

# ELIZABETH M. EKREN, PhD

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Adaptable social science researcher with interdisciplinary experience in applied sociology, development, and public health. Adept in qualitative and quantitative methods and analysis approaches. Skilled in managing research studies, writing for multiple audiences, visualizing data, and securing grant funding (\$2.5M+). Thriving in an associate role leveraging expertise in study design, project coordination, and collaborative stakeholder engagement.

## EDUCATION

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- Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Development Studies** **2021**  
**University of Bonn, Center for Development Studies** (*Summa cum laude*)
- **Thesis:** Agency, opportunity structure and empowerment in everyday refugee life: Enduring and overcoming challenges of daily living in Cologne refugee shelters
- Master of Science (MSc), Russian and East European Studies** **2010**  
**University of Oxford** (*with Distinction in the thesis*)
- **Thesis:** Getting down to business: Evaluating the relationship between formal legal institutions and the status of small enterprise development in Russia and Georgia
- Bachelor of Arts (BA), Psychology, Russian Language** **2009**  
**Yale University** (*with Distinction in both majors*)
- **Thesis (Psychology):** Language, Play, and Early Intervention: Ensuring the Healthy Social Emotional Development of Deaf Children
  - **Thesis (Russian Language):** Paradox, Juxtaposition and the Historical Context in Anna Akhmatova's *Requiem*
- Associate of Arts (AA), German Language** **2016**  
**US Department of Defense, Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center** (*Dean's List*)

## ACADEMIC RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

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- Postdoctoral Research Associate** **July 2023 – present**  
**Translational Health Research Center, Texas State University, San Marcos, TX**
- Act as principal investigator to direct all research project management activities including design, timeline, and budgeting
  - Design, manage, and conduct qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research studies to explore public health topics, health outcomes, health programs, social determinants of health, disaster planning, and community resilience
  - Perform advanced statistical analysis and data visualization on primary and secondary data sets, such as statewide survey data, to inform policy decisions and publications for state stakeholders, as well as internal strategic planning
  - Identify trends, patterns, and insights in datasets to communicate results for diverse audiences across multiple channels
  - Write and compile materials for federal, state, and foundation grants to secure over \$1M in research funding
  - Build cross-sector partnerships with research entities and community organizations to expand program reach and impact
  - Guide, mentor, and supervise junior lab members and students to foster a collaborative learning environment
- Research Coordinator/Program Evaluator** **February 2022 – July 2023**  
**Texas School Safety Center, Texas State University, San Marcos, TX**
- Design and manage qualitative and quantitative research studies to assess the efficacy of school safety interventions
  - Conduct evaluations and impact analyses with mixed method approaches to assess grant and program effectiveness
  - Design and implement surveys, interviews, and focus group protocols to gather actionable data for educational and safety-related projects in line with established best-practice standards in occupational and behavioral health
  - Synthesize research findings into policy briefs, reports, and academic manuscripts for diverse audiences, including government agencies and public education stakeholders to enhance decision-making and refine training programs

## PEER-REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

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- Ekren, E.,** Adhikari, S., Maleki, S., Sexton, J.K., Aubert, C., Tomasso, M., Hopkins, R., Villagran, M. (*In press*). Profiles of non-medical drivers and health burden associated with care seeking among rural women. *Journal of Primary Care & Community Health*.
- Ekren, E.,** Hall, R.E., Pierdolla, E., Barnes, V., Jarzombek, A., Morrish, D., Martinez-Prather, K. (2025). Crime prevention through environmental design in public school career and technical education facilities: Principals' perceptions of security enhancement. *Safety Science*, 182(2025), 106781.
- Ekren, E.,** Maleki, S., Curran, C., Watkins, C., Villagran, M. (2025). Health differences between rural and non-rural Texas counties based on 2023 County Health Rankings. *BMC Health Services Research*, 25(2).
- Ekren, E.,** Tomasso, M., Villagran, M. (2024) Resilience as a concept for convergence across health, systems, and well-being: An AI-augmented mapping of 50 years of resilience research. *Sustainability*. 16(23), 10333.
- Goebel, H., Morrish, D., Pierdolla, E., **Ekren, E.,** Hall, R., Barnes, V., Jarzombek-Torralva, A., Martinez-Prather, K. (2024). Secondary administrators' perceptions of crime prevention through environmental design principles (CPTED) in schools with agriculture, food, and natural resource programs. *Proceedings of the Western Region of the American Association of Agricultural Education Conference*, 43.
- Maleki, S., Dede-Bamfo, N., **Ekren, E.,** Mohammadalazadehkorde, M., Villagran, M. (2024). Mapping access to children's hospitals in Texas. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 21(2), 140.
- Valerio, L., Vaughn, M. A., **Ekren, E.,** Barnes, V. (2024). A content analysis of memoranda of understanding between Texas public school districts and law enforcement agencies. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, 18, paae019.
- Al Munajed, D., **Ekren, E.** (2020). Exploring the impact of multidimensional refugee vulnerability on distancing as a protective measure against COVID-19: The case of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Turkey. *Journal of Migration and Health*, 1-2, 100023.
- Ekren, E.** (2018). How can theories of institutional design and everyday innovation reveal agency for change in refugee communities? *International Journal of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies*, 3(2), 5-18.
- Ekren, E.** (2018). Obstacles to refugees' self-reliance in Germany. *Forced Migration Review*, 58, 30-32.

