



# Immigrant Colombian Women in the USA: Examining Adversity, Resilience, and Social Networks

Cándida Madrigal<sup>1</sup>\*, PhD., LCSW-CA, LCSW-PA, José L. Madrigal<sup>2</sup>, BS

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work Education/Gerontology, California State University, Fresno 5310 N. Campus Drive, M/S PHS 102, United States.

<sup>2</sup>Pagoda Realty /Associate Broker, 4439 Champlain Avenue, Mobile, Alabama 36619, United States.

## Article Details

Article Type: Research Article

Received date: 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2024

Accepted date: 20<sup>th</sup> February, 2024

Published date: 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 2024

\***Corresponding Author:** Cándida Madrigal, PhD., LCSW-CA, LCSW-PA, Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work Education/Gerontology, California State University, Fresno 5310 N. Campus Drive, M/S PHS 102, United States.

**Citation:** Madrigal, C., & Madrigal, J. L., (2024). Immigrant Colombian Women in the USA: Examining Adversity, Resilience, and Social Networks. *J Soci Work Welf Policy*, 2(1): 107. doi: <https://doi.org/10.33790/jswwp1100107>.

**Copyright:** ©2024, This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

## Introduction

Immigration, involving departing from one's homeland and arriving in a host country, can profoundly influence an individual's psychosocial well-being. It encompasses phases marked by substantial changes, stress, family disintegration, and subsequent reintegration. This journey may lead to family breakdown and frequently involves adversity. Adapting to a fresh life in a new nation presents numerous challenges and necessitates sacrifices [1,2]. As a result, immigrants are highly susceptible to mental health issues. [3-5]. Understanding immigration requires examining adaptation, integration modes, influencing circumstances, and shaping factors. Multiple theories contribute to exploring this complex phenomenon. Resilience, a trait inherent in individuals that enables them to effectively navigate psychosocial challenges in the face of adversity [6,7], is a vital concept to investigate concerning immigrants' adjustment to their new environment.

This study examines and aims to provide multifaceted factors influencing the resilience of Colombian immigrants in the United States, recognizing the interconnectedness of historical, contextual, and individual elements in shaping their immigrant experience. This framework encompasses elements such as the historical context of Colombian migration cycles, the impact of political, economic, and social conditions in both Colombia and the U.S., and the evolving immigration policies. Additionally, it considers the adversities encountered, resilience factors, coping strategies, and the influence of cultural and social networks, including family, friends, community, and social services.

## Importance of the Study

Studying Latinos in the United States is crucial due to their substantial presence. As of July 1, 2011, Latinos accounted for 52 million people in the United States, constituting 16.7% of the total population and establishing them as the racial or ethnic minority in the country with the largest population. Furthermore, the U.S. Hispanic population reached nearly 64 million in 2022, according

to the Pew Research Center, thus, the nation's Hispanic population continues to be one of the fastest-growing in the U.S. [8]. The link between Latinos/Hispanics and the United States spans social, cultural, economic, and political realms. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize that the U.S. Hispanic population originates from diverse regions in Latin America and Spain. Hence, it is vital to examine the distinct nationality groups, as their immigrant trajectories may vary.

Colombians hold a significant position in the United States. In 2021, they constituted 2% of the U.S. Hispanic population. They are the seventh-largest Hispanic-origin population in the U.S. and the largest group of immigrants from South America. The number of Colombian immigrants in the U.S. reached 1.4 million in 2021 from 500,000 in 2000, increasing 183% [9,10]. Consequently, it is suitable to delve into the experience of Colombian immigrants in the United States and comprehend the adversities they have encountered and the factors influencing their resilience. Moreover, given that current immigration policies affect all immigrants, coupled with the evolving economic and political landscape in the U.S., it becomes imperative to grasp the resilient elements contributing to the overall success of immigrants in the United States, and Colombians specifically.

## Colombians in the United States: Studies

The primary focus of this study is on immigrants from Colombia. Historical references and empirical studies regarding Colombian immigrants in the United States are limited. Nevertheless, various publications have explored diverse facets of Colombians in the United States. Significantly, Guarnizo et al. investigated the topic of Colombians in the U.S. in 1999. Their study seems one of the earliest scholarly works on Colombian immigration. Their publication explored the distrust experienced by Colombians in New York City and Los Angeles, asserting that the Colombian community is understudied for various reasons, primarily due to challenges in trusting others, leading to a tendency to remain silent.

In 2001, Collier and Gamarra investigated the dispersion of Colombians in South Florida, presenting their perspective on studying

the experiences of Colombian immigrants in the United States. Sanchez completed his dissertation on the study of Colombians in New York in 2002 and classified the experience of Colombians into three distinctive periods, connecting the internal conditions that were taking place in Colombia to the immigration policies in the U.S.

