My program of research focuses on how adolescents and young adults with serious mental health challenges make decisions about whether to seek mental health services. Previous national epidemiological studies have demonstrated that adolescence and young adulthood is a time for the onset of serious mental health disorders, yet studies have found high rates of underutilization of mental health services by young people living with a serious mental health condition. This is an important period of launching to adult life in relation to significant functioning outcomes that include employment, education, and social relationships. Developing a serious mental health challenge during this transition can cause major impairment in these functioning outcomes. In 2014, the Institute of Medicine published a report on the importance of conducting research on young adult mental health. Of significance, only a marginal group of individuals that develop a psychotic disorder receive care prior to developing psychosis. This is considered a serious public health concern for young people in the early stages of psychosis because delays in the treatment for psychosis lead to worse outcomes.

**Current gap in the empirical literature:**
Currently there are gaps in understanding the decision making process that young people at clinical high risk for developing psychosis (prodromal phase of psychosis) make when determining whether to seek mental health services. In addition there is conflicting research on the role that key supportive others play in mental health service utilization in young people at clinical high risk for developing psychosis. Furthermore, there is little to no research done on what these young people perceive are the social and community messages they are receiving from significant others in their lives which in turn could influence their decisions to seek mental health services.

**My scholarly research encompasses three main areas:**

1. Explore the barriers and facilitators to seeking mental health services in adolescents and young adults at risk for developing psychosis in different communities, and countries (e.g. USA, Canada) using qualitative research techniques.

2. Develop and test surveys to understand decision making and mental health service utilization of young people that meet the criteria for psychotic like experiences.

3. Build on this understanding to develop evidenced-based interventions aimed to increase initial and continued engagement in mental health services in youth in the early stage of psychosis.
My PhD education has allowed me to develop my research skills as mixed method researcher applying cutting edge methodologies and statistical methods to important mental health issues with adolescents and young adults. To this end, I have worked on quantitative research projects that utilized multi-level structural equation modeling; as well qualitative studies that utilized grounded theory, narrative analysis, thematic analysis, content analysis techniques. I have also gained expertise as a mental health service utilization researcher with young people, as well as developed skills as an intervention researcher.

For my dissertation, I am conducting a qualitative study that looks at mental health service utilization and decision-making in young adults at risk for developing psychosis that attend a specialtyprodromal clinic at the New York State Psychiatric Institute at Columbia University. My study is twofold: aim 1: inductive; conducting open-ended interviews with young adults at risk for developing psychosis and using grounded theory techniques to develop a conceptual framework; aim 2: deductive; applying a decision making theory (Unified Theory of Behavior) to understand decision making when it comes to mental health service utilization in the same young adults using content analysis techniques. My research findings will have important implications for social work practice and research including: 1) Do services tailored specifically to youth at risk for developing psychosis increase engagement; and 2) How does race and gender impact mental health service utilization? The Fahs-Beck fund for Research and Experimentation at The New York Community Trust has successfully funded my dissertation project. In addition, I received funding from the Doctoral Fund from the Research Department at the Silver School of Social Work to fund my dissertation project.

As I begin an academic career, I plan to continue to conduct research on mental health service utilization among youth in the early stages of psychosis, as well as in adolescent and young people living with a serious mental health conditions. My long-term goal is to develop evidenced-based interventions aimed to increase engagement in mental health services in these young people at clinical high risk for developing psychosis. My future research will build upon the knowledge and skills that I have acquired in the context of my dissertation and other research projects. I plan on applying to funding sources both in the USA and in Canada.