

Lena Moraa Obara

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EDUCATION

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| 2025 | Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) Rutgers University School of Social Work <i>New Brunswick, New Jersey</i> <i>Dissertation: Exploring coping strategies and support systems for gender-based violence among urban refugee women in Nairobi, Kenya: insights across three migration phases</i> <i>Dean's honorable mention for dissertation of the year award 2025</i> |
| 2015 | M.A. degree in Sociology (Disaster Management) University of Nairobi, <i>Nairobi, Kenya</i> |
| 2010 | Bachelor of Industrial and Organizational Psychology Makerere University, <i>Kampala, Uganda</i> |

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

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| Beginning September 2025 | Postdoctoral Research Scientist Columbia School of Social Work, New York |
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RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Interpersonal violence and survivor-centered interventions
- Environmental determinants of health and violence risk in informal settlements
- Forced displacement, resilience, and adaptation among refugee populations
- Policy integration of climate change adaptation and gender-based violence prevention

AWARDS AND FUNDING

| | |
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| Columbia University Research Stabilization Fund Grant | 2025 |
| Dean's Honorable Mention for Dissertation of the Year Award | 2025 |
| Rutgers University School of Social Work Graduate Research Assistantship | 2021-2024 |
| Rutgers School of Graduate Studies Travel Fund | 2023 |

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| Rutgers School of Graduate Studies Research Fund | 2023 |
| Life Paths Promising Scholar Award | 2022 |
| Rutgers Center for African Studies Research Fund | 2022 |

PEER REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

Obara, L. M., & Banyard, V. (2025). Understanding resilience in the face of adversity in Kenya: A scoping review. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 26(2), 312–326.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380241309377>

Obara, L. M., Shin, G., Balakrishnan, A., Ukoh, E., Otieno, S., Witte, S. S., & Winter, S. C. (2025). A latent class analysis of coping strategies among women in informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya. *Journal of Mental Health and Clinical Psychology*, 9(2), 37–45. <https://doi.org/10.29245/2578-2959/2025/2.1341>

Duron, J., **Obara, L. M.**, Mojta, P., Ford, V., & Banyard, V. (2025). Understanding the strengths of young parents using photovoice: An evaluation of the school-based parent linking program in New Jersey. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 164, 108514.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2025.108514>

Brown, H. E., Balakrishnan, A. K., Stamps, K. M., **Obara, L. M.**, Witte, S. S., & Winter, S. C. (2025). Experiences of extreme weather and mental health in climate-vulnerable communities: Results from a large-scale survey of women living in informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya. *BMC Psychology*, 13(1), Article 1000. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-025-03319-2>

Ukoh, E., Achieng, S. O., Plaxico, L., Balakrishnan, A. K., **Obara, L. M.**, Dzombo, M., Ramchal, M., Amponsah, E., Brown, H., Musyimi, C., Witte, S. S., & Winter, S. C. (in press). Factors that affect the sleep of women in informal settlements in Kenya.

Balakrishnan, A. K., Otieno, S., Dzombo, M., Plaxico, L., Ukoh, E., **Obara, L. M.**, Brown, H., Musyimi, C., Lincoln, C., Yang, L. S., Witte, S. S., & Winter, S. C. (2024). Socio-ecological impacts of extreme weather events in two informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 12, 1389054. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2024.1389054>

Winter, S. C., Winter, M. R., Plaxico, L., Balakrishnan, A. K., Dzombo, M., Tabb, L. P., Ukoh, E., Lincoln, C., **Obara, L. M.**, Otieno, S. A., Muita, R., & Witte, S. S. (2024). Extreme weather should be defined according to its impact on climate-vulnerable communities. *Nature Climate Change*, 14(5), 462–467. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-024-01983-7>

Winter, S. C., Sommer, M., **Obara, L. M.**, & Nair, D. (2022). “There is no place to dispose of them. What would you have me do?” A qualitative study of menstruation in the unique physical and social environment in informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya. *Health & Place*, 78, 102932.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2022.102932>

Barchi, F., AbiNader, M. A., Winter, S. C., **Obara, L. M.**, Mbogo, D., Thomas, B. M., & Ammerman, B. (2022). Improving adult women's emotional health in rural Kenya through community soccer and the role of social support: A mixed-methods analysis. *Journal of Sport for Development*. <https://jsfd.org/>