Several studies have documented Colombians' educational levels and job skills in the U.S. Researchers have characterized Colombians as generally possessing skills and education [11-13]. In addition, 88.0% of participants in Madrigal's [14] study indicated that a portion had finished specialized training or an undergraduate degree, with 13.3% noting the attainment of an advanced degree. In general, participants conveyed a high level of educational attainment. Other studies have looked at Colombian Americans, and their challenges and achievements in their post-migration journey in the United States.

### **Resilience of Immigrant Populations: Studies**

Numerous studies have documented the resilience of immigrant populations. Researchers at Columbia University conducted interviews with 46 immigrant youth who arrived in the United States as unaccompanied minors and were able to remain in New York City. They looked at the factors that contributed to their levels of resilience [15].

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [16] issued a report based on a study encompassing all OECD and other countries, which specifically aimed to examine the resilience of immigrant students. The report identified risks and preventive factors that could facilitate or hinder students' success (2018). Empirical studies on immigrant resilience in the United States have documented that understanding the adjustment of immigrants to the receiving country from various theoretical perspectives is crucial [14, 17, 18]. Nevertheless, there is a lack of research specifically addressing the resilience of Colombians, as outlined in this study.

### **Literature Review**

Since the focus of this study is Colombians in the United States, the literature on theories that influence the human migration experience is relevant. This study will specifically address the cumulative social network theory and resilience. Also, the discussion of immigration patterns provides context for Colombian immigrants' experiences in the United States.

### **Immigration Theories**

Many theorists across various social science and policy fields have provided explanations, discussions, and theories regarding the immigration process. A wide array of political, economic, and social theories, frameworks, and perspectives exist, all of which center on human migration and shape our comprehension of the immigrant experience. This paper will address the cumulative social network theory of immigration and resilience.

The cumulative social network theory posits that as connections strengthen, social networks reduce migration costs, enhancing their allure for those at home [19-21]. It suggests that once the immigration process commences, other factors play a role in determining the success of the immigrant in the host country. It speculates that a chain reaction can occur after the initial arrival of family members and once they integrate into the new system, there is a tendency for other family members, friends, and acquaintances to join them. This transmission of the migration experience may facilitate the process for new immigrants until it can no longer support newcomers. This cycle offers a way to comprehend and depict the dynamics of family reunification and the interconnected chains of global migration. Social networks significantly influence different aspects of migration and are crucial for migrants. Interpersonal and organizational ties affect migration trends, employment prospects abroad, and migrants' connections to their home countries. Additionally, these networks

promote development in countries of origin, drive sizable remittance economies, and facilitate transnational activities [22].

### **Resiliency and Immigrants' Experience**

Resilience is the process and result of effectively adapting to challenging life experiences. Adaptation involves emotional, behavioral, and mental flexibility, adjusting to external and internal demands [23]. It represents an implied process, or an underlying characteristic influenced by various factors, impacting one's encounters and capacity to surmount challenges. It suggests that the individual is currently thriving, along with instances of extraordinary circumstances posing a threat to positive outcomes [24]. Hence, exploring resilience becomes highly pertinent in examining the psychosocial well-being of immigrants.

Immigrants may exhibit resilient coping styles across various life stages. Consequently, life changes can influence positive adaptation amid adversity. Although these changes are part of nature, they are influenced by the individual's psychological, cultural, and socioeconomic factors [25, 26]. Immigrants face their conventional life transitions for their age and must cope with the circumstances of their immigrant journey.

Early literature on resilience provides a foundation for comprehending the transition toward viewing resilience within a broader sociocultural context. Cultural resilience explores how an individual's cultural heritage, including language, customs, and norms, contributes to their ability to overcome challenges, both on a personal and community level. It refers to the capacity of specific human cultures to endure stressors such as contact with other cultures, disasters, etc. [27]. This perspective suggests that resilience is not solely dependent on individual traits but is also shaped by broader sociocultural support systems and that cultures can uphold critical cultural knowledge through generations, regardless of challenges and complexities. Culturally focused resilient adaptation suggests that navigating adversity is a dynamic process influenced by personal attributes, cultural background, values, and supportive sociocultural elements, such as nurturing relationships with adults.

Previous research has documented the importance of understanding the immigrant adjustment to the receiving country from different theoretical perspectives, but no research has been found that studies the immigration adaption of Colombians in the U.S., using the framework of cultural resilience and the cumulative social network theory.

