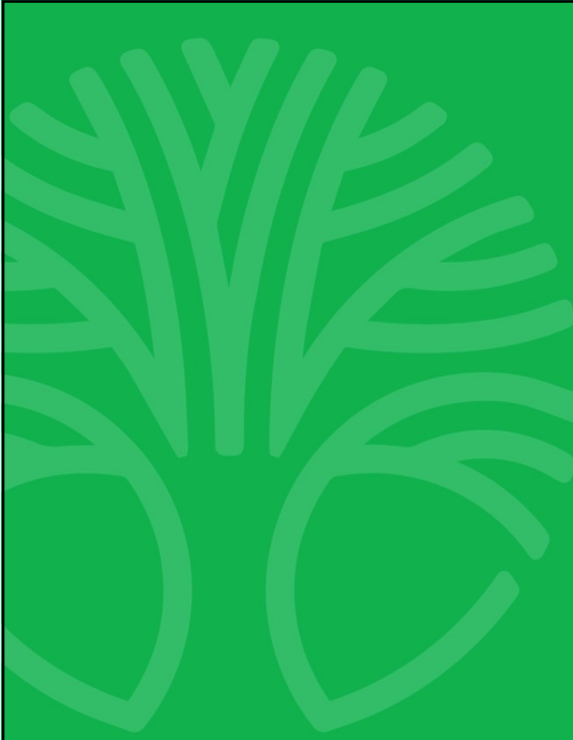


A stylized, light green tree graphic with multiple branches and rounded foliage, positioned on the left side of the slide.

Law Enforcement and Social Services: Intentional & Reciprocal Partnerships

Dr. Anjali Buehler
Dr. David A. McLeod

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A stylized, light blue tree graphic with multiple branches and rounded foliage, positioned on the left side of the slide.

Introductions

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Learning Objectives

- Explain the general structure and function of law enforcement in the United States
- Understand the differences in types of police social service partnership models
- Describe best practices for interprofessional collaboration
- Examine ethical issues in social work collaborations with law enforcement

Poll #1



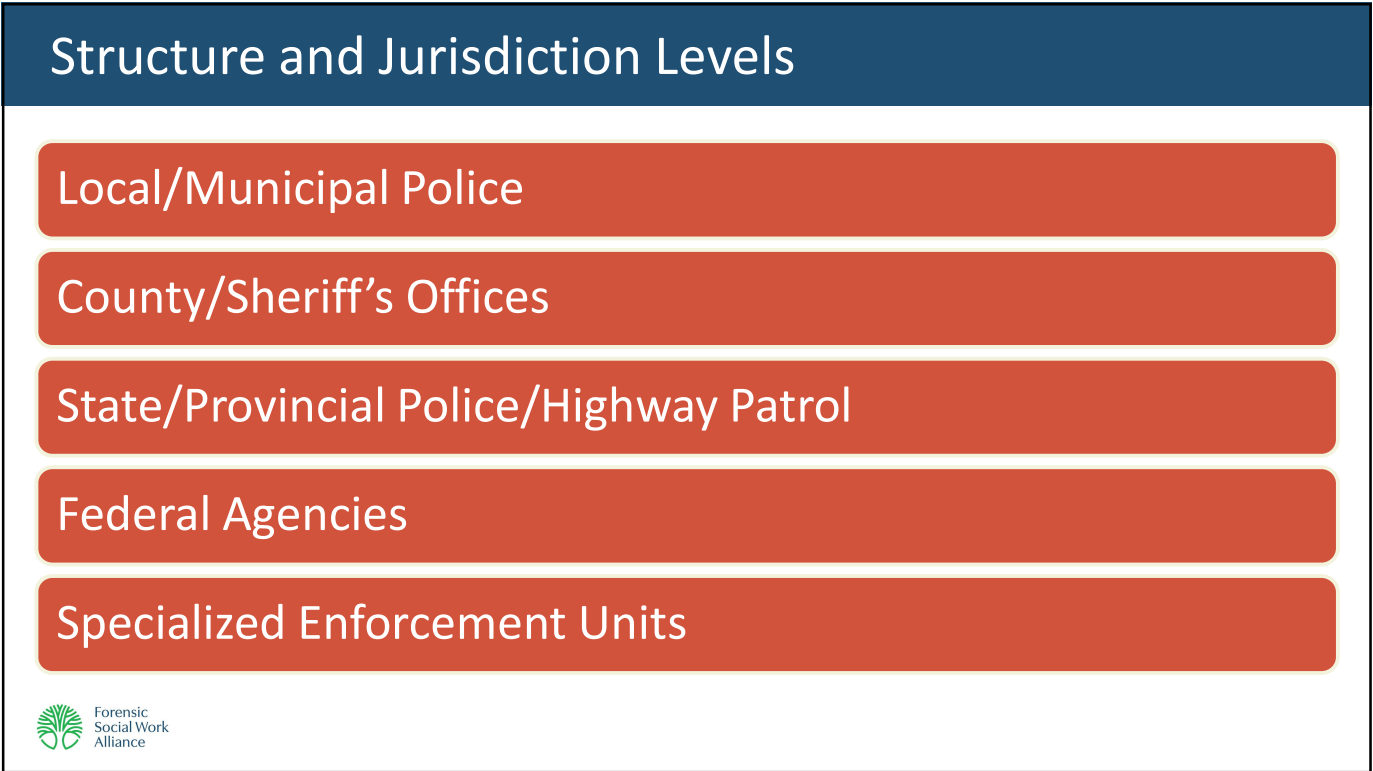
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Structure and Function of Law Enforcement

