

# Milken Institute School of Public Health

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

## DrPH 2020 Cohort Bios

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**Elif Alyanak, MPH**

**Dept: HPM**

Originally from Atlanta, GA, Elif is pursuing her DrPH at George Washington University, concentrating in Health Policy and Management. She graduated from the Georgia Institute of Technology and soon after received her MPH, also in Health Policy and Management, from Georgia State University. Elif is currently an epidemiologist and research scientist consultant with the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases at the CDC, where for the past 7 years she has worked with the Influenza Division, primarily coordinating and managing vaccine effectiveness research platforms, and supporting the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) with vaccination recommendation and guidelines. Elif

evaluates scientific literature, publications, and clinical trials to stay current on global influenza vaccine findings and policies, reviewing and analyzing results to author recommendations for the prevention and control of seasonal influenza with vaccines. She consults with the ACIP Influenza Working Group to provide evidence-based research guidance for review and use by clinical providers, public health laboratories and domestic and international partners. Elif has a particular interest in vaccine science, vaccine policy and immunization research programs. Taking what has been learned from the emergency response experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, Elif would like to continue work related to strategic decision making, prevention and control planning, and immunization programming in preparation for any future outbreaks, epidemics or pandemics. In her free time, Elif enjoys cooking, exploring to find new restaurants and donut shops, and traveling whenever possible, especially to visit her family and home in Turkey.



**Elizabeth Arend, MS**

**Dept: HPM**

Elizabeth is a DrPH student in GW's Health Policy and Management department. She was born in New Jersey, and raised outside of San Francisco and Boston. After more than a decade of work in global health, including posts in Ethiopia, South Africa and Rwanda, Elizabeth transitioned to focus on behavioral health and access to care in the United States. She currently serves as the Director of Provider Services at the Primary Care Coalition in Montgomery County, MD, but is headquartered in her living room in Dupont Circle. Her goal is to blow up the U.S. healthcare system and put it back together again, which she anticipates will keep her busy for the rest of her career. Elizabeth is a proud graduate of Bryn Mawr College where she majored in Feminist and Gender Studies. She wishes she had paid closer attention in biostats class during her master's at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. She has memorized every episode of *I Love Lucy* and is an unabashed coffee snob. Her greatest ambition in life is to get a dog.



**Ali Aslam, MPH**

**Dept: EOH**

Ali is a DrPH student in the Environmental and Occupational Health Department at GW. He currently serves as a Senior Analyst at the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO), where he provides technical assistance and capacity-building support to state and territorial environmental health programs. Within environmental health, Ali focuses on issues related to the built environment, water safety, environmental justice and health equity. Ali received his MPH at GWU and has a Bachelor's degree in environmental engineering from the University of Virginia. Before coming to GW, he completed a fellowship with CDC's Public Health Associate Program and worked as a health educator in rural Illinois. Ali was born in VA and currently resides in the DC metropolitan area.



**Sarah Axelson, MSW**

**Dept: PCH**

My name is Sarah Axelson and I'm from Fairfax, VA. I am a DrPH student within the Health Behavior program, in the Prevention and Community Health Department. I've been working in public health, specifically sexual and reproductive health, at the national level for the last fifteen years. I've held various roles in non-profit and federal government – I started as a Program Manager for Teen Pregnancy Prevention initiatives at Advocates for Youth, went on to serve as a Project Officer for Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiatives in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and also worked as Director of

Training for national health equity organization ETR. I currently serve as the Director of Training and Innovation, and the Interim Head of Programs, at Power to Decide, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring that everyone has the power to decide if, when, and under what circumstances to get pregnant and have a child. I've also been a part-time Lecturer in the Milken Institute SPH since 2011, teaching various courses for undergraduate students. I am incredibly passionate about sexual and reproductive health, rights, and justice, and about supporting young people, and I have done a lot of work with college students to improve sexual and reproductive health care on college campuses. I cannot imagine working in any field other than public health. I wake up every day feeling a moral and ethical imperative to improve our collective well-being. Public health, specifically sexual and reproductive health, gives me the opportunity to achieve that lasting impact.

