

Tulane psychiatrist wins prestigious award for foster care research

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Dr. Charles Zeanah, the Mary Peters Sellars-Polchow Chair in Psychiatry at Tulane University School of Medicine, is a recipient of the 2017 Ruane Prize for Outstanding Achievement in Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Research.

A Tulane professor of child psychiatry is part of a team that has been awarded the 2017 Ruane Prize for Outstanding Achievement in Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Research. The award recognizes important advances in the understanding and treatment of early-onset brain and behavior disorders. Dr. Charles Zeanah, the Mary Peters Sellars-Polchow Chair in Psychiatry at Tulane University School of Medicine, shares the award with two fellow researchers.

Zeanah worked with fellow Ruane Award recipients Nathan Fox of the University of Maryland and Charles Nelson III of Boston Children's Hospital on the Bucharest Early Intervention Project, the only randomized clinical trial of foster care intervention for infants and young children who began life in institutions under conditions of significant psychosocial adversity.

The project demonstrated that young children who had been abandoned and lived in institutions had profound deficits in expressing positive emotions and relating well to others. The researchers also found that children in foster care had made significant gains in their abilities to express positive emotions and did so as well as children who had never lived in institutions. Further, these children were significantly more likely to form secure attachments to their foster mothers than the institutionalized children were to their institutional caregivers.

Throughout his career, Zeanah has studied the effects of adverse early experiences on development including trauma, abuse and neglect. He has also studied interventions designed to enhance recovery following exposure to adverse experiences.

The \$50,000 Ruane Prize is given by the Brain & Behavior Research Foundation to outstanding scientists who carry out research on the causes, pathophysiology, treatment or prevention of severe mental illness. The Foundation awards scientists who show particular promise for advancing the understanding of psychotic, affective or other severe brain and behavior disorders that have their onset in childhood or adolescence.