

# Scholars, Educators, Leaders

## PhD in Social Work Upcoming Graduates

2024-2025



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**TENNESSEE**  
KNOXVILLE

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORK



Dear Colleagues,

It is my pleasure to introduce you to the upcoming graduates of the PhD Program at the University of Tennessee College of Social Work.

Our students are trained in rigorous research methods and innovative pedagogy. They are eager and ready to serve as the newest scholars, educators, and emerging leaders in our profession.

At the University of Tennessee, we are proud of our scholarship grounded in community needs, with an eye to intersectional oppression, social impact and social change. Our students' research interests reflect these values and—as their biographies and curriculum vitae attest—include a deep commitment to improving the quality of life for the most vulnerable groups in society.

It would be my pleasure to connect you with any of our upcoming graduates or to provide you with additional information.

Please contact me at (865) 974-3802 or [geely@utk.edu](mailto:geely@utk.edu).

With warm regards,

Gretchen E. Ely, PhD, MSW  
Professor, PhD Program Director



**Learn more about  
our PhD program**



# Kiki Kline

**Expected PhD in Social Work by Summer 2025**

*University of Tennessee (UTK), Knoxville*

**Master of Social Work (Clinical Mental Health)**

*University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work*

**Bachelor of Arts in Psychology**

*University of Delaware*

***“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.” – Marianne Williamson***

## Dissertation

### **Pending: Binge Eating and a Critical Exploration of Potential Barriers to Care**

Kiki Kline's dissertation is an exploratory examination of specific barriers to receiving adequate mental health and eating disorder care for binge eating symptoms. Her recently conducted systematic literature review found various factors related to not receiving care for binge eating symptoms on multiple social-ecological levels. A common factor present on individual, provider-level, and social/systemic levels was the relation of weight-based belief systems limiting the receipt of care. Thus, the research methodology for her dissertation takes a critical approach to the conceptualization of binge eating and the type of treatment received targeting weight-related factors as potential barriers. Two separate studies of quantitative simple analyses will be conducted from Kline's data collected over the summer of 2021 that target those with binge eating symptoms. First, she will examine the potential relationship between weight category (i.e., BMI) and delay of mental healthcare services, seeking to understand if weight places any barrier to delaying mental health services for those with binge eating. Second, she will examine the potential relationship between attitudes of delaying mental healthcare due to fear of being discriminated against because of weight/shape/size and the receipt of eating disorder treatment, now looking at potential weight-related beliefs and fears and, again, targeting those with binge eating symptoms.

## Biography

Kline is a PhD student with an interest in integrating liberatory and alternative mental health practices towards improving relationships with food, bodies, and oneself on various social-ecological levels.

She aims to help populations reduce experiences of psychological distress. Her transdisciplinary research in psychology, psychiatry, public health, medicine, and social work has shaped her collaborative efforts in connecting fields and domains to target concerns related to our relationships to our bodies, food, weight, and related distress.

Kline has worked as a community organizer and lobbies for legislation to increase access to mental health resources and decrease stigma. Specifically, her activities targeted individuals that struggle with an eating disorder diagnosis and disoriented eating behaviors, self-harm and suicide, discrimination against body size, and social justice.

Currently living in Golden, CO, Kline enjoys building relationships with the community, and engaging in advocacy and research-related activities. As an advocate for self-care, in her personal life, you may find her traveling to the mountains, rock climbing, singing, engaging in ecstatic dance, and practicing yoga and meditation.

## Research Interests

- Alternative healing modalities and liberatory practices towards disordered eating behaviors, with an emphasis on binge eating, ameliorating weight stigma and the overlapping impact of social ecological levels
- Mental health practices and systems of care in relation towards improving relationships with food, bodies, and oneself



# Ashlee Lawler

**Expected PhD in Social Work by Summer 2025**

*University of Tennessee (UTK), Knoxville*

**Master of Social Work (Medical/Clinical Social Work)**

*University of Alabama, Birmingham*

**Master of Arts in Applied/Medical Sociology**

*University of Maryland, Baltimore County*

**Bachelor of Arts in Social Psychology/Sociology (Criminal Justice Minor)**

*University of Alabama, Birmingham*

***“It’s awfully important to win with humility. It’s also important to lose. I hate to lose worse than anyone, but if you never lose you won’t know how to act. If you lose with humility, then you can come back.” – Paul “Bear” Bryant***

## Dissertation

### **Correlations and Predictions Between Mental, Emotional, Sexual Abuse and STD/STI Testing Among Appalachian Women**

In continuation of her academic journey through a social work PhD program, Ashlee Lawler has been afforded the opportunity to engage in meaningful research and teaching that is critically important in society, bridges gaps, and aims to provide positive change for individuals. Lawler’s dissertation is focused on the specific types of IPV such as mental, emotional, and sexual abuse between intimate partners and STD/STI testing among women residing in Appalachian regions within the United States. Moreover, future work by Lawler will continue to center on various social groups with multiple intersecting identities, types of IPV and DV, social behaviors and deviance, coping mechanisms, additional sexual, mental, and physical health outcomes, and help-seeking among IPV and trauma survivors.

