Title of Paper/Presentation: Bidirectional Relations between Mexican American Mothers’ Parenting Behaviors & Youth Internalizing Symptoms

Authors: Jennifer A. Manongdo and Jorge I. Ramirez Garcia

(a) Background: Latino youth are more likely to develop delinquency, anxiety, and depression than Euro-American youth. Knowledge of risk factors to mental health problems provides insight on how to best serve Latino youth. Programs often target parents because their impact on youth mental health (i.e., parent effects) is well documented. However, less attention has been given to the impact of youth on parents (i.e., child effects). Understanding of parent and child effects in Latino parent-youth relations is critical to improve programs to decrease Latino youth mental health problems. In this study both parent and child effects were tested.

(b) Method: 89 adolescents of Mexican decent completed questionnaires in their language of preference at two time points, approximately one year apart. Mental health problems were measured by internalizing (depression, anxiety, somatic) and externalizing (aggression, delinquency) symptoms. Parent behaviors were measured by supportive parenting (acceptance, involvement, monitoring) and harsh parental control (firm control, inconsistent discipline, harsh parenting).

(c) Results: Evidence was found for parent effects in a series of regressions. Lower baseline supportive parenting and harsh parental control predicted increases in internalizing problems. Higher baseline supportive parenting predicted increases in externalizing symptoms. Evidence was also found for child effects. Higher internalizing and lower externalizing symptoms predicted decreases in supportive parenting. Lower baseline internalizing symptoms predicted increases in harsh parental control. Overall, predictive bidirectional effects were found for supportive parenting and internalizing, supportive parenting and externalizing, and harsh parental control and internalizing, but not harsh parental control and externalizing symptoms.

(d) Conclusion: Recommendations for Latino family interventionists are to recognize that youth can elicit parent behaviors. Interventions should include parent training on how to respond to youths’ symptoms more adaptively to alter the cyclical patterns. Furthermore, youth can be educated on how they impact their parents and how behavior changes can elicit more desirable responses from parents.