

Crianza en Armonía: Culturally Responsive Family Support

Isabel Cunningham, Shahla Alai-Rosales & Alicia Re Cruz

Regardless of ability, race, ethnicity, gender or socioeconomic status, all children deserve opportunities for happy and healthy development (United Nations Convention on Rights of a Child, 1989). Early in life, parents are the primary support for children to have these opportunities, especially children with disabilities such as autism. Unfortunately, there are marked disparities in the opportunities for children with autism of the non-majority race, ethnicity or living in poverty.

The purpose of the proposed study is to develop and evaluate a model of family support that can specifically address disparities in the Latino community, a group that research indicates is consistently at a disadvantage regarding autism diagnoses, interventions and services.

Our research team is uniquely positioned to carry out this study. The primary investigator, Isabel Cunningham, is a doctoral student in Health Services Research with a concentration in Behavior Analysis, is bilingual in Spanish and English, is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) with over ten years of clinical experience working with families and has chosen this topic for her dissertation research. Her primary advisor, Dr. Shahla Alai-Rosales, also a BCBA, has over forty years of experience working with families and has focused her career on serving underserved populations in community settings. She is also bilingual and has expertise in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) research methods. Her secondary advisor, Dr. Alicia Re Cruz, an Applied Anthropologist has over forty years of experience in Latino community settings and has dedicated her career to understanding and navigating the complexities of migrant and refugee life. Dr. Re Cruz is bilingual and an expert in qualitative research methods. Finally, we are a student and faculty at UNT. UNT is a Hispanic serving institution and the project fits within the university's values.

If we are funded, the award will be allocated in three ways. First, the six participating families will receive compensation to offset the additional requirements of participating in a research project (\$500 visa card per family). Second, a spring semester RA stipend (\$1600 monthly) will allow Isabel to complete the research by August 2023. Finally, a \$600 travel allowance will offset conference costs needed to present the research findings within Latino and ABA autism intervention communities.

The Proposal

Children with autism and their families that receive evidence-based behavioral interventions have favorable developmental outcomes (National Autism Center, 2015). Parent coaching congruent with family routines and using naturalistic behavioral techniques are effective in building child skills, improving parent-child interactions, and increasing parent self-efficacy (Ala'i-Rosales et al., 2013; Franz et al. 2022; McConachie & Diggle, 2007; Oono et al., 2013; Rojas-Torres, 2020; Steiner et al., 2012; Wainer et al., 2017). However, there are well documented diagnostic and intervention access disparities between racial and ethnic minorities and the dominant majority (Angell et al., 2018). Furthermore, when interventions are accessed, the evidence base of those services has been developed in English by researchers from the dominant culture (Angell et al., 2016; Beaulieu et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2019; Neely et al., 2020; Pritchett et al., 2021). This results in interventions that are culturally incongruent for many minority families (Ala'i-Rosales et al., 2022; Angell, et al, 2016).

The Latino population is the fastest growing minority group in the United States (United States Census Bureau, 2019). Latino children receive diagnoses of autism later and less often in comparison to the dominant majority (Angell et al., 2018; Magaña et al., 2013; Magaña et al., 2015; Palmer et al., 2010). Latino families have also been historically underrepresented and marginalized in the research on interventions for children with autism, and families are often excluded from research due to English requirements (Angell et al., 2018; DuBay et al., 2018; West et al., 2015; Zuckerman et al., 2017). Recently, there has been an increase in efforts related to equitable access in different regions of the country (e.g., Baires, 2020; Buzhardt et al., 2016; Castro-Hostetler, 2022; Gevarter et al., 2021; Feldman, 2022; Lopez et al., 2019; Magaña et al., 2015). The proposed study aims to add to this growing literature and address intervention access in the Dallas/ Fort Worth area.

Crianza en Armonía is an adaptation of Sunny Starts, a family coaching program for families with newly diagnosed children with autism (Ala'i-Rosales et al., 2013; Guðmundsdóttir et al., 2019). It is a short-term, flexible, collaborative and evidence-based program. Sunny Starts has been effective at supporting parents from various cultural backgrounds in learning naturalistic behavioral techniques to improve child skills that are valuable to their family and expansive for their child's continued development while enhancing their family relationships (Ala'i-Rosales et al., 2013). There have been many iterations as the program is designed to be adapted to individual family needs and continues to be refined through various research projects (Guðmundsdóttir et al., 2019; Carnett, et al, under review). *Crianza en Armonía* will extend this research base. The adaptation of this program will be implemented in public education and public health care systems and will be offered in Spanish and English. Using a community action research approach (Fawcett, 1991; 2021), we will focus on identifying the expressed needs and cultural values of the pilot families we serve in ways that incorporate their preferences for intervention delivery and support relationship harmony and skill development. As we learn to increase the cultural responsiveness of the service delivery, language and content, we will also be developing tools that other providers can use. Our goal is to produce both a model and a process for serving Latino families in our region.

The mixed methods study will include young Latino children at risk or with autism and their families living in the Dallas/ Fort Worth area. Families will be recruited from churches, community centers, and public agencies where Latino families, especially immigrants, refugees and families seeking asylum might seek supports for their children. Two levels of analysis, at minimum, will be included in the study. First, focus groups and individual family interviews will be completed to assess the needs of the Latino community. A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) will then be conducted to identify emerging themes. Second, in response to the identified themes and the existing evidence-base, the Sunny Starts parent coaching program will be translated, adapted in collaboration with the families, and evaluated using a single subject experimental design (Horner, 2005). Specifically, a multiple baseline design across three family selected child goals and procedures and replicated across 6 families, will be used to evaluate the effectiveness and cultural congruence of the program. Video samples of parent-child interactions will be collected to evaluate both individual progress and the overall effectiveness of the program. In addition to measuring child goals and the number of parent mediated teaching interactions towards those goals, parent-child harmony and discordance will be evaluated, directly and through interviews, to ensure that intervention methods enhance desired family relationships. Finally, the social validity of the program goals, procedures, and outcomes (Wolf, 1978) will be evaluated at the beginning, before each goal addition and at follow up. Upon completion of the study, the *Crianza en Armonía* findings will be reported in educational settings and the program materials be made publicly available. We will also partner with regional public health and education agencies to conduct training and provide *Crianza en Armonía* instructional materials.

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