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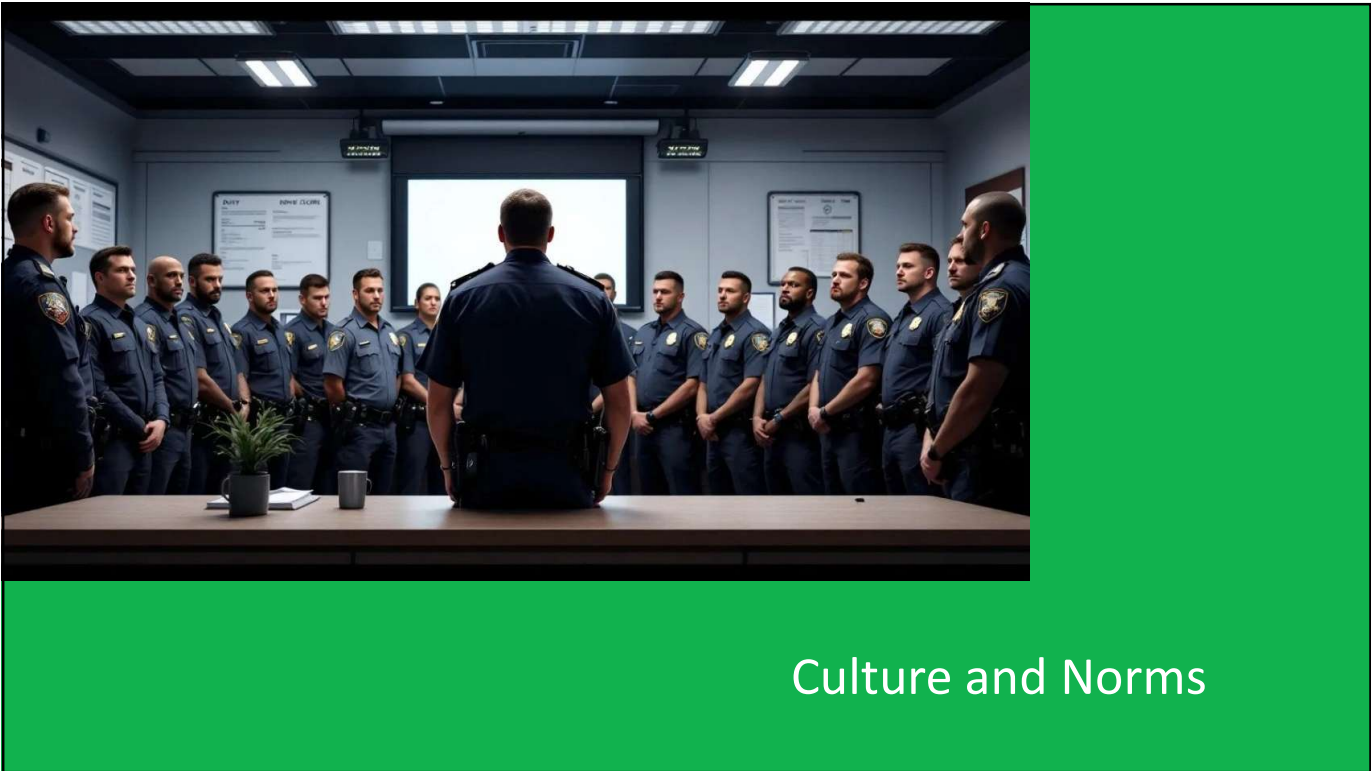
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Discretion in Decision-Making

- Legal mandates vs. officer judgment
- Factors: severity, evidence, context, priorities
- Research: suspicion vs. action decisions
- Bias and structural inequities



Decision Frameworks and Heuristics

- Heuristics: pattern recognition, prior experience, shortcuts
- Risks: cognitive bias, selective attention, tunnel vision

1. Anchoring bias.

People are **over-reliant** on the first piece of information they hear. In a salary negotiation, whoever makes the first offer establishes a range of reasonable possibilities in each person's mind.



