

## Child maltreatment the focus of study by UTSA, UT Health and ChildSafe

APRIL 23, 2021 — UTSA, UT Health San Antonio and Bexar County children's advocacy center [ChildSafe](#) were jointly awarded a \$5,000 grant from the [Institute for Integration of Medicine and Science \(IIMS\)](#). The grant will fund research related to child abuse in Bexar County.



This grant is well timed, as April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month. Principal investigator **Monica Lawson**, UTSA assistant professor of psychology, hopes the study will provide a better understanding of San Antonio's high rate of confirmed child maltreatment cases.

“This project represents a first step towards solving this problem,” Lawson said. “The bigger picture is once we understand why rates are so high, we can design and implement targeted interventions to prevent abuse and neglect in our community.”

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The research team includes Lawson, counseling staff at ChildSafe, and **Nancy Kellogg**, a pediatrician for UT Health San Antonio and the Center for Miracles at the Children's Hospital of San Antonio who specializes in child abuse.

“This study is timely and important to our community. These are unprecedented times of economic and social stressors that inevitably affect the health and well-being of children” Kellogg said. “The more we understand about the challenges that parents and child welfare professionals face, the better we can do as a community to strengthen families and protect children.”

ChildSafe plays a significant role in coordinating evidence-based services for child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation by employing a unique model where a multi-disciplinary team of professionals work together to ensure child perpetrators are brought to justice, children and families are safe, and victims receive specialized treatment to heal from violence and abuse.

“We are consistently asked why child abuse rates in our county are so high, and while we have general knowledge and assumptions, those in child welfare have never had quantifiable data to answer that question scientifically,” said **Randy McGibeny**, ChildSafe chief operating officer. “This grant will allow our community to begin to identify root causes of Bexar County’s high rates of child abuse.”

“All of us at ChildSafe look forward to the opportunity to continue and expand our long-standing partnership with UT Health San Antonio, and embark on a new relationship with UTSA,” added **Kim Abernethy**, ChildSafe president and CEO. “The more professionals we have researching the issue of child abuse in our community, the more we can collectively support children in Bexar County.”

The purpose of IIMS’s Community Engagement Small Project Grants program is to support community and research collaborations from South Texas with grants so researchers may develop activities that lead to the translation of research for public health benefit.

The Center for Miracles is a collaborative program staffed by UT Health San Antonio faculty and fellows working with the Children’s Hospital of San Antonio social workers and medical assistants. This referral-only clinic evaluates children referred by child protective services, law enforcement, forensic interviewers, and physicians.

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⇒ [The \*College for Community, Health and Policy\* at UTSA](#)

⇒ [ChildSafe](#)

⇒ [The \*Center for Miracles\* at the Children’s Hospital of San Antonio](#)

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ChildSafe is Bexar County’s most advanced trauma-focused care center, providing crisis intervention, case management services,

counseling, and advanced therapy to aid in the healing of child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation, physical abuse and neglect.

— [Amanda Cody and Ingrid Wright](#)

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