

A citizen science approach for supporting vulnerable populations during COVID-19 crisis, by Jessica Hafetz Mirman

There is an abundance of COVID-19 research and engagement activities happening across the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Edinburgh and our project team is delighted to be part of such a dynamic group!

The overall aims of our project, based in the School of Health and Social Science, are to conduct a data-driven needs assessment utilizing citizen-science methods with people and families living in or near poverty in communities in Edinburgh. The data from the needs assessment will be used as inputs into a community organizing initiative conducted in collaboration with Faith in Community to (1) raise awareness of citizens' specific needs, (2) identify available resources and assets to meet these needs, and (3) connect citizens with the resources and assets that they need. Citizens will have an active role throughout this process as key producers and consumers of the data.

We are taking an asset- and resilience-based approach to this project, which means that we seek not to only characterize communities based on "deficits" but also to identify strengths, assets, and champions of positive change. For example, we are:

- measuring individual-level "grit" to determine how grit may be related to mental health, well-being and adaptive behaviours,

- using the selective optimization and compensation (SOC) model to understand how people of all ages and communities are strategically adapting to the crisis, and
- using the CoronaReport app (<https://www.coronareport.eu/>) to provide a tool for citizens to report on the impact of the virus on their lives by answering close-ended questions and completing an open text “diary”. These reports can be updated as often as the citizens want, and are viewable using an interactive mapping tool, thus creating a living digital diary.

To accomplish these goals we are working with Faith in Community Scotland, a registered charity organisation that has a vision to enable Scotland’s poorest communities to flourish. They prioritise their work in communities with high levels of poverty, this includes across Edinburgh & South East Scotland. As such, they were a natural organization to collaborate with.

What makes this project unique is its grounding in Applied Developmental Science (ADS). *“ADS is scholarship that seeks to advance the integration of developmental research with actions, policies and programs that promote positive development and/or enhance the life chances of vulnerable children and families.”* (Lerner, Fisher & Weinberg, 2000). I was fortunate enough to do my graduate training with the founders of Applied Developmental Science two decades ago at Fordham University and I couldn’t be happier to continue to engage in ADS at The University of Edinburgh. The COVID-19 crisis is a cross-cutting public health problem with its impact reaching from neurons to neighborhoods and back again. ADS provides an established conceptual, theoretical, and practical framework to tackle the numerous challenges posed by Covid-19 and to promote a more civil society by engaging in rigorous scientific research in collaboration with community partners.

For more information about this project come find us on Twitter @Coronareportapp or send us an email at coronareportapp@ed.ac.uk. The CoronaReport App can be downloaded for free for use by citizens and scientists at <https://www.coronareport.global/>

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Dr. Jessica Hafetz Mirman is a lecturer in applied psychology and public health at the University of Edinburgh. She manages this project with Dr. Stephanie Adams