2. Availability heuristic.

People **overestimate the importance** of information that is available to them. A person might argue that smoking is not unhealthy because they know someone who lived to 100 and smoked three packs a day.



3. Bandwagon effect.

The probability of one person adopting a belief increases based on the number of people who hold that belief. This is a powerful form of **groupthink** and is reason why meetings are often unproductive.



4. Blind-spot bias.

Failing to recognize your own cognitive biases is a bias in itself. People notice cognitive and motivational biases much more in others than in themselves.



5. Choice-supportive bias.

When you choose something, you tend to feel positive about it, even if that **choice has flaws**. Like how you think your dog is awesome — even if it bites people every once in a while.



6. Clustering illusion.

This is the tendency to **see patterns in random events**. It is key to various gambling fallacies, like the idea that red is more or less likely to turn up on a roulette table after a string of reds.



7. Confirmation bias.

We tend to listen only to information that confirms our **preconceptions** — one of the many reasons it's so hard to have an intelligent conversation about climate change.



8. Conservatism bias.

Where people favor prior evidence over new evidence or information that has emerged. People were **slow to accept** that the Earth was round because they maintained their earlier understanding that the planet was flat.



Theoretical Lenses on Policing

Broken Windows Theory

Community & Problem-Oriented Policing

Procedural Justice & Legitimacy

Institutional/Bureaucratic Theory

Street-Level Bureaucracy (Lipsky)

Critical/Structural Theories

Forensic Social Work Alliance

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Implications for Forensic Social Work

Identify leverage points

Map authority boundaries

Mitigate bias via training & review

Build legitimacy through procedural justice

Co-design response protocols

Cultivate trust & shared language

Forensic Social Work Alliance

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Police & Social Service Collaborations

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Police and Social Service Collaborations

- Not all social workers agree that social workers should partner with police (Abrams & Detlaff, 2020)
- FSWA stance is an “abolitionist approach to reform” (McCarter, Singeltary, & Reyes, 2025, p. 12)

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Types of Collaborations for Police & Social Services

(Linhorst et al., 2024)

- Direct Service Teams
- Task force or council
- Referrals
- Training
- Provision of clinical services to LEOs



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Direct Service Teams – Embedded & Co-response models

Who

- Social workers/clinicians who primarily “sit” in the police department OR
- May be employed by a social service organization

What

- Areas of focus: mental health, substance use disorders, domestic violence, hoarding, homelessness, death notifications

How and when

- Case management and/or co-response;
 - After incident follow-up or on the scene response, advocacy and support for survivors of crime, resources, and referrals
 - Real-time or follow-up response (crisis vs. non-crisis) and place (on scene or at home/other chosen location)
- Work closely with LEOs, but maintain an independent role

Why

- Goals may include – building community partnerships, improving/building community and police relations, reducing repeat calls, providing needed services and referrals to residents



Source:
<https://www.marysvillewa.gov/1027/Embedded-Social-Worker-Program>



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Task force and Councils

- Teams to address issues at the community level
- Purpose varies widely – plan or coordinate services, improve service delivery
(Linhorst et al., 2024)
- Sexual Assault Response Teams (SART) are a common example



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Types of Collaborations for Police & Social Services

(Linhorst et al., 2024)

- Referrals
 - Referrals only, no direct working relationship
- Training
 - SW → LEO, LEO → SW, SW <-> LEO
- Provision of clinical services to LEOs



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Frameworks for Interprofessional Collaboration

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Interprofessional Collaboration

- Frameworks and guidelines for ideal collaborative work
- “an effective interpersonal process that facilitates the achievement of goals that cannot be reached when individual professionals act on their own” (Bronstein, 2003, p. 299)
- What experience do you have in your current or former roles working with other professionals in a field different than your own?
 - Positive experiences – what made it positive?
 - Negative experiences – what made it negative?

