



Name: Virmarie Correa-Fernández

Department/College: Educational Psychology

Research Area: Social Programs, health and Health Disparities

Biography: Dr. Virmarie Correa-Fernández obtained her doctoral degree (PhD) in Clinical Psychology in 2003 from Carlos Albizu University in San Juan, Puerto Rico. She is a Tobacco Treatment Specialist and is trained in Motivational Interviewing. Her academic training and clinical work experience allowed her to develop a strong record of direct clinical work with vulnerable populations and led to a growing interest in behavioral health disparities. She completed a postdoctoral fellowship in the Department of Health Disparities

Research at MD Anderson Cancer Center, where she was an Instructor for two years. Currently, Dr. Correa-Fernández is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychological, Health and Learning Sciences at the University of Houston. The overarching mission of Dr. Correa-Fernández's program of research is to generate knowledge that contributes to reducing tobacco-related and behavioral health disparities, particularly among underrepresented groups. She seeks to establish an independently-funded research program that elucidates the mechanisms and treatment response related to multiple health behavior change, and smoking cessation among individuals with behavioral health vulnerabilities, especially among Hispanic/Latinos subgroups. She is particularly interested in investigating the efficacy of evidence-based treatments for the co-morbidity of tobacco dependence with non-nicotine substance use disorders and other mental health problems; and to inform, develop, evaluate and disseminate culturally competent interventions for smokers with these comorbidities. Thus far, her research has focused on understanding and addressing health behavior change among diverse underserved populations (e.g. individuals meeting criteria for depression and anxiety disorders and/or low socioeconomic status, racial/ethnic minorities), with a specific focus on smoking cessation and at-risk drinking. She is expanding her research program by: (a) focusing on Hispanic/Latino populations, (b) studying the complex and dynamic relationships between psychosocial factors (e.g. self-efficacy, distress tolerance, social support, alcohol use, etc.) in predicting different cessation milestones, (c) culturally adapting and testing the feasibility of a distinctive cognitive-behavioral intervention (e.g. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) for Hispanic/Latino smokers with co-morbid depression and anxiety, and (d) encouraging evidence-based smoking cessation interventions at the provider and clinic levels in mental health settings. These research areas are addressed in her Mentored Research Scholar Grant from the American Cancer Society, entitled: Reducing Tobacco-Related Health Disparities: A Focus on Mental Health. In addition to Dr. Correa-Fernández's primary research focus, other areas of interest include: understanding and promoting Hispanic/Latino participation in behavioral research and psychosocial interventions, mixed-methods approaches, community-based participatory research, and multi-level interventions. As a behavioral researcher, her goal is that her work would have a broader reach as it will contribute to translate research findings into practice, and will, ultimately, have a more sustainable public health impact.