Segura, A., Henkhaus, M., Banyard, V., **Obara, L. M.**, & Jefferson, G. C. (2023). Rethinking dating and sexual violence prevention for youth during the pandemic: Examining program feasibility and acceptability. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 38(3–4), 4114–4137. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605221111421>

Winter, S., Johnson, L., **Obara, L. M.**, & Nair, D. (2023). Exploring non-partner violence in informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 38(1–2), 2017–2047. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605221097444>

Winter, S. C., Johnson, L., & **Obara, L. M.** (2021). Neighborhood cohesion, perceptions of disorder, and the geography of women's fear of crime in informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 68(3–4), 385–401. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12519>

Winter, S. C., Aguilar, N. J., **Obara, L. M.**, & Johnson, L. (2022). “Next, it will be you”: Women's fear of victimization and precautionary safety behaviors in informal settlement communities in Nairobi, Kenya. *Violence Against Women*, 28(12–13), 2966–2991. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012211045718>

Winter, S. C., **Obara, L. M.**, Aguilar, N. J., & Johnson, L. (2022). Breaking the cycle: Women's perceptions of the causes of violence and crime in informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya, and their strategies for response and prevention. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 37(19–20), NP17394–NP17428. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605211028013>

Barchi, F., AbiNader, M. A., Winter, S. C., **Obara, L. M.**, Mbogo, D., Thomas, B. M., & Ammerman, B. (2021). “It is like medicine”: Using sports to promote adult women's health in rural Kenya. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(5), 2347. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18052347>

Winter, S. C., **Obara, L. M.**, & McMahon, S. (2020). Intimate partner violence: A key correlate of women's physical and mental health in informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya. *PLOS ONE*, 15(4), e0230894. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0230894>

Winter, S. C., **Obara, L. M.**, & Barchi, F. (2019). Environmental correlates of health-related quality of life among women living in informal settlements in Kenya. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16(20), 3948. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16203948>

PUBLICATIONS UNDER REVIEW

Shin, G., **Obara, L. M.**, Stamps, K., Balakrishnan, A., Amponsah, E. B., Witte, S. S., & Winter, S. C. (Manuscript under review). Intimate partner violence, motherhood, and mental health: Examining the impact of IPV on mothers' resilience and mental health in informal settlements of Nairobi, Kenya.

Winter, S. C., **Obara, L. M.**, Balakrishnan, A., Otieno, S., Shin, G., Ukoh, C., Odhiambo, M., Simiyu, L., Stamps, K., Ndeti, D., Mutiso, V., & Witte, S. S. (Manuscript under review). Protocol for adapting and implementing a pilot intervention for intimate partner violence and mental health intervention for women living in two informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya.

Winter, S. C., **Obara, L. M.**, Ndeti, D., Mutiso, V., Gilbert, L., Bellamy, S., Shin, G., Shrestha, A., & Witte, S. (Manuscript under review). Feasibility and preliminary effectiveness of a combined intimate partner violence (IPV) and mental health intervention (WINGS+PM+) to reduce IPV and poor mental health among women in informal settlements in low-income country settings.

John, R., **Obara, L. M.**, Morris, M., & Malorni, A. (Manuscript under review). Measuring model minority stereotype: A scoping review.

Winter, S. C., Stamps, K., Balakrishnan, A., Brown, H., Yang, L., Ramchal, M., Amponsah, E., Dzombo, M., **Obara, L. M.**, Musyimi, C., Ukoh, E., & Witte, S. S. (revise & resubmit). Women's multi-faceted resilience in the face of climate change and extreme weather events in informal settlements in Kenya.

MANUSCRIPTS IN PREPARATION

Banyard, V., **Obara, L. M.**, Taylor, E., & Hamby, S. (n.d.). A strengths-based science of intimate partner violence prevention.

Obara, L. M., et al. (n.d.). Experiences of gender-based violence across the migration journey: Perspectives from refugee women residing in Nairobi, Kenya.

Obara, L. M., et al. (n.d.). Coping with gender-based violence across three migration phases: Strategies among urban refugee women in Nairobi, Kenya.

Obara, L. M., et al. (n.d.). From flight to uncertainty: Support for gender-based violence survivors across migration phases among refugee women in Nairobi, Kenya.

