



*Ph.D. Candidate April Chai*

Ph.D. candidate April Chai published an article titled "**Counting the days: Exploring post-mortem interval factors in sexual homicides**" in *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*. The piece was co-authored with Kylie Reale from Southern Illinois University.

April writes, "In our recent research, we examine the unsettling topic of sexual homicides, focusing on the critical factors that affect how long it takes for victims to be discovered. Analyzing 269 cases from the Homicide Investigation Tracking System, we uncovered that certain traits of the offenders, victims, and even the environment where the crime occurred, significantly influence the delay in finding these victims. This study is more than just an academic exercise; it has real-world implications, potentially guiding law enforcement in refining their investigative approaches to bring closure to families more swiftly.

My journey into this research began years ago during my time at Simon Fraser University, where I had the privilege of working under Dr. Eric Beauregard. It was there that I met Kylie S. Reale, now an Assistant Professor at Southern Illinois University. Dr. Reale and I shared a similar interest in criminology, and our years of working together has led to this collaboration. As a Ph.D. candidate under the guidance of Dr. Kim Rossmo, teaming up with Dr. Reale on this project was an easy decision, and together we have worked to shed light on these crucial aspects of homicide investigations."

[Read the article in \*Behavioral Sciences & the Law\*](#)

Dr. Kelly Clary is co-leading a funded National Institutes of Health R03 (\$100,000) grant with research collaborators from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. This two-year grant project, titled "**Enabling Early Detection and Intervention in Military Suicide**" will use machine learning algorithm modeling with the Military Suicide Research Consortium Common Data Elements data set.

They believe their study findings will be used to halt military and Veteran suicide, improve the overall military and Veteran fitness, further protect and improve the military and Veteran's mental health, well-being, and enhance our nation's security.



*Dr. Kelly Clary*



*Dr. Katherine Selber*

Dr. Katherine Selber and Dr. Kelly Clary received funding from the FY 24 Veterans Legacy Grants Program.

The project, **Texas Veteran Legacy (TexVet Legacy)**, funded through the Department of Veterans Affairs, seeks to develop and tell the stories of our student Veterans, alum, and community members including both their own stories of service, but also stories of their comrades who were lost, thus memorializing their service. The project aims to train 10 undergraduate student Veterans to gather 50 stories of interred Veterans, throughout the state of Texas. By the end of the first year, project leaders will host a Summer Institute to illuminate the evidence-based methodologies to educate professors, teachers and students in local schools. The goal is to educate these stakeholders in the importance of military service and the legacies they have left and encourage them to continue collecting stories and

visiting VA-funded cemeteries in Texas.

The team included School of Social Work personnel (Dr. Selber, Dr. Clary, and Michele Dziadik-Willingham) as well as colleagues in Emerging Technologies (Dr. Khoi Nguyen, Kristin Van Diest, Andrew Rechnitz, and Heriberto Arambula). It is a great, innovative collaboration. While this is a one-year award, there is a great possibility of a second year if the team reaches their goals during year one. OSP team members were Alexandra Smith and Crystal Anderson.

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Dr. Melanie Soderstrom's solo-authored article "**Formalizing and expanding school resource officer presence: Examining the influence on student arrests**" was published by *Journal of Criminal Justice*.

Melanie writes, "I previously worked as a criminal defense attorney specializing in representing juveniles. I was wholly unprepared for and shocked by how many cases I received to represent juveniles for incidents occurring at school. In many of these cases, law enforcement officers assigned to the school full-time, known as school resource officers (SROs), arrested the student. None of my cases involved serious, violent crime. For example, I represented a middle school student for stealing a can of soda from the teacher's lounge, as well as an elementary school student for slapping a classmate who was "being mean" to her.