**Bani Bhattacharya****Dept: EOH**

Having lived in a developing country during the formative years of life helped me to understand the importance and value of protecting the environment and human health. Encountering daily problems of clean water, water shortages, polluted air, severe droughts, diseases such as dengue, malaria, etc., intrigued my curiosity of learning about the environment and the life history strategies of living organisms. Applying this knowledge in understanding the complex equilibrium of ecosystems and the impact of human beings motivated me to pursue education and work in the field of science and environmental health. I am currently employed at NIH. My work entails collaboration with professionals nationally and internationally on environmental sustainability. Prior to joining NIH, I worked as a toxicologist (contractor) at EPA, and as an Environmental and Occupational Health Specialist (contractor) at DoD. I am originally from New Delhi, India.



**Ramaa Chitale, MPH**  
**Dept: GH**

My name is Ramaa Chitale and I am a DrPh student in the department of Global Health. I earned a B.A. in History from Bowdoin College, and completed my MPH from Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. Currently I am a consultant for the real-world evidence team at Real Chemistry, where I work in health economics and outcomes research including disease/economic models and as a medical writer. My public health interests are in vaccine access and equity globally, cost-effectiveness analysis, and tools to improve health communications.





**Alison Cuccia, MSPH**

**Dept: PCH**

I grew up in Lawrenceville, New Jersey and graduated from Carnegie Mellon University in 2011, where I studied Chemistry and Mathematics. After college, I went to the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, graduating in 2013 with a Master of Science in Public Health (MSPH) degree with a focus in Human Nutrition. During this program, I assisted with research led by Dr. Joel Gittelsohn, which sought to improve healthy food access in low-income areas of Baltimore City. In early 2014, I began working as a

Program Evaluator for the Army Public Health Center (APHC), supporting projects aimed at changing the built environment on military installations to encourage healthy eating, physical activity, and tobacco free living. At the end of 2017, I became a Senior Research Associate at Truth Initiative Schroeder Institute in Washington, DC, where I still currently work. At Truth Initiative, I have been an integral part of eleven published peer reviewed papers and sixteen presentations at national and international conferences. My current research focuses on tobacco control policies, specifically policies that prevent young people from using e-cigarettes. In 2020, I began working on my Doctor of Public Health degree with a concentration in Health Behavior at the George Washington Milken Institute for Public Health.



**Michael Forde**

**Dept: PCH**

My name is Michael H. Forde, and I am a DrPH student in Health Behavior within the Milken Institute of Public Health. My hometown is Brooklyn, New York, however, I grew up in Johnston County, North Carolina. Before becoming a DrPH student, I worked in health communications with the National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Allergy & Infectious Diseases, as a public health specialist assisting with the federal COVID-19 response. Throughout the course of my DrPH program, I will be continuing to serve as a health communications specialist while leading to mitigate local and national health disparities. My interest in public health stems from my past exposure to working with vulnerable populations in inpatient and outpatient settings. I was disheartened to see that higher levels of risk attributed to patients were not consistently synonymous with increased levels of care. Financial barriers, cultural barriers, and implicit bias presented as factors making it difficult for patients to have an optimal outcome. In addition, the intensive care coordination of patients revealed to me barriers in provider-patient communication and the dire need for systematic interventions among marginalized groups.



**Gnora Gumanow, MPH**

**Dept: HPM**

Gnora Gumanow (She/Her) is a doctoral student in the George Washington School of Public Health's Department of Health Policy and Management with a primary interest in the intersection of civic engagement and public health. She graduated with her MPH in health policy from GW in the spring of 2020. Prior to that Gnora worked as a grassroots field organizer and program director for reproductive health access and youth democracy reform respectively. Gnora grew up in Portland, Oregon and moved to DC in 2018. While pursuing her doctoral degree, Gnora works at the Alliance for Youth Action as a Director of Network

Capacity, offering programmatic support to local youth organizing groups across the country and representing the organization on key economic justice and democracy reform coalitions. In her spare free time, Gnora captains a women's ultimate frisbee team and enjoys long walks with her pup Juniper.



**Christina Juan, MSc**

**Dept: GH**

Christina Juan is a global health DrPH student and an NIH-funded researcher with the Global Mental Health Equity Lab led by Professor Brandon Kohrt. Her research includes an [exploration of the associations between gender attitudes, polyvictimization, and adolescent mental health](#), and analysis of mental health diagnoses by primary care workers.

