

## Research Statement | Tatiana Londoño

I work at the intersection of immigration and mental health, investigating how migration experiences and resettlement contexts impact the mental health of Latinx immigrant youth. Migration-related trauma exposure among Latinx immigrant youth has many long-lasting adverse consequences yet remains understudied. Immigrant youth are unduly burdened by experiences of persecution, violence, and displacement in their home countries and during migration. They continue to deal with difficult experiences once they arrive in the U.S. – e.g., immigration enforcement, discrimination, and poverty. These experiences negatively affect mental health and can lead to post-traumatic stress, depression, and anxiety. Yet, these experiences may also lead to positive adaptations in the form of post-traumatic growth and resilience. My dissertation focuses on the mental health adaptations of Latinx immigrant youth and their families who have experienced recent migration. I provide further detail on each of my dissertation chapters below. My identity as a first-generation Latina immigrant from a predominantly immigrant community and my social work practice experience with Latinx and immigrant families across multiple contexts motivate my research. Through these experiences, I have lived and witnessed the unique challenges Latinx and immigrant communities face and their strategies of survival and resilience. Inspired by these experiences, I seek to develop a program of research that: 1) identifies risk and protective factors for mental health outcomes among Latinx populations, with an emphasis on Latinx immigrant youth, and; 2) develops culturally relevant, evidence-based interventions that help prevent mental health issues and promote resilience among Latinx immigrant youth.

**Risk and Protective Factors for Mental Health Outcomes.** Migration-related experiences do not impact youth mental health in isolation. From an ecological systems perspective, Latinx immigrant youth develop in response to and are influenced by their environments, including their family. These environments either mitigate or exacerbate mental health adaptations. Thus, much of my research explores how family dynamics shape Latinx youth's mental health. For example, in a study published in *Family Process* (Londoño et al., 2021), I found that sibling relationships served as important loci of stability and protection for children whose parents were either at risk of or had been detained and deported. Importantly, these findings highlight the potential utility of targeting sibling relationships in preventative interventions for families dealing with immigration-related adversity. In addition to sibling relationships, I am interested in the role parent-child dynamics play in the mental health of Latinx youth. In a study funded by the National Institute for Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) on Latina adolescents who have previously attempted suicide (Londoño et al., in preparation), I examined how parents transmit vulnerabilities and strengths to their adolescent daughters, and how this transmission plays a role in the adolescent's suicidal behaviors. I found that parents often had a history of trauma, and would use various parenting behaviors (e.g., boundary-setting, hiding their suffering, not communicating about struggles) to protect their adolescents from facing similar challenges. While these strategies were at times helpful, they also made adolescents feel misunderstood by and distanced from their parents, which influenced the adolescents' suicidal behaviors. These results demonstrate important parental coping and survival strategies that warrant attention in family-focused preventative interventions for Latinx adolescents dealing with suicidality. My family-focused research spurred my dissertation's focus on family dynamics and the mental health of Latinx immigrant youth.

I have also examined important environmental determinants of youth mental health, such as mental health service access. I led the recruitment, data collection, and analysis of an investigation on the mental health service experiences of youth transitioning into adulthood with serious co-occurring mental health conditions. Findings showed that while youth saw a benefit in continuing mental health services, most disengaged due to difficulties with navigating care and getting their needs met (Londoño et al., 2021). This work informs my research on how Latinx immigrant youth's interactions with mental health systems impact their mental health. Through this work, I also gained expertise in the implementation of a mixed-method longitudinal study, and in innovative strategies to increase engagement among youth with mental health issues.