## MANUSCRIPTS UNDER REVIEW AND IN PROGRESS

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- Ekren, E.,** Maleki, S., Shakya, K., Villagran, M. (Under revision with *Community Mental Health Journal*). Mental health and individual resilience in contexts of social vulnerability: Evidence from rural Texas
- Ekren, E.,** Tuszynski, M. (*In progress*). Community economic freedom, geographic disadvantage, and differences in health outcomes across U.S. metro areas
- Ekren, E.,** Sexton, J.K. (*In progress*). Rurality, socioeconomic deprivation, and kindergarten vaccination coverage: A county-level analysis of interaction effects in the United States
- Ekren, E.,** Ibora, M. (*In progress*). Associations of neighborhood social infrastructure, rurality, and disease burden across U.S. counties: A paper series examining differences in mortality outcomes across dementia, heart disease, and substance use disorders
- Ekren, E.,** Davis, P., Rhode, R., Villagran, M. (*In progress*). Understanding vaccine uptake among rural older adults: A health belief model approach
- Ekren, E.,** Morales, K., Nason, E., Clary, K., Lee, L. (*In progress*). "It has become something different:" Emotional trajectories of growth and resilience among volunteer frontline responders after a major U.S. flood
- Ekren, E.,** Shakya, K., Grubbs, M., Schneider, J., Villagran, M. (*In progress*). Understanding the role of a rural public library in supporting local health and social needs: A community-based assessment
- Hall, R.E., Jarzombek-Torralva, A., Scogin, S., Barnes, V., **Ekren, E.,** Pierdolla, E., Morrish, S., Martinez-Prather, K. (*Repurposing for resubmission*). Securing unique career and technical education facilities: Insights from Texas public schools

## CONFERENCE, RESEARCH, AND OTHER PRESENTATIONS

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- Interviewee, *Texas State University researchers launch study on mental health of flood recovery volunteers*, KXAN (Austin, TX) (available at: <https://www.kxan.com/video/texas-state-university-researchers-launch-study-on-mental-health-of-flood-recovery-volunteers/11564671/>), February 27, 2026
- Host/Presenter, *Rural health research for community change*, An ECHO Series of the Translational Health Research Center (San Marcos, Texas), (available at: <https://www.youtube.com/@THRCtxst>), 2025
- Presenter, *Resilience as a mediator between social determinants of vulnerability and mental health of residents in rural East Texas communities*, Texas State University Health Scholar Showcase (San Marcos, Texas), 2025

Presenter, *Place matters for health: Exploring place-based indicators shaping healthcare access and outcomes in rural East Texas communities*, Health + Resilience Research Network, Texas State University (San Marcos, Texas), 2025

Co-author, *Secondary administrators' perceptions of crime prevention through environmental design principles (CPTED) in schools with agriculture, food, and natural resource programs*, Western Region, American Association of Agricultural Education (Chico, California), 2024

Co-author, *Cattle, drones, and cosmetology: How do Texas schools keep CTE facilities safe?*, Texas School Safety Center Annual Conference (San Antonio, Texas), 2024

Co-presenter, *Mapping resilience for a transdisciplinary research conceptualization: An AI-augmented semi-systematic review of 50 years of resilience literature*, Texas State University Health Scholar Showcase (San Marcos, Texas), 2024

Co-presenter, *Motivational factors influencing school behavioral threat assessment processes*, Texas Association of School Administrators Convention, txEDCON23 (Dallas, Texas), 2023

Presenter, *How learning from plane crashes can make schools safer*, TedX at Texas State University 2023 (available at: <https://youtu.be/c8F-tJ8NJuc>), TED Editor's Pick, April 25, 2023