### **Colombians, their Migration Cycles, and the United States**

The United States' approach to immigration from Latin America has historically been marked by disparities compared to its treatment of European nations. President James Monroe's Monroe Doctrine, delivered in 1823, warned European powers against interfering in the Western Hemisphere's affairs, leaving a lasting impact on regional politics [28]. The U.S. often intervened in Latin American countries, primarily driven by economic interests, which exposed citizens to American opportunities. Access to the U.S. has been easier for Latin America's affluent due to financial privilege. During the Cold War, amid U.S. economic expansion, immigration policies were relaxed to attract skilled labor, leading to the establishment of specific immigration laws in 1965 [29].

The period between 1945 and 1965 marked the onset of Colombian migration to the United States. The economic prosperity prevailing in the U.S. during this era served as a magnet for many highly educated Colombians, allured by the promise of better employment opportunities and higher wages. This influx contributed to what is commonly referred to as a "brain drain," characterized by a notable emigration of educated individuals from Colombia to the U.S. [12, 13]. In tandem with economic motives, the political turmoil sparked by the assassination of the left-wing presidential candidate, Jorge

Eliecer Gaitan, on April 9, 1948, further destabilized Colombia. Gaitan, a charismatic leader of the liberal party and a champion of political reform, held significant sway among the Colombian populace and was poised to secure the presidency, adding to the nation's tumultuous climate.

The unrest prompted a realization among many Colombians that pursuing opportunities in the U.S. could translate their aspirations for a better economic future into reality. Facilitated by employment contracts from U.S. companies, particularly in sectors such as textiles, mechanics, and skilled labor, numerous Colombians embarked on the journey toward economic advancement in the U.S. [12,13]. The 1950s witnessed a notable increase in the Colombian population in the U.S., with figures reaching 18,048, a number that surged to 72,028 permanent residents by 1960 (United States Immigration and Naturalization Service [USINS], 1970).

The second trend of Colombian migration to the U.S. is divided into two distinct periods: from 1966 to 1975 and from 1976 to 1990. The period between 1966 and 1975 witnessed the effects of amendments to the immigration laws in the United States, notably the "1965 Immigration and Nationality Act", also referred to as the Family Reunification Act [29]. This legislation eliminated country-of-origin quotas and considered abilities, knowledge, and expertise in specific jobs, U.S.-based relatives, and political refugee status. Simultaneously, in Colombia, the economic and political situation was worsening, and there was an increase in internal political violence in rural areas [13].

From 1976 to 1990, Colombia's already precarious political and economic situation worsened as it emerged as a significant producer, trafficker, and supplier of marijuana, cocaine, and heroin to various regions worldwide [13,30]. Colombian migration to the U.S. witnessed a substantial increase during this period. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the number of Colombians residing in the United States fluctuated between 156,000 [31] and 122,849 (USINS, 1995).

1991 marked the beginning of the third trend of Colombians arriving in the U.S. The 1990s were impacted by external and internal political crises, along with a concerning association between drug traffickers and guerrilla groups, notably the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), which sought control over the drug trade. This situation caused concern for the United States government and its military. As a result, the U.S. pledged millions of dollars to assist the Colombian government through "Plan Colombia" in eradicating drugs and combating rebellious groups [12,13,32,33].

The political and economic turmoil in Colombia, coupled with escalating violence and the personal threats of abduction, coercion, and killings, led numerous wealthy individuals, families, and professionals to leave the country [12, 13, 33]. During this period, 137,985 Colombians became legal residents of the U.S. [34]. Colombians have persisted in arriving and establishing residence in the United States. Recent statistics reveal that from 2018 to 2020, 49,375 Colombians acquired permanent residence in the U.S. [35]. Furthermore, between 2019 and 2021, 47,435 Colombians became naturalized citizens of the United States [35]. The connection between Colombia and the U.S. extends across several domains; consequently, studying this group is crucial, as they constitute a significant immigrant population exerting influence in diverse spheres within the United States.

## Methods

### Methodology

Employing the qualitative research approach, which asserts that the most genuine way to comprehend an individual's subjective reality is by direct inquiry [36, 37], this investigation delved into the coping strategies of eight Colombian women who arrived in the United States at various points in time and ages. This phenomenological study utilizes an intricate understanding of immigration [38] by exploring resilient factors in their lived experiences that contributed

to their feelings of success and contentment in their new country, the USA.

The data collected from narratives during unstructured interviews underwent analysis and evaluation utilizing the constant comparative method [39]. This approach intended to identify potential distinctions in coping strategies, resilient aspects, and psychosocial factors. The study aimed to comprehend which aspects of resilience contributed to the protective factors and daily psychosocial adjustment experienced by the eight Colombian immigrants. The Narrative Analysis method was employed to identify and construct themes and categories.