Previously, she conducted research at the Demographic and Health Surveys Program and the International Center for Research on Women. She grew up in New York, attended the

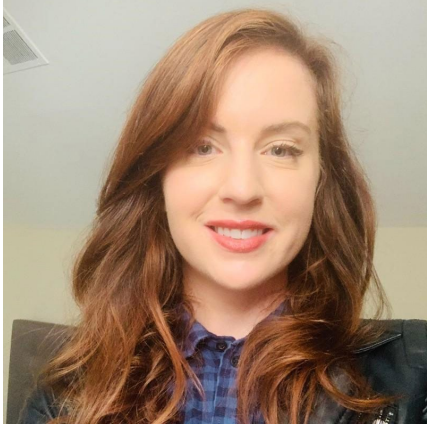
University of Michigan, and received a Master in Science in Reproductive & Sexual Health Research from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.



**Bryan Kirk, MPH**  
**Dept: HPM**

Bryan Kirk earned a Bachelor of Science in Psychology degree from the University of Minnesota in 2011 and a Master's in Public Health in Health Policy and Management from Boston University in 2016. Bryan has spent 4 years working in direct mental health patient care, 3 years in supply chain management, and 2.5 years in grassroots public health education with Peace Corps Belize. He has worked at multiple levels of healthcare from direct patient care to operations, management, and strategy, and has an extensive background in project management.

Currently, Bryan works for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services as a Health Insurance Specialist, supporting qualified health plan certification for [healthcare.gov](https://www.healthcare.gov) and working in project management and IT coordination. Bryan is also a first year DrPH Candidate in Health Policy at George Washington University. He is passionate about health systems reform, mental health parity, health care access and equity, and the global burden of disease. In his free time, Bryan enjoys rock climbing, playing the ukulele, music, running, traveling, watching most sports, cooking, and baking.



**Lizzy Laferriere**

**Dept: HPM**

Lizzy Laferriere (she/her) is determined to unlock and champion a healthier system for children in U.S. juvenile legal system. As Team Lead for Innovation at the Office of Population Affairs (OPA), Lizzy co-designs and executes OPA strategy to expand what's possible in promoting sexual and reproductive health. She has diverse experience in the field of health and children's advocacy, including legislative advocacy, policy implementation, political campaigns, and county government. She is currently pursuing her doctorate in health policy from George Washington University, where she researches public health approaches to decarceration and adolescent reproductive justice. She received her MPP in international policy from Georgetown and BA from Wellesley. Her key strengths are: deliberative, context, discipline, achiever, relator. She serves as a CASA with the DC Bridges Juvenile Justice Program and is President of her Wellesley Alumnae Class. Her free time is largely dedicated to building forts for her cat, Hermie.



**Grey Maxson, MPH**  
**Dept: PCH**

My name is Grey Maxson; I am a DrPH student in the Department of Prevention and Community Health. I grew up in Boise, Idaho and have been living in the DC area since 2015. Prior to becoming a doctoral student, I spent several years working in international development, which included time both domestically and abroad. I also spent two years working in physical activity promotion with the Pan American Health Organization. I currently work full-time as a Program Associate with the Center for Health and Health Care in Schools, which is housed within the public health school here at GW. I received my B.Sc. in Exercise Science from BYU and completed my MPH at GW.



**Caitlin Murphy, MPA-PNP**  
**Dept: HPM**

Caitlin currently acts as a Senior Research Associate within the Health Policy and Management Department at the Milken Institute School of Public Health at George Washington University. She brings over 12 years of experience managing mixed-method research projects aiming to improve the health and wellbeing of women, children, and families through practice and policy change. She brings content expertise regarding maternal and child health, reproductive health, mental health, trauma, and social determinants of health among low-income populations, as well as pathways for addressing social determinants of health in healthcare settings. Previously, she provided research project management in support of women's and children's health initiatives at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Population Services International's Women's Health Project, the Research Center for Leadership in Action at NYU, the World Bank Group, Population Action International, and the Ms. Foundation for Women. Ms. Murphy has a Masters' in Public Policy Analysis from NYU Wagner with a concentration in health and gender, and is a current DrPH student in the Health Policy and Management Department at GWU.