Co-presenter, *Exploring the impact of multidimensional refugee vulnerability on distancing as a protective measure against COVID-19*, Bi-annual Conference of the German Anthropological Association (Remote/Bremen, Germany), 2021

Presenter, *"Too many people, too many differences:" Limits to self-organization and community-driven change in Cologne refugee shelters*, 3rd Conference of the German Network of Forced Migration Researchers (Cologne, Germany), 2020

Presenter, *Forever refugee? Exclusion, state negotiations, and the distinction of refugeehood in Cologne, Germany*, (Paper) Bi-annual Conference of the German Anthropological Association (Konstanz, Germany), 2019

Presenter, *Institutions and agency for change in everyday refugee life*, 2nd International Research and Policy Workshop on Migration and Development, German Development Institute (Bonn, Germany), 2018

Presenter, *Institutions and agency for change in everyday refugee life*, Workshop on Translocal Conflict Dynamics Among Refugees, Bonn International Center for Conversion (Bonn, Germany), 2018

Presenter, *How can theories of institutional design and everyday innovation reveal agency for change in refugee communities?*, International Conference on Refugee and Forced Immigration Studies, EMARC (Istanbul, Turkey), 2017

Presenter, *Obstacles to refugees' self-reliance in Germany*, MDE Workshop on Refugee Entrepreneurship (Bremen, Germany), 2017

Presenter, *Institutions, innovation, and opportunity in asylum-seeker communities: Evidence from North Rhein Westphalia, Germany*, Institutional and Organizational Economics Academy, Scientific Institute of Cargèse (Corsica, France), 2017

## GRANT SUBMISSIONS

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*Awarded*: PI, *Strengthening future response through psychosocial resilience of Central Texas flood recovery volunteers*, National Hazards Center, Health and Extreme Weather Research (\$49,205), January 2025

*Awarded*: Project consultant in partnership with the Martindale Library, *Strategic planning and assessing community well-being services*. Central Texas Community Foundation, Rural Impact Investment Fund (\$25,000), October 2025

*Awarded*: Grant-writing contributor, *35 Health Merge – A Mental Health Data Training Program*, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, FY 2023 Congressional Directive Spending Projects, No-cost extension on Award #FG001011-01 (Extension request: \$563,558), September 2024

*Awarded*: Grant-writing contributor, *Community Mental Health Surveillance Collaborative to strengthen mental health infrastructure, including training, equipment, and technology*, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Community Funded Project – FY 2022 CDS Project, No-cost extension on Award #FG000820-01 (Extension request: \$605,765), September 2024

*Awarded*: PI, *Manging health issues in rural Texas communities*, TLL Temple Foundation (\$23,609), May 2024

*Awarded*: Grant-writing contributor, *Establishing a dedicated state resource to provide technical assistance to support behavioral threat assessment implementation in Texas public schools*, Bureau of Justice Assistance STOP School Violence Program, O-BJA-2023-171666, Award #15PBJA-23-GG-04397-STOP (\$1,560,987), October 2023

*Submitted*: Key/senior personnel (PI: Eduardo Perez), *Transforming disaster response: Integrating behavioral complexity and social determinants in operations engineering for chronic disease management*, National Science Foundation (\$868,403), November 2025

*Applied, unfunded*: PI, *HAYS Response Lab (Helping All in Your System): Community-led scenario planning for preparedness*. Community Action Inc. of Central Texas, Social Vitality Fund (\$40,000), November 2025

*Applied, unfunded*: PI, *Beyond A1C: Patient-clinician communication, health literacy, and emotional well-being in young adults with diabetes – An All of Us analysis*. Healthy Americas Foundation Research Consortium (\$10,000), October 2025

*Applied, unfunded*: PI, *HAYS Response Lab (Helping All in Your System): Community-led scenario planning for preparedness*, Greater Community Fayette Foundation, 2025-26 Rural Health Fund (\$25,000), June 2025

*Applied, unfunded: PI, Thriving Texas: Local economic opportunity and the capacity to flourish, Sid W. Richardson Foundation (\$96,630), August 2025*

*Applied, unfunded: PI, Addressing maternal healthcare access challenges in rural East Texas: Convening community experts to prioritize multilevel local solutions, Blue Cross of Texas Blue Impact Grant (\$62,010), April 2025*

*Applied, unfunded: Key/senior personnel (PI: Kathy Martinez-Prather), Testing the impact of a school behavioral threat assessment implementation toolkit in Texas public schools, National Institute of Justice O-NIJ-2023-171616, August 2023*

## **OTHER PROFESSIONAL AND APPLIED RESEARCH EXPERIENCE**

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### **Manager, Consulting Programs and Content Development**