Obara, L. M., Kianna, S., Ukoh, E., Witte, S., & Winter, S. C. (n.d.). "God helps us endure": The role of spiritual resilience in managing climate-related stress in Nairobi's informal settlements.

Obara, L. M., Banyard, V., & Jefferson, G. (in progress). Using photovoice to explore stress and stress management practices among underrepresented youth.

Obara, L. M., & Witte, S. (in progress). A scoping review of the prevalence of sexual violence among refugees in East Africa.

Obara, L. M., & Winter, S. C. (n.d.). Exploring women's perceptions of the National Youth Service's slum improvement initiative in informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya.

PRESENTATIONS

John, R. S., Zhu, S., Malorni, A., & **Obara, L. M.** (2025). The impact of the model minority stereotype on Asian American young adults' mental health [Conference presentation]. Society for the Study of Emerging Adulthood (SSEA) Conference, Charleston, SC, United States.

Obara, L. M., Balakrishnan, A., Dzombo, M., Ukoh, E., Otieno, S. A., Lincoln, C., Plaxico, L., Witte, S. S., & Winter, S. C. (2025). Navigating stress: Coping profiles of women in Kenyan informal settlements [Conference presentation]. Society for Social Work Research (SSWR) Annual Conference, Washington, DC, United States.

Farrell, H., Meninger, F. E., Shin, G., Ramchal, M., **Obara, L. M.**, Aguilar, N., Musyimi, C., Witte, S. S., & Winter, S. C. (2025). Ecological understanding of trust in accessing services in informal settlements [Conference presentation]. Society for Social Work Research (SSWR) Annual Conference, Seattle, WA, United States.

Balakrishnan, A., Dzombo, M., **Obara, L. M.**, Mwanthi, D., Brown, H., Stamps, K., Ramchal, M., Witte, S. S., & Winter, S. C. (2025). Community participatory approaches to climate justice in informal settlements in Nairobi [Conference presentation]. Society for Social Work Research (SSWR) Annual Conference, Seattle, WA, United States.

John, R., Malorni, A., **Obara, L. M.**, Zhu, S., & Sindhu, F. (2025). Experiences of model minority stereotype in Asian American college students [Poster presentation]. Society for Social Work Research (SSWR) Annual Conference, Seattle, WA, United States.

Ramchal, M., Odeyinde, M., **Obara, L. M.**, Witte, S. S., & Winter, S. C. (2025). Extreme cold events and implications for disability and functionality in women living in informal settlements in Kenya [Conference presentation]. Society for Social Work Research (SSWR) Annual Conference, Washington, DC, United States.

Shin, G., Yang, L., **Obara, L. M.**, Farrell, H., Witte, S. S., & Winter, S. C. (2025). Intimate partner violence, motherhood, and mental health: Examining the impact on survivors in informal settlements of Nairobi, Kenya [Conference presentation]. Society for Social Work Research (SSWR) Annual Conference, Washington, DC, United States.

Amponsah, E., Dzombo, M., Otieno, S. A., **Obara, L. M.**, Balakrishnan, A., Witte, S. S., & Winter, S. C. (2025). Unraveling the nexus between neighborhood disorder and intimate partner violence against women: The importance of social cohesion in informal settlements in Kenya [Conference presentation]. Society for Social Work Research (SSWR) Annual Conference, Washington, DC, United States.

Balakrishnan, A., Dzombo, M., Ukoh, E., Achieng, S. O., Plaxico, L., **Obara, L. M.**, Lincoln, C., Witte, S. S., & Winter, S. C. (2024). Using socioecological theory to examine impacts of extreme weather events in two informal settlements in Nairobi [Conference presentation]. Society for Social Work Research (SSWR) Annual Conference, Washington, DC, United States.