**Gloria Pedersen, MSc**  
**Dept: GH**

Originally from Boston, MA, Gloria Pedersen is a current DrPH student in the Global Health track. She received her MSc in Global Mental Health in 2017 from King's College London and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and currently works as a research associate with Dr. Brandon Kohrt in the Global Mental Health Division, School of Medicine and Health Science, at The George Washington University in Washington, D.C. She is currently leading the management of two projects at the GMH

lab: **EQUIP: Ensuring Quality in Psychological Support**, A WHO workforce development package for psychological interventions (<https://www.gmhequitylab.com/equip>), and **WHO Foundational Helping Skills Training Package (within EQUIP)**, a 20-hour training aimed at building foundational helping skills for helpers across health and other sectors (eg, MHPSS, healthcare providers, nurses, etc.). Gloria is also leading two systematic reviews under the **Identifying Depression Early in Adolescence (IDEA) project**, a multi-country consortium involving Brazil, UK, Nepal, and Nigeria (<https://www.gmhequitylab.com/idea>). Previously, Gloria worked in developmental psychobiology at Weill Cornell Medical College, supporting research on healthy adolescent brain development and risk-taking behaviours. Prior to joining the GMH Division at GWU, Gloria worked in London at the Centre for Global Mental Health (IoPPN) and with War Child Holland on various research topics including depression and HIV-treatment adherence in Zimbabwean adults, comorbid anxiety and depression in adolescents, and family-based psychosocial interventions for youth outcomes in low-and middle-income countries. Research interests broadly include child and adolescent mental health, mental health service delivery, capacity building, and implementation, and service-user and family involvement for mental health interventions.



**Ilse Peterson, MPH**

**Dept: HPM**

Ilse Peterson is a strategy consultant who manages initiatives to address scientific, clinical and public health challenges. With more than a decade of experience working with life sciences, health care and tax-exempt organization clients, Ilse provides strategic, project management and impact evaluation services to advance her clients' goals. Ilse has aided individual clients and associations in defining organizational priorities and action plans, creating and managing grant programs, establishing new programs to address clinical research and public health challenges, and convening stakeholders in workshop and conference settings. She has also helped establish and manage several multi-stakeholder collaborations. Additionally, she assists clients with initiatives related to clinical research and data privacy compliance. She is currently a Senior Manager for strategy and alliance development at Faegre Drinker. She is originally from Saint Paul, MN.



**Courtney Riggle-van Schagen**  
**Dept: PCH**

Courtney Riggle-van Schagen has worked in community health for more than 15 years, with a focus on addressing health disparities and advocating for health equity in underserved and under-resourced communities. Courtney holds a Master of Social Work from the University of Maryland, Baltimore, with a specialization in Clinical Mental Health and a Bachelor of Science in Human Development and Psychological Services from Northwestern University.

Currently Courtney serves as the Director of Behavioral Health with a Federally Qualified Health Center in Northern Virginia contributing to the integration of primary care and behavioral health to improve health outcomes and access to care. Courtney's clinical expertise is focused on providing culturally and linguistically competent and responsive behavioral health care to patients in the immigrant community to address trauma, mood disorders, child and adolescent adjustment and health behavior change strategies to improve adaptive functioning. Courtney is passionate about work that is centered on the intersection of social justice and human rights issues for migrants at the US Southern border and reducing health disparities for Latino immigrants. She is also interested in working to develop interventions that are more inclusive of immigrant populations and improving training for clinical teams that support more effective communication between patients and their healthcare providers.



**Rebecca Robbins, MSc, PA-C**  
**Dept: EOH**

Originally from southern West Virginia, Rebecca is a DrPH student within the department of Environmental and Occupational Health at the Milken Institute School of Public Health. She currently works as a research associate in the Perry Lab at the George Washington University with Dr. Melissa Perry, studying environmental endocrine disruption and the role these disruptors play on both male and female reproductive health. She received her MSc from the University of Charleston in 2013 and spent the next 7 years practicing medicine as a physician assistant (PA). She previously served as a neuropsychiatric PA for a rural West Virginia community mental health clinic, treating both general mental health disorders and working with victims of gender-based violence. She later transitioned into procedural work, spending several years on the neuroradiology service at a major academic institution, where she completed fluoroscopically guided spinal procedures, working primarily with neurosurgery, oncology, and trauma patients. Her work in rural communities gave her a deeper understanding of how devastating the impacts of environmental contaminants can be on population health and led her to shift her career in order to focus more deeply on environmental health issues.



**Rachel Sadlon, MPH**  
**Dept: PCH**

Rachel Sadlon is a DrPH student in the Health Behavior program. Currently, Ms. Sadlon is the Associate Director of Research and Evaluation at the Center for Health and Health Care in Schools, located within the George Washington University Milken Institute School of Public Health. Ms. Sadlon directs the Center's research and evaluation portfolio, helping schools and communities

across the U.S. develop and evaluate school-connected programs and policies that support the health and well-being of children. She has 10 years' experience designing, implementing, and evaluating prevention programs targeting school-aged children and adolescents. Ms. Sadlon also co-instructs the graduate level public health course, School Health and Safety. Rachel grew up in Glastonbury, CT and has lived in the Washington, DC area since 2017. Ms. Sadlon received her BA in Political Science and MPH from the University of Connecticut, and a Certificate in Health Policy from the Milken Institute School of Public Health.



