

Sheila Ohlsson Walker, CFA, Ph.D.

Personal Mission Statement: To leverage biopsychosocial science and advocacy to empower children and families in living the healthy, happy and productive lives they choose and deserve.

Sheila Ohlsson Walker is a Senior Scientist with Tufts University's Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development; a Visiting Assistant Professor with the Johns Hopkins School of Education; an Adjunct Professor of Pediatrics at George Washington University / Children's National Medical Center; and a Faculty Affiliate at the University of California, Irvine. Her research interests focus on how information from the fields of neurobiology, genetics, epigenetics, psychoneuroimmunology and human development can be *translated and applied* to promote healthy multi-generational relationships and lifestyle habits, reduce rates of chronic disease, enhance school performance, and optimize health and learning throughout life. A core focus is on the biological embedding of chronic stress, and how environmental factors can significantly enhance or degrade health and educational outcomes, with an emphasis on highly vulnerable populations. Her research interests include the preconception, prenatal and early childhood origins of health and neurodevelopment, and understanding how biosocial research on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and toxic stress can be effectively leveraged towards early intervention, prevention, resilience and enhanced quality of life within family systems and communities.

Dr. Walker's work builds upon her doctoral research at the intersection of biology and behavior on the Twins Early Development Study – the largest longitudinal twin study to date on children's cognitive abilities, behavior and language development. Her doctoral research on the 15,000 twin pair study, which began in 1994, examined the relative influence of “nature” and “nurture” on characteristics relevant for education. Dr. Walker subsequently developed and taught an undergraduate course at Georgetown University on how health and human development are shaped by the dynamic interaction between genetics and the environment. She later applied this knowledge to perform interdisciplinary research at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health as part of the Center on the Early Life Origins of Disease. While at Bloomberg, she co-instructed a course framing school for all children - particularly our most vulnerable - within a public health context using the Centers for Disease Control's “Whole Child, Whole School, Whole Community” model. In 2018, Dr. Walker served as the Interim Vice President of Applied & Translational Science at the Center for Youth Wellness, a Bay Area-based nonprofit focused on ameliorating toxic stress via changing pediatric screening practices around ACEs. Her role entailed managing the Clinical and Research teams, co-creating practical and accessible content for parents, pediatricians, educators and policymakers, and collaborating to develop the organization's long-term strategic vision. Her present focus is on applying scientific research and leveraging public-private partnerships to foster positive youth development through sport.

Prior to academia, Dr. Walker was a mutual fund Portfolio Manager at the Berger Funds in Denver, having studied finance and marketing as an undergraduate at the University of Colorado, Boulder. She attended CU on a tennis scholarship, played professional tennis in Europe after graduation, and continues to compete at a national level. Dr. Walker received her doctorate in Behavioral Genetics from Kings College London in 2005. In addition to being engaged with a variety of local and national organizations focused on improving education and health outcomes for at-risk children, she serves on the national boards of LIFT, a nonprofit dedicated to multi-generational poverty alleviation; the advisory board for Turnaround for Children, focused on harnessing biopsychosocial science to design positive learning environments for children in high-adversity schools; the Junior Tennis Champions Center, committed to transforming lives through tennis; and serves on the board of the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee Foundation. She is married, has three sons, and lives in Denver, Colorado.

PUBLICATIONS

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2. "Children Seized at the U.S. Border Will Face Lasting Health Consequences". Published in New Scientist, June 2018. Chelsea Whyte. <https://www.newscientist.com/article/2172120-children-seized-at-us-border-will-face-lasting-health-effects>
3. Wang, H., Xu, B., Xu, R., Walker S.O., Wang, G. Joint Effect of Maternal Plasma Homocysteine and Prepregnancy Obesity on Child Blood Pressure. International Journal of Obesity 2017 May 3. doi: 10.1038/ijo.2017.109. [Epub ahead of print] PMID: 28454692, PMCID: PMC5412713.
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