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- Winter, S. C., Dzombo, M., **Obara, L. M.**, Stamps, K., Shin, G., & Balakrishnan, A. (2024). Exploring impacts of climate-related weather events on women's experiences of violence and related adaptation strategies [Conference presentation]. Society for Social Work Research (SSWR) Annual Conference, Washington, DC, United States.
- Winter, S. C., Winter, M. R., Plaxico, L., Balakrishnan, A., Dzombo, M., Tabb, L., Ukoh, E., Lincoln, C., **Obara, L. M.**, Otieno, S., Muita, R., & Witte, S. S. (2024). (Re)defining extremes: Women's experiences of the impacts of weather events in informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya [Conference presentation]. Society for Social Work Research (SSWR) Annual Conference, Washington, DC, United States.
- Obara, L. M.**, Balakrishnan, A., Dzombo, M., Ukoh, E., Achieng, S. O., Plaxico, L., Lincoln, C., Witte, S. S., & Winter, S. C. (2024). Coping strategies of women in informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya [Conference presentation]. Society for Social Work Research (SSWR) Annual Conference, Washington, DC, United States.
- Ukoh, E., Achieng, S. O., Plaxico, L., Balakrishnan, A. K., **Obara, L. M.**, Dzombo, M., Ramchal, M., Amponsah, E., Brown, H., Musyimi, C., Witte, S. S., & Winter, S. C. (2024). Quality of sleep among women in informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya [Conference presentation]. Society for Social Work Research (SSWR) Annual Conference, Washington, DC, United States.
- Dzombo, M., Plaxico, L., Achieng, S. O., **Obara, L. M.**, Balakrishnan, A., Ukoh, E., Lincoln, C., Witte, S. S., & Winter, S. C. (2024). PAR in action: Empowerment of women through paid community health work in informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya [Conference presentation]. Society for Social Work Research (SSWR) Annual Conference, Washington, DC, United States.
- Balakrishnan, A., Dzombo, M., Ukoh, E., Achieng, S. O., Plaxico, L., **Obara, L. M.**, Lincoln, C., Witte, S. S., & Winter, S. C. (2023). Using socioecological theory to examine impacts of extreme weather events in two informal settlements in Nairobi [Roundtable presentation]. American Public Health Association (APHA) Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA, United States.
- Sabina, C., **Obara, L. M.**, & Cuevas, C. A. (2023). The role of cultural variables in the victimization-distress link among Latino adolescents [Conference presentation]. ResilienceCon 2023, Nashville, TN, United States.
- Duron, J., **Obara, L. M.**, Mojta, P., Ford, V., & Banyard, V. (2023). Using photovoice to understand the strengths of young parents: An evaluation of the Parent Linking Program [Conference presentation]. ResilienceCon 2023, Nashville, TN, United States.
- Barchi, F., AbiNader, M. A., Winter, S. C., **Obara, L. M.**, Mbogo, D., Thomas, B. M., & Ammerman, B. (2023). The power of the pitch: Building social support and improving women's emotional health in rural Kenya [Poster presentation]. Society for Social Work Research (SSWR) Annual Conference, Phoenix, AZ, United States.

Jefferson, G. C., **Obara, L. M.**, Davis, A., & Banyard, V. (2022). Elevating youth voices through strength-based mentorship [Poster presentation]. National Mentoring Resource Center, Youth Mentoring Research Symposium, Virtual Conference.

Obara, L. M., Segura-Montagut, A., Banyard, V., Jefferson, G., & Henkhaus, M. (2022). Acceptability and feasibility of online sexual prevention programs [Poster presentation]. ResilienceCon 2022, Virtual Conference.

Kapadia, A., Marti, Y., **Obara, L. M.**, Lincoln, C., Lukens, E., Winter, S. C., & Witte, S. S. (2022). COVID-19 crisis psychoeducation training for community leaders in informal settlements in Brazil and Kenya [Conference presentation]. Society for Social Work Research (SSWR) Annual Conference.

Winter, S. C., Johnson, L., & **Obara, L. M.** (2022). Social and environmental correlates of women's depression in informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya: Indicators of risk and protection [Conference presentation]. Society for Social Work Research (SSWR) Annual Conference.

Winter, S. C., Johnson, L., & **Obara, L. M.** (2021). Intimate partner violence: A key correlate of non-partner violence in informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya [Conference presentation]. American Public Health Association (APHA) Annual Meeting, Denver, CO, United States.

Obara, L. M., & Winter, S. C. (2021). "Hide my shame": Challenges of menstrual hygiene in informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya [Conference presentation]. Society for Social Work Research (SSWR) Annual Conference, Virtual Conference.