When I returned to academia to earn my Ph.D., I knew I wanted to study the phenomenon of the "school-to-prison pipeline" including SROs' contribution to the pipeline. A Florida county formalized their SRO programming and expanded coverage to include every public school. This paper is a result of a collaboration with the county's sheriff's office to analyze trends in school arrests over six years and assess whether the major changes to the SRO program impacted the number and characteristics of student arrests. Results show that SROs were regularly arresting students, but the formalization and expansion of the SRO program did not have statistically significant impact on overall student arrests. However, there was a significant increase in felony arrests and arrests made by SROs employed by municipal police departments."



*Dr. Melanie Soderstrom*

[Read the article in \*Journal of Criminal Justice\*](#)

Drs. Laure Brimbal, Sean Roche, and Hunter Martaindale co-authored a newly published article titled **"Interviewing and interrogation practices and beliefs, 20 Years Later: A national self-report survey of American police"** and published in *Law and Human Behavior*.

This study provides a contemporary examination of the evolving practices and beliefs regarding interviewing and interrogation among U.S. law enforcement officers. The researchers surveyed 526 officers to assess whether recent changes in research and training have influenced current practices. The findings reveal significant positive trends, such as an increased reliance on evidence and information to detect deception and a notable rise in the recording of interrogations, with nearly 78% of agencies now requiring it. In contrast to data from 20 years ago, when less than 10% of interrogations were video recorded, nearly three-quarters are now documented in this way. Additionally, the average interview duration has remained stable at 1.6 hours, with suspects typically interviewed about three times.

The survey also highlights a shift towards more science-based approaches in law enforcement, with a reduced reliance on coercive interrogation techniques and a stronger emphasis on methods supported by research. Challenges still remain, as the reported accuracy of lie detection has only slightly decreased to 74% when research shows it is typically around chance. Officers also reported that 26.2% of innocent suspects at least partially falsely confessed, showing an increased awareness of the false confession phenomenon but still a concerning high rate. Overall, these findings suggest that while U.S. law enforcement practices have evolved towards more research-informed methods and demonstrate a potential increase in awareness for more effective interrogation strategies.



*Left to right: Dr. Sean Roche, Dr. Laure Brimbal, and Dr. Hunter Martaindale*

[Read the article in APA PsychNet](#)

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*Dr. Christine Norton*

Dr. Christine Norton, Professor of Social Work, received a sub-award from the University of New Hampshire through a grant from the Peterffy Foundation to further her research in outdoor therapy, as well as to engage in strategic planning with the new **Outdoor Research Center (ORC) for Health, Wellbeing, and Experiential Engagement**. The ORC aims to create a compassionate, inclusive community that transforms outdoor health practices and research through collaboration, transparency, and ethical approaches while prioritizing participants' voices and advancing social and environmental justice.

Dr. Norton has been named Co-Director of the ORC and will collaborate with Co-Director Dr. Anita Tucker at the University of New Hampshire to build researcher/practitioner partnerships to improve outdoor health practices, influence policy, and further external funding for research and grants with ORC collaborators nationally and internationally.

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The **Title IV-E Child Welfare Partnership (CWP) team** has successfully renewed Year 3 of its 5-year contract with the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) for Fiscal Year 2025.



*Dr. Mijin Choi,  
Principal Investigator*



*Ms. Martha Wildberger,  
Project Director*



*Ms. Michele Bauman,  
Grant Coordinator*



*Amanda Graves,  
Student Worker*

Since its establishment in 1994, the CWP has been a pivotal initiative, fostering a strong collaboration between Texas DFPS and the School of Social Work at Texas State University to educate and retain ethical and skilled child welfare professionals across Texas.

The program provides students with financial support and specialized training during their social work studies, with a commitment to work for DFPS post-graduation. Participants receive a stipend during their internships with Child Protective Services (CPS) and begin their careers in child welfare upon graduation in Austin, San Antonio, and surrounding counties. Additionally, current child welfare employees receive tuition support while pursuing their MSW degrees.

