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My research focuses on marginalized youth and the inequities they experience. My current work examines health inequities, including how identity and environmental factors inform health decision-making and the type and accessibility of services available to youth. As a transdisciplinary, social welfare researcher, I take an integrated, intersectional approach to examine health-in-context with the aim of ensuring service approaches are responsive to youth's lived experiences. I have 10 years of experience collaborating on multidisciplinary teams to develop and evaluate research-based tools and programs to improve youth systems and outcomes. From this work, I have developed content expertise and a strong record of research scholarship related to the juvenile legal and child welfare systems, youth programming, gang membership, and the intersection of identity, environment, and health. My program of research reflects a promising trajectory and valuable contribution to social work science and practice.

Prior Research and Scholarship

I have worked extensively on projects spanning program development, implementation and evaluation in the fields of youth violence prevention and the juvenile legal system. This has included analyses of large administrative datasets and program evaluations using a range of designs and methods. My roles have integrated mezzo-level practice and research, including fostering community and agency partnerships alongside contributing to all aspects of research process including conceptualization; data collection, management, and analysis; and dissemination of findings. In addition to increasing my leadership in applied research, these experiences helped me build a skill set geared toward cross-systems collaboration and community participation. I have applied, for example, a community-based participatory approach to co-develop a structured assessment tool and implementation protocol in a multiservice youth initiative. By working with service providers and obtaining youth input, we designed a tool that balanced scientific rigor with local needs for functionality and community relevance (e.g., developed meaningful guidelines for translating empirically derived scores to case planning). I am first author of the User's Manual and a publication detailing this work.

My current program of research reflects my priority to improve the health and well-being of marginalized youth, including those disproportionately involved in juvenile legal, child welfare and disinvested community contexts. My general exam was a scoping review of studies linking neighborhoods and health during the transition to adulthood, capturing transition experiences of marginalization. I synthesized the theoretical and methodological approaches and found the literature was fragmented with limited theoretical coherence. The first authored manuscript, published in a top journal in the field (*Health & Place*), calls for research and theory development that incorporates varied transition experiences and expanded definitions of identity to clarify how person and place interact to influence health. Additionally, I recently led an evaluation of emerging practice frameworks for youth probation which call for systemic reform away from punitive practices toward prioritizing adolescent development and cross-systems collaboration. Results suggest that coordinated efforts to increase family and school involvement for youth on

probation will result in greater therapeutic gains. The first authored manuscript is under review.

My research focusing on gang-involved youth recognizes the multiple forms of marginalization and persistent health disparities experienced by these youth. Despite this complexity, research to date emphasizes violence risk, gang desistance, and legal system intervention,¹ and there remain considerable gaps regarding health decision-making and service needs within this population. Because youth gang involvement is highly racialized, the consequences of not attending to the health inequities of this population make this a pressing social justice issue. My research in this area addresses these gaps and has resulted in conference presentations, first authored manuscripts (published and under review), and has informed my dissertation research.

My three-paper dissertation examines variation in sexual, physical, and mental health among gang-involved youth, with a focus on how identity and ecological factors shape health risks. This includes a qualitative analysis of the youth gang literature and two quantitative analyses of gang-involved youth from a state-wide survey. This research will have implications for guiding service approaches that are relevant and responsive for these youth. I was awarded the Warren G. Magnuson scholarship for my promising contribution to addressing health disparities. This project has resulted in student and faculty collaborations and two manuscripts are currently in progress.

Research Trajectory

Addressing health inequities and creating meaningful change will require expanding on and rethinking traditional approaches to research and practice with marginalized youth. One immediate next step involves publishing and building on my dissertation research, which offers promise in bridging gaps regarding health decision-making and service needs for gang-involved youth. For instance, preliminary results suggest heterosexuality within the gang subculture is not universal, and those who identify otherwise may be at heightened vulnerability for sexual health risk. I plan to continue this research to further clarify the gang-health link and aim to translate findings to practice through efforts to develop and adapt assessment tools, practitioner education, and harm reduction strategies to increase responsiveness to varied health needs in the youth gang context. I will then examine the feasibility, acceptability, and effectiveness of adapted approaches. I plan to apply for a National Institutes of Health (NIH) R21 and R01 grants to support this work.

Over the long-term, I will continue to build an evidence-base around the impact of marginalized identities and environmental and systemic factors on health and well-being. I aim to work in collaboration with youth, communities, and systems to develop program and policy solutions to address inequities. My history of productive collaborations with colleagues will help support my efforts to advance this work, and I look forward to developing relationships with new colleagues and community partners. In addition to primary data projects, I am also prepared to leverage my skills to undertake research using administrative and national datasets (e.g., Add Health, YRBSS). Analyses of these data will provide broadly generalizable findings that are complementary to findings from local sources. Funding opportunities for my longer-term research are broad, including the NIH (e.g., NIMHD, NICHD), philanthropic foundations (e.g., Annie E. Casey, MacArthur, W.T. Grant), and research-practice partnerships with youth-serving agencies.

¹Simon, T., Ritter, N., & Mahendra, R. (2013). *Changing course: Preventing gang membership*. Office of Justice Programs and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Accessible from: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/239234.pdf>