## Biography

One of Lawler’s first loves has always been the social sciences. The culmination of her academic experiences, as well as prior extensive direct-patient care at a level-I trauma hospital and work at an IPV agency, has created an invaluable pathway for her to conduct interdisciplinary research using primary and secondary data from local, state, and national levels. Additionally, she has conducted quantitative and qualitative research and examined and evaluated community research at county and state levels.

Lawler is a huge believer in practicing and teaching applied research and takes pride in social work being an evidence-based and pragmatic field which works to address complex social problems while also bringing cultural responsiveness and intersectionality into focus. Whether Lawler is teaching an undergraduate or graduate level course, she aims to draw upon all her extensive past teaching experiences as a teaching assistant, co-instructor, and independent primary instructor from various disciplines and the field of social work for both in-person and online courses. In addition, Lawler strives to incorporate a social constructionism and inclusive teaching style into the classes to help create a reflective, reflexive, and strong critical thinking atmosphere for students to engage and learn.

## Research Interests

- IPV, DV, ACEs, and Trauma
- Mental, Sexual, and Physical Health Outcomes
- Diverse Populations and Social Groups
- Interdisciplinary Approaches using Theory, Quantitative, Mixed-Methods, and Community-Based Research to Inform Policy and Practice



# Sangwon Lee

**Expected PhD in Social Work by Spring 2025**

*University of Tennessee (UTK), Knoxville*

**Master of Social Work**

*Chongshin University, Seoul, Korea*

**Bachelor of Science in Leisure and Sport, Health Care**

*National Institute for Lifelong Education (NILE), Seoul, Korea*

***“Horrible in itself, disaster is sometimes a door back into paradise, the paradise at least in which we are who we hope to be, do the work we desire, and are each our sister’s and brother’s keeper.” — Rebecca Solnit***

## Dissertation

### **Building Adaptive Capacity to Respond to Extreme Heat Among Bus Riders in Tennessee: A Mixed-Method Study**

Sangwon Lee’s dissertation employs a mixed-methods approach to investigate how extreme heat affects bus riders’ physical and mental health to propose adaptive strategies for U.S. cities. The quantitative study examines how Tennessee residents’ socioeconomic characteristics and access to public information (e.g., heat warnings transit updates) shape their knowledge, attitudes, and practices concerning heat-related health risks while using public transportation. The qualitative portion explores bus riders’ lived experiences on hot days, focusing on underserved populations through interviews conducted in collaboration with a community organization.

## Biography

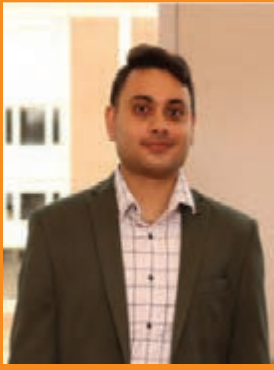
Lee is an interdisciplinary scholar with a pioneering approach to environmental and climate justice. She focuses on community-level interventions to mitigate the impact of climate-related hazards, particularly extreme heat and tornadoes. Her work, which is at the forefront of the field, utilizes cutting-edge techniques such as mixed methods, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), and field investigations to examine health disparities and spatial inequalities due to climate change and protective factors affecting underserved populations in a disaster context. She emphasizes place-based, community-engaged approaches aiming to illuminate the socioeconomic and contextual complexities underlying social and environmental challenges and seek to amplify residents’ voices by incorporating community-based data collection.

Before transitioning to social work, Lee spent five years as a physical therapist in Korea, specializing in children and adolescents with disabilities. After earning her Master’s in Social Work in 2015, she worked for international non-profits in Ireland and Germany, supporting adults with developmental disabilities and neurodiversity. In 2020, she returned to Korea and contributed to research at government-affiliated institutes. Her research focused on shaping social work practice guidelines in response to COVID-19, demonstrating the practical implications of her work. She also worked on promoting eco-friendly public transit, further showcasing her commitment to environmental and social justice.

As an educator, Lee is deeply committed to advancing social, political, and economic justice. She instills this commitment in her students, encouraging them to align their strengths and identities with social work values. She then guides them to master scientific methods, preparing them to be catalysts for positive change in their communities.