While most of my research directly relates to the first goal of my research agenda, other important research in behavioral health has indirectly advanced this goal. For example, I collaborated on a project funded by NIMHD that identified psychosocial determinants of smoking cessation among Spanish-speaking Latinx adults. Utilizing data from this project, I found that resilience factors such as positive affect and social support are stronger predictors of motivation and self-efficacy to quit smoking than risk factors such as negative affect and loneliness (Londoño et al., 2022). Smoking cessation interventions largely target risk factors; thus, this work highlights the

importance of resilience factors and the benefit of incorporating them into cessation interventions. This work was published in the *American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse*. This, and my other work examining determinants of health behaviors among Latino adults (Castro et al., 2022; Guerra et al., 2022; Moore et al., 2022), informs my research by highlighting how to identify intervention targets for inclusion in culturally relevant interventions.

**Culturally Relevant Interventions.** I have also contributed to work that directly advances my second research goal: developing culturally relevant interventions. I collaborated on the adaptation and implementation of a parenting intervention for Latinx immigrant parents, funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, that integrated experiences of discrimination and biculturalism. This project substantiated the need of accommodating the lived experiences of Latinx immigrant families to increase parenting effectiveness and decrease the risk of mental health issues among Latinx immigrant youth. As project manager of the implementation component, I am conducting focus groups with families to identify key implementation strategies and interviews with community partners to examine barriers and facilitators to implementation (Londoño et al., in preparation). These findings inform future implementations of the intervention to Latinx immigrant families across the U.S. Through this work, I also honed my expertise in how to design, implement, and disseminate culturally adapted interventions.

**Dissertation Research.** Building upon these topics, my dissertation explores: 1) migration trauma exposure and mental health outcomes among immigrant youth from the Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA); 2) how migration shapes parent-child relationships among these families, and; 3) different trajectories of wellbeing and environmental conditions that contribute to youth's trajectories. A structural violence theoretical framework guides my understanding of the mechanisms through which social forces such as state-sanctioned violence, immigration enforcement, and other oppressive experiences become embodied as individual experiences and outcomes. I also apply ecological models of parenting, which helps understand how external environments impact the functioning and wellbeing of families. Lastly, I use a post-traumatic growth lens to explore both adaptive and maladaptive trajectories of wellbeing. This research is motivated by and draws upon data collected for a mixed-method study funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and examines the experiences of Central American youth during migration, and immigration detention, as well as their post-release psychosocial wellbeing. For this project, I co-led the development of the qualitative and quantitative protocols and the training and supervision of undergraduate research assistants. I also coordinated participant recruitment, non-profit agency partnerships, data collection, and analysis. I expand this work by conducting follow-up interviews with a subsample of the parents from the larger study to further explore parent-child relationships and different trajectories of wellbeing in the resettlement context. Results from this study will support the need to address migration trauma experiences and outcomes in evidence-based interventions.

**Future Research Agenda.** My long-term career goal is to inform social work practice, immigration-related policy, and public knowledge of recently arrived Latinx immigrant youth and their families to prevent trauma-related negative outcomes and foster resilience and growth. My dissertation research will substantiate the need for future investigations related to effective and culturally relevant interventions for Latinx immigrant youth. This will inform the next logical step in my program of research, which is to adapt and implement a culturally relevant brief intervention for immigrant families from the NTCA. In pursuit of this important next step, I will apply for grants, such as the K series award from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), to gain further training in intervention research and fund the preliminary research that will go on to inform the intervention. Then, I will apply for planning grants, such as the NIH R34, that will support the initial implementation of the intervention.

In my career, I will be committed to the dissemination of my research to clinicians and advocates working on the ground with these populations. My findings will help ensure that social work practices with Latinx immigrant youth are trauma-informed and culturally responsive to this population's unique experiences, needs, and strengths. In collaboration with immigration policy experts, I plan for my research to inform future policy. I have previously collaborated with policy-oriented advocacy organizations, such as the Children's Defense Fund, to disseminate research to policymakers and will continue to actively pursue these collaborations. Lastly, I hope to educate others about the true experiences of these youth. Besides academic conferences, I will present my research at local community events or to audiences that might not be aware of the current circumstances of immigrants. The need for culturally relevant evidence-based interventions focusing on Latinx immigrant youth and their families is timely and important. I will dedicate my career to ensuring these families have access to such interventions.