Winter, S. C., & **Obara, L. M.** (2020). Violence against women in informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya: A critical issue [Poster presentation]. Society for Social Work Research (SSWR) Annual Conference, Washington, DC, United States.

Winter, S. C., & **Obara, L. M.** (2020). Water and sanitation: Key factors associated with women's physical and mental health in informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya [Poster presentation]. Society for Social Work Research (SSWR) Annual Conference, Washington, DC, United States.

TEACHING INTERESTS

Global Health; Human Behavior and The Social Environment; Violence Against Women and Children; Research Methods; Global Social Work; Qualitative Methods

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

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| <i>Instructor</i> , Global Health Perspectives, undergraduate students. Rutgers University, Edward J Bloustein, School of Planning and Public Policy | Spring, 2024, Summer 2024, Fall 2024, Spring 2025, Summer 2025, Fall 2025. |
| <i>Teaching Assistant</i> , Global Health Perspectives, In-person, Rutgers University, Edward J Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy | Spring, 2022 |

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Consultant

Institution: Columbia University, School of Social Work, New York, 2024
Supervised a combined Intimate Partner Violence and Mental Health Intervention (Wings+PM+ and PM+) in Nairobi, Kenya

Graduate Assistant

2021-2024

Institution: Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey - Center for Research on Ending Violence (REV)

Project title: *JAIA YOUth (Just as I am Youth)*

Description: Worked on a project focused on training youth from underrepresented communities in New York City on Mindful leadership

Project title: *PLP (Parent Linking Program)*

Description: worked on a project focused on supporting young parents in high schools in New Jersey. Broad roles included: Conducting in-depth interviews, conducting focused group discussions, organizing a photovoice session, conducting a Literature review, data analysis, and report writing.

Project title: *OUTSMART*

Description: Helped design a best practices toolkit and coalition building for Owners and managers of nightclubs, restaurants, and bars to prevent and end sexual violence.

Project title: *AMARD&V (Artists Mentoring Against Racism, Drugs, & Violence)*

Description: I was a research assistant in a project aimed at empowering young people to transform their Lives, their attitudes about themselves, and their community, as well as develop skills that equip them for a successful education and a healthy future.

Research Manager (Independent Contractor)

2019-2021

Institution: Columbia University, School of Social Work, New York

Project title: *Investigated barriers and facilitators to the prevention, treatment, and response to gender-based violence in informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya*

Description: **Consulting research manager** focused on identifying organizations that address GBV in informal settlements and

exploring barriers and facilitators to prevent and response to GBV in these settlements.

Research Assistant

2019

Institution: Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy,
Rutgers University, USA

Project title: *Tackling gender norms and gender-based violence through women's sports in rural Kenya*

Description: I was a research assistant on a project focused on women's empowerment, perceptions of gender norms, efficacy, health, and experiences of violence in Kwale County and assisted in data collection, analysis, interpretation, and presentation of results.

Research Assistant

2016-2018

Institution: University of Nairobi, Kenya

Project title: *Youth in Kenya: The Paradox of Intervention and Impact*

Description: I helped with data collection, analysis, interpretation, and presentation of results from an exploratory study that identified challenges that youth encounter and developing solutions to leadership, corruption, and integrity in Kenya

Project title: *University of Nairobi, Rapid Assessment Survey*

Description: Data Collection among teaching and non-teaching staff, examining the level of services they receive from the University of Nairobi, and a Corruption Perception Survey.

Project title: *Construction of Knowledge Societies, Building Communities for Wealth Creation in Kenya*

Description: My broad roles included: data collection and analysis; interpretation and presentation of results; and report writing from a longitudinal evaluation on matters related to knowledge of the Constitution of Kenya 2010, specifically Chapters 4 and 6

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Society for Social Work & Research (SSWR)
American Public Health Association (APHA)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Software: SPSS, NVivo, Atlas, STATA, Latent Gold

VOLUNTEERING AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Volunteer - Finnish Red Cross - 2015

Arrangement and distribution of in-kind donations, as well as participation in fundraising efforts.

Activities include arranging relief items and providing psychological support to refugees and asylum seekers who had undergone abuse on the way to Europe.

Volunteer - Anoka Community Mission – 2025

Collaborate with team members to sort and organize donations, ensuring efficient distribution of food, clothing, and toiletries to families in need.
