GHRCCA)



The BRIDGE team in Kazakhstan



Y.G. Lee was selected to share his reflections on PRIDE by the School of Social Work

See this [terrific video short by the Columbia School of Social Work](#) of SIG's Y.G. Lee for #PRIDE month.

The [WINGS intervention](#) debuted a stunning new infographic created by student Olivia Smith:



[Learn more about Project Wings](#)

Grantors and Funders



National Institutes
of Health



COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
President's Global Innovation Fund



unicef

The research, training programs, and global work of the Social Intervention Group would not be possible without the generous support of our grantors and funders. [Read about our grantors and funders.](#)

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