**William Steen, MPH**  
**Dept: EOH**

My name is William Steen and I am a DrPH student in the Environmental and Occupational Health Department. Prior to moving to DC, I worked at Mount Sinai South Nassau Hospital in New York, just a few minutes from my hometown of Bellmore. While working in healthcare administration, I supervised many data-driven projects focused on patient outcome metrics and productivity. After three years in my healthcare administration role, I moved to DC to begin my MPH in Environmental Health Science and Policy in the department of Environmental and Occupational Health. I graduated from Milken in May of 2020 and have transitioned straight into the DrPH program. I am excited to continue my work here in EOH and look forward to meeting you on Wednesday!



**Maria Taleyero, MD MS**  
**Dept: EOH**

I was born and raised in Mexico City, where I received my medical training. A few years ago I decided to venture into the public health field because I realized how neglected environmental health was. I moved to New York City and got my Masters in Toxicology at Columbia University, where I worked after graduation on radiation exposure projects and electronic cigarette use hazards. I work as a consultant for the Mexican government on different environmental health programs that include prevention of lead exposure and the development of new policies to protect Mexicans from environmental hazards. I am

passionate about health effects caused by environmental exposures such as heavy metals; pesticide use and other persistent chemicals.



**Aroona Toor, MPH**  
**Dept: HPM**

Aroona Toor is a DrPH student in the Department of Health Policy and Management at the George Washington University, Milken Institute School of Public Health. A native of St. Louis, MO, Aroona currently lives in Virginia and is the Health Policy and Advocacy Fellow at the American Muslim Health Professionals (AMHP).

Aroona completed her Bachelor of Science in Public Health and International Studies with a minor in Spanish, as well as a Master's in Public Health, in Epidemiology from Saint Louis University. Since graduating, Aroona has worked as the Project Manager for Health Equity at the American Cancer Society, as a Legal Assistant for CG Immigration Law, LLC and for the Saint Louis County Department of Public Health focusing on mental health and substance abuse prevention in North Saint Louis County Youth. In 2015, after becoming more aware of unmet needs in her community and a determination to address these needs, Aroona co-founded the Muslim Women's Professional Network, a national, award-winning non-profit organization with chapters across the U.S.

Aroona is a member of the Asian and Pacific Islander American Scholars (APIA Scholars), Scholar Advisory Committee and has previously served on the Gates Millennium Scholars Alumni Advisory Council and the American Cancer Society's Global Young Professionals Council.

Aroona is passionate about the intersection of public health and social justice and is committed to working towards a more equitable world where everyone has a fair and just opportunity to live a safe, healthy, and prosperous life. In her free time, Aroona enjoys spending time with family and friends, trying new restaurants, staying active and traveling.





**Prarthana Vasudevan, MS MSPH**  
**Dept: GH**

Prarthana Vasudevan is a first year DrPH student in the Global Health Department at The George Washington University Milken Institute School of Public Health. Her professional interests include immunization policy and advocacy, science communication, and women in global health leadership. Currently, she works as a Communications Officer at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, where she assists in planning and implementing communications activities and in tracking the Center's research and policy impact. Prior to joining the Center in

August 2020, she specialized in vaccine policy, advocacy, and communications for 5 years at the Johns Hopkins International Vaccine Access Center, and focused on childhood routine immunization in India (working with Dr. Mathu Santosham and his team) and global older adult immunization. She holds a MS in biological sciences from the University of Maryland and a MSPH in global disease epidemiology and control from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, where she also earned a certificate in vaccine science and policy. She earned a BS in biochemistry and molecular biology from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Prarthana is a proud first-generation immigrant and Indian American. Her hometown is Columbia, Maryland, with roots in Chennai, India.

**Sahil Verma, MBBS MPH**

**Dept: HPM**

My name is Sahil Verma. I was born and raised in Punjab, India. Currently, I am pursuing DrPH in Health Policy. I received my medical training in India, following which I practiced general medicine for over 6 years with special focus on preventative medicine and preventable diseases. I left my practice to pursue advanced education in Public Health and Health Policy. Currently, I am working with Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services as a Health Insurance Specialist. I am passionate about serving the public through servant leadership.