A distinctive feature of the program is its collaboration with DFPS, community-based child welfare agencies, and universities across the U.S., all working together to nurture competent child welfare workers and better serve culturally diverse children and families. Beyond financial assistance, education, and training, the CWP team actively engages in research with child welfare scholars from various universities on workforce development, presents at national conferences, and publishes studies in peer-reviewed journals.

The renewed contract for FY 2025, covering July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025, will support 20 students and employees in the child welfare field, with total funding of \$583,142.

For more information on this program, please visit [The Title IV-E Child Welfare Partnership web page](#)

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Dr. Kathleen Padilla recently published her article titled " **'Hot, dumpster fire, mess': Police personnel perceptions of the current state of mental health in law enforcement.**" The article was co-authored with Adam Fine from Arizona State and is published in the *International Journal of Police Science and Management*.

Kathleen writes, "For this manuscript, we took inspiration from Riccardi and colleagues (2022) and asked police personnel to choose four words to describe the current state of mental health in law enforcement. We then interviewed 75 sworn and civilian police personnel about their perceptions, as well as what they thought their peers' perceptions were – as we know sometimes asking about peers' thoughts/behaviors can be quite reflective of our own thoughts/behaviors (Zhang & Messner, 2000).

Words were value-coded to be either positive, neutral, or negative in nature, and responses that did not fit into this response pattern were analyzed for themes and general sentiment. Overwhelmingly, the responses were negative (see Figure 1) and sometimes neutral in nature; that mental health is overlooked or complex. These findings were reflected when asking about peers' perceptions (see Figure 2). A more positive note, however, was a general understanding that it is also changing and improving, particularly as a new generation of police officers works their way up the ranks. This study provided insight into how police personnel view the working environments in which they are embedded and helps set the foundations for conversations surrounding improving mental health in this field."



*Dr. Kathleen Padilla and her pup, Phyl*

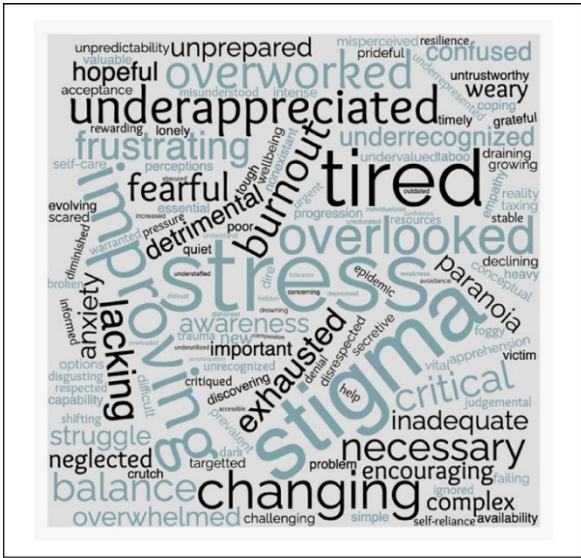


Figure 1. Personal perceptions of mental health in law enforcement.

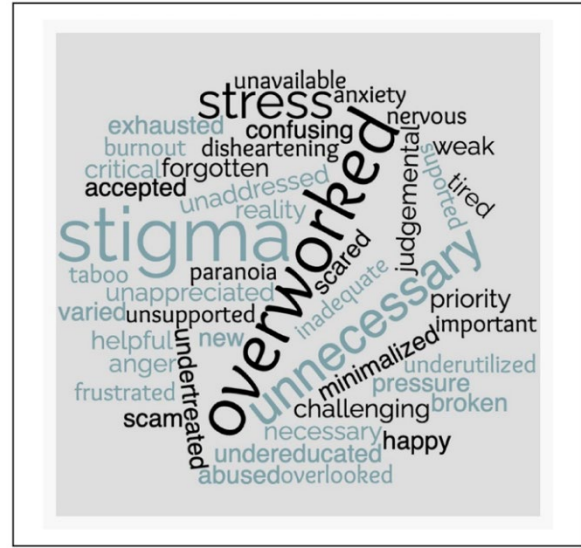


Figure 2. Peers' perceptions of mental health in law enforcement.