Poll #2

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IPEC Core Competencies for Interprofessional Collaborative Practice

FIGURE 7. IPEC CORE COMPETENCIES FOR INTERPROFESSIONAL COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE: VERSION 3 (2023)



► **Values and Ethics**

Work with **team** members to maintain a climate of shared values, ethical conduct, and mutual respect.

► **Roles and Responsibilities**

Use the knowledge of one's own role and **team** members' expertise to address individual and population **health outcomes**.

► **Communication**

Communicate in a responsive, responsible, respectful, and compassionate manner with **team** members.

► **Teams and Teamwork**

Apply values and principles of the science of teamwork to adapt one's own role in a variety of **team** settings.

Examples from
Twitchell,
Hohman, and
Gaston, 2021

Source:
https://www.ipeccollaborative.org/assets/core-competencies/IPEC_Core_Competencies_Version_3_2023.pdf



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Challenges in Implementation (Linhorst & Schafer, 2025)

- Not creating or not formalizing plans and procedures
- Conflicts in or no shared philosophy, mission or goals
- Role issues
- Lack of stakeholder involvement and leadership
- Ineffective communication and information sharing
- Interpersonal conflict and unequal distribution of power
- Limited time, resources, staffing, support, and training
- Lack of trust and respect
- No evaluation of the collaboration

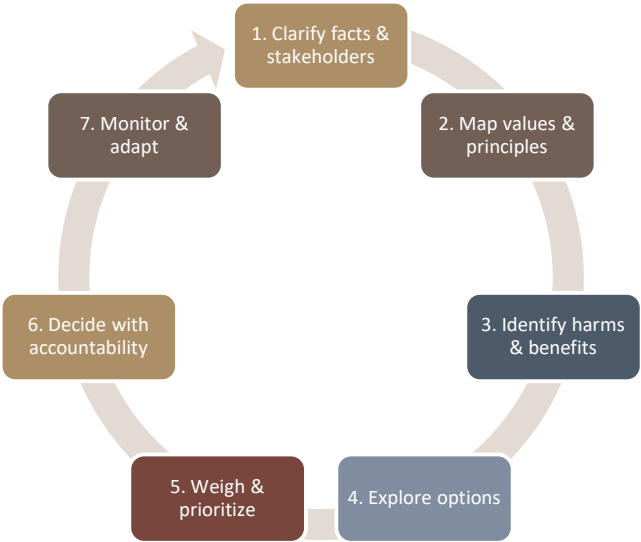


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Ethical Issues

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Ethical Decision Framework



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Ethical Issues	Domain	Ethical Risk / Tension	Illustration / Evidence	Mitigation Strategies & Best Practices
	Confidentiality & Privacy	Disclosure may breach client trust	Clients avoid services if police affiliation unclear	Explain limits upfront, use consent forms, minimize shared data
	Dual Roles / Role Conflict	Balancing advocacy vs. policing duties	Social worker seen as agent of law enforcement	Define roles in MOUs, use ethics reviews, prevent role expansion
	Complicity in Harm	Risk of legitimizing oppressive policing	Partnerships with agencies accused of discrimination	Require transparency, equity audits, exit clauses if needed
	Informed Consent & Autonomy	Clients may feel coerced to engage	Police referral mistaken for mandatory service	Offer alternatives, reiterate voluntary nature, safeguards
	Power Asymmetries & Trust	Perceived alliance with coercive authority	Communities distrust embedded social workers	Engage stakeholders, build transparency, use community liaisons
	Bias & Surveillance Risks	Marginalized groups over-policed or monitored	Law enforcement bias amplified by partnership	Track outcomes, anti-bias training, community oversight
	Transparency & Accountability	Limited oversight of policing practices	"Blue wall of silence" resists external review	External audits, independent review boards, transparency clauses
	Scope Creep & Mission Drift	Social work role expands into enforcement	Crisis intervention expands to intelligence gathering	Set clear limits, periodic role review, watchdog mechanisms
	Moral Distress & Self-Care	Ethical strain, burnout from conflicting duties	Internal conflict when values clash with policies/outcomes	Peer support, ethics debriefs, allow refusal of assignments

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Thank you! Questions?

Anjali Buehler, PhD, MSW
Associate Professor
Department of Social Work
Governors State University
abuehler@govst.edu

David Axlyn McLeod, PhD, MSW
Director - Anne and Henry Zarrow School of Social Work
Zarrow Strategic Professor of Forensic Social Work
University of Oklahoma
damcleod@ou.edu
www.damcleod.com

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