## Research Interests

- Health disparities and spatial inequality due to climate change
- Risk and protective factors for underserved populations in a disaster context
- Community participatory approaches in environmental geography for social work application



# Aritra Moulick

**Expected PhD in Social Work (Epidemiology Minor) by Spring 2025**  
*University of Tennessee (UTK), Knoxville*

**Master of Social Work (Public Health)**  
*Tata Institute of Social Sciences, India*

**Bachelor of Commerce (Honors)**  
*University of Calcutta, India*

***"Dedicated to uncovering the truths that heal nations, by transforming data into hope and action for a healthier world."***

## Dissertation

### **Infodemic Crisis: Measuring Social Media Covid-19 Vaccine Misinformation in the United States Population**

Social media serves an important role in dissemination of information and misinformation about vaccines, so it may especially influence vaccine hesitancy in times of crisis. Aritra Moulick believes an instrument to measure COVID-19 vaccine misinformation is needed to facilitate understanding the extent of social media influence among the US population. The new scale also known as the Social Media Covid-19 Vaccine Misinformation Scale (SMCov-19VMS) is being used to understand how people in the US process vaccine-related information on social media, how they form opinions about their beliefs, their confidence in this information, and how they engage with content about diseases preventable by vaccines. Second to his dissertation research, Moulick is particularly interested in how lack of access to healthcare affects marginalized and vulnerable populations with a focus on health equity, well-being, and advocacy.

## Biography

With his undergraduate degree in commerce and a graduate degree in social work, Moulick brings a unique blend of expertise and a love of interdisciplinary collaboration to his research and teaching practices. During his time in India, Moulick gained an appreciation for cultures and perspectives different from his own while working with tribal and marginalized communities in remote rural areas of India. Moulick's commitment to social justice ultimately led him to a career in social work with a strong focus on health equity and well-being of the rural and indigent communities. With a deep commitment to promoting social justice and anti-racism, his work is driven by a passion for equity, striving to develop actionable solutions that improve community well-being. As an emerging scholar, Moulick combines rigorous academic inquiry with a commitment to real-world impact, preparing to contribute significantly to the field of social work and public health.

## Research Interests

- Social media vaccine misinformation and vaccine hesitancy
- Meta-analysis of empirical studies
- Systematic literature reviews
- Measurement equivalence with use of confirmatory factor analysis
- Primary health care accessibility and availability
- Macro public health issues
- Healthcare disparities among minorities
- Burn care and trauma
- Rural healthcare accessibility



# Namrata Mukherjee

**Expected PhD in Social Work by Spring 2025**

*University of Tennessee (UTK), Knoxville*

**Master of Arts in Social Work (Social Work in Community Organization & Development Practices)**

*Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), India*

**Bachelor of Arts (Honors) in Economics**

*Gauhati University, India*

***"As an aging researcher, I believe that the richness of our understanding comes from embracing the diverse experiences and perspectives of older adults across different cultures. By integrating this diversity into our research, we can create more inclusive and effective solutions that honor every individual's unique journey through aging."***

## Dissertation

### **Considering Physical Functional Impairments as Factors in Social Isolation Among Older Adults**

Namrata Mukherjee's research has been shaped by life course perspectives on the multi-level factors, including social and ecological factors, that influence the quality of life of older individuals. Mukherjee strives to address the Grand Challenges in social work by contributing to the understanding and eradication of social isolation among vulnerable populations. Her dissertation focuses on scale development to measure physical functional impairments that cause social isolation in later life. Her research goal is to enhance the cultural responsiveness of service systems and inform policies and practices to improve the health and well-being of older adults.

## Biography

With her undergraduate degree in economics and a graduate degree in Social Work in India, Mukherjee brings a unique blend of cross-cultural perspectives and a love of interdisciplinary collaboration to her research and teaching practices. Her practice experience of working with diverse communities in India and engaging in community participatory research in the U.S. has enhanced her appreciation for cultures and life-course perspectives that shape our narratives. Mukherjee's drive to uncover the interplay of social, political, and economic influences on human behavior ultimately guided her toward a career in social work.

Mukherjee's commitment to diversity in research and teaching has evolved from self-awareness which is complemented by systems-awareness, to critically analyze the oppressive systems that impede opportunities. Viewing teaching as a way to establish social justice-based learning objectives in each course, Mukherjee strives to co-create an environment with her students where they feel empowered, valued, and can cultivate their critical consciousness. She has independently taught at the graduate level in online, face-to-face, and hybrid modalities.

## Research Interests

- Social isolation and aging
- Socio-ecological aspects of aging
- Health and wellness of LGBTQ+ older adults
- Public policy in aging

**The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**  
**College of Social Work**

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