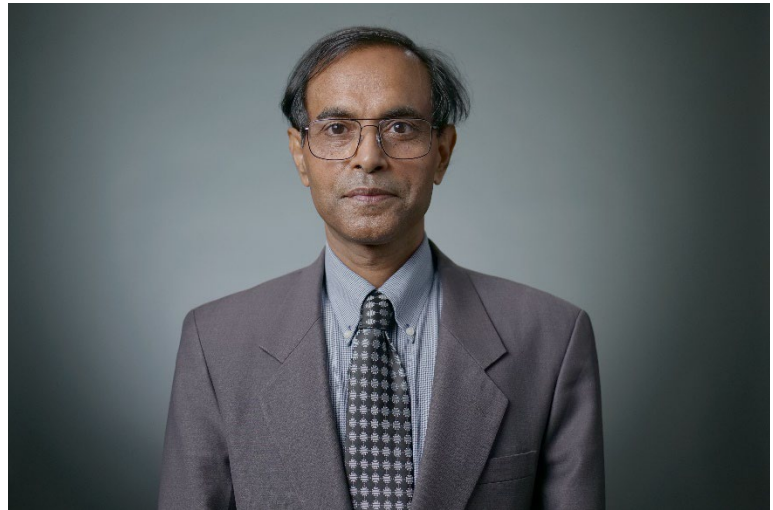
Riccardi JS, Celeste G and Dimitropoulos A (2022) Recognizing and responding to traumatized youth: preliminary results and implications for police trainings. *Police Practice and Research* 23(2): 174–194.

Zhang L., and Messner, S.F. (2000). The effects of alternative measures of delinquent peers on self-reported delinquency. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 37(3): 323–337.

[Read the article in \*International Journal of Police Science & Management\*](#)

**Dr. Madan M. Dey received subaward funding for the project titled “Restaurant and Supermarket Demand for Important Aquaculture Species.”**

Seafood markets in the U.S. have undergone dramatic changes in recent decades and are increasingly supplied by imported seafood, and an increasing share of the imports are farmed seafood. While there is significant growth in total sales of farmed seafood, so far only a limited share of the supply is domestic. Moreover, an expansion of U.S. aquaculture production relies on market demand for domestically farmed seafood. In the U.S., about 63% of seafood is consumed at-home, but a larger share of seafood by value (65%) is purchased at restaurants. This makes both grocery stores and restaurants important outlets for marketing aquaculture products. In the Southeastern U.S., there is minimal market information available for most aquaculture species and there is generally limited information on seafood consumption trends in both the grocery and restaurant sector, and this lack of data limits the industry’s ability to increase consumption in existing markets and expand markets to new geographic areas, markets outlets, and consumer segments.



Dr. Madan M. Dey

The project output will provide a better understanding of preferences for red drum, oysters, and crawfish, which will assist the industries and policymakers in developing strategies to expand sales. Market information will be distributed to aquaculture stakeholders through refereed journal publications, extension publications including a Southern Regional Aquaculture Center fact sheet, academic and industry conferences, and direct outreach.

Dr. Madan M. Dey, Professor and Department of Agricultural Sciences Chair, is leading the TXST component of the project. Dr. Dey's research group is leveraging existing access to the Nielsen retail scanner dataset to examine seafood sales in supermarkets in the Gulf states. Store-based scanner data is being used to identify products, quantities sold, and prices paid by region. Researchers at three institutions in the Gulf states (Auburn University, Texas State University, and University of Florida) are implementing this project to characterize demand characteristics and identify market outlets with the greatest potential for increasing sales of U.S. farmed products. This work is funded by the Southern Regional Aquaculture Center, which is sponsored by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). It is a 2-years project with a total funding of US \$241,096, out of which Texas State will receive US \$99,396.