**July 2012 – July 2015**

**AssetMark, Inc.**, Concord, CA

- Manage client consulting engagements, developing custom business improvement plans and performance tracking tools
- Author market research reports and program evaluations, translating complex sales and customer insights datasets into clear business strategy recommendations for senior leaders
- Collaborate with multidisciplinary and cross-functional teams to design content for workshops and national conferences
- Design and facilitate workshops and webinars, enhancing client engagement with practical training materials

### **Consultant**

**October 2010 – July 2012**

**Booz Allen Hamilton**, Various locations

- Edit and compile intelligence reports, research products, and briefing materials for public and internal dissemination
- Assess key business performance indicators to provide data-informed insights, supporting senior leaders in strategic decision-making and enabling implementation of operational improvements

### **Security Policy Research Intern**

**Summer 2009**

**National Defense University**, Washington, DC

- Conduct research on energy/utility sector security, producing multimedia content and report materials for senior scholars

### **Policy Research Intern**

**Summer 2008**

**The Heritage Foundation**, Washington, DC

- Develop report and editorial materials on US-European relations, contributing to high-profile public policy discussions

### **Intelligence Aid**

**Summer 2007**

**Office of Naval Intelligence**, Washington, DC

- Research and analyze naval security threats using open-source and classified materials to support intelligence operations

### **Policy Assistant**

**Summer 2006**

**Office of Kentucky Secretary of State**, Frankfort, KY

- Create civic education content and manage electronic archival projects, ensuring public access to historical documents

## **JOURNALS REVIEWED FOR**

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- Application submitted, 2026-27 JAMA Network Open health equity editorial fellowship (February 2026) (<https://jamanetwork.com/pages/jama-network-open-editorial-fellowship>)
- Discover Public Health (<https://link.springer.com/journal/12982>)
- Community Mental Health Journal (<https://link.springer.com/journal/10597>)
- BMC Public Health (<https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/>)
- Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management (<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/14685973>)
- Research Ethics (<https://journals.sagepub.com/home/REA>)
- Journal of Migration and Health (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/journal-of-migration-and-health>)
- Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies (<https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/wimm20>)
- Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies (<https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/cjms20>)

## SOFTWARE, LANGUAGE, AND OTHER SKILLS

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- Qualitative data analysis and computer-assisted (CAQDAS) coding: ATLAS.ti, Leximancer, NVivo
- Survey development: Google Forms, Qualtrics, Survey Monkey
- Microsoft Office Suite: Excel (advanced analysis, power query, pivot tables), PowerPoint (data visualizations and presentations), Outlook, Teams, Visio, Word
- Citation, literature, and project management: Citavi, Elicit, End Note, Monday, Research Rabbit, Salesforce Zotero
- Statistical analysis: Excel, SPSS, R, R Studio, Jamovi
- Languages: English (native); German (C1/B2); Russian (A2/A1)
- Previous Top Secret (TS) clearance with access to Sensitive Compartmented Information (SCI); previous DHS Suitability

## KEY AWARDS AND HONORS

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- Nominee, National Dissertation Prize, German Anthropological Association, 2022
- PhD funding recipient, Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (€45,000), 2017 – 2019
- Scholarship recipient, National Military Family Association (\$2,000), 2017 – 2019
- Scholarship recipient, International Promovieren in Deutschland - für alle, conference grant (\$1,000), 2018
- Fellowship recipient, Charles G. Koch Summer Fellowship for the Study of Institutional Economics, 2010
- Award recipient, Yale University Henry W. Scott Slavic Languages and Literatures Thesis Prize (\$500), 2009
- Award recipient, Kentucky Colonel's Commission for distinguished work and service in the state of Kentucky, 2006

## RESULTS-ORIENTED SKILLS AND ABILITIES

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- Proven ability to work effectively in cross-cultural, multi-lingual teams in international, interdisciplinary contexts
- High level of integrity with the ability to think critically, communicate effectively, and engage inclusively
- Willingness to take on tasks with minimal supervision and execute with strong attention to detail and organization
- Demonstrated success in meeting frequent, multiple, and competing deadlines within tight timelines

## REFERENCES

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**Dr. Melinda Villagran**, Director, Translational Health Research Center, Texas State University

*Current research supervisor*

- [mvilla@txstate.edu](mailto:mvilla@txstate.edu)
- (512) 245-4044

**Ms. Valerie Barnes**, Associate Director of Research, Texas School Safety Center, Texas State University

*Prior research supervisor*

- [vrb25@txstate.edu](mailto:vrb25@txstate.edu)
- (512) 245-5857