### Participants

Eight Colombian-born females, aged 18 and above, who were older than five when they arrived and came to the United States between 1945 and 2008, were recruited for interviews using convenience and snowball sampling [38]. The interview participants were recruited through convenience sampling, as they were readily available and accessible to the researcher. Additionally, snowball sampling was employed, wherein participants assisted the researcher in identifying other potential subjects. The University of Texas at Arlington approved the study.

### Interview Instrument

The researcher included five sections when developing the interview questionnaire. The first section is labeled Demographics, including age, education, marital status, Family status, and Vocation – Profession- Career. The second section addresses living arrangements in Colombia (before departure), which includes the nature of the attachments/ emotional support, family background, friends/ community resources, financial situation, political background, and lifestyle. The third section inquires about their experience of departing Colombia, their age at departure, the challenges in deciding to leave, the mode of transportation used, assistance received, sacrifices made, and whether their initial intention was to leave permanently. The fourth section queries their arrival experience, and the last section asks about their present status. The interviews took one hour; however, on some occasions, participants requested to elaborate on their answers, leading to extended interview durations.

### Data Collection

The researcher provided participants with a pseudonym to protect their identities. Participants received an informed consent form outlining the contact details of the principal investigator and the research procedures. Emphasizing the voluntary nature of participation, participants had the right to withdraw at any time. The eight participants consented to the audio recording of interviews for accurate transcription and theme identification.

### Data Analysis

Consistent with qualitative methodology, the analysis focused on examining transcripts, separating, and identifying recurring themes, and coding within the data. However, as the study was guided by phenomenological methodology, it also concentrated on developing rich descriptions of their experiences and attitudes balancing between recurring themes and significant experiences. The analysis ultimately focused on identifying resilient aspects that influenced the factors contributing to coping with stressful events, mitigating risk, and facilitating daily adaptation to the host country.

## Results

This study encompassed eight participants ranging from thirty-nine to seventy-one years old. Table 1.1 displays the Demographics of Participants (N=8). All participants were born in Colombia and migrated to various cities in the United States.

Six different themes were identified from the narratives. These themes discussed the adversities the eight women experienced and had to overcome to successfully continue living in the US. Four resiliency factors that help overcome the adversities to live meaningfully in America were identified. These include the attitude of determination, faith in God, having social networks, and taking calculated risks.

NAME*	Age at time of Arrival	Education	Marital status	Family status	Profession
MARCELA	22 & 31	Ph.D.	Married	One son	University Professor
BLANCA	17	11 <sup>th</sup> grade	Divorced	-One son -One daughter -Two grandchildren	Housekeeper
FLOR	44	- Three years nursing-assistant	widowed	-Two sons -Two grandsons	Homemaker
OLGA	11	Associate degree in Word Processing	Second Marriage	-One son -One stepdaughter	Computer Specialist
CELIA	34	Master's in social work	Single	No children	Social Worker
DIANA	16	High School	Divorced	No children	Self-employed (Hairdresser, babysitter, housekeeper).
ANDREA	24	Equivalent to 9 <sup>th</sup> grade and Commercial Secretary Degree	Married	-Daughter- 13 - Son- 9	Homemaker (worked as housekeeper)
NATALIA	55	Baccalaureate in Public Accounting	1x widowed 1 x divorce	-Daughter- 37 -Son 38 -1 grandchild	-Accountant -Receptionist

Table 1.1 Participants' Demographics (N=8)

\*Names have been changed for confidentiality reasons

### Overcoming Adversity

All participants talked about adverse experiences during and after their migration to the United States. Several participants, especially those residing in small towns, reported being discriminated against at different times after they arrived. Marcela described her feelings of discrimination as follows:

... As a student, I enjoyed attending and experiencing the school environment. I did well in all aspects. The school had an international flair due to the diverse new group of immigrants. However, it did not seem they valued diversity. Everything continued the same way after we arrived. The town where I am living now is also not welcoming. The people are not very open-minded. I have experienced discrimination due to my accent. Also, it is not as easy to make friends. I basically go to school, to classes, and come home; I do not really socialize. I got a job to help my family. I had problems with the supervisor due to my Hispanic accent. I also think that being a woman contributed to the supervisor's negative attitude.

Several participants talked about financial adversities. They reported that they and their families struggled financially and had limited resources when they initially came to the United States. For example, they talked about not having any money, or limited money, having to wear old clothes, and receiving food stamps, and other social service support upon arriving. Olga described her experiences of limited resources as:

There were many tough periods. School was one of the most difficult. I remember always seeing other female students as more positive, well-dressed, and well-liked by the guys. We had

to wear old clothes that a Mennonite lady, who became like our Godmother, would bring us. My family also received government assistance. I remember being embarrassed when my mother would pay with food stamps.

Despite encountering discrimination, and facing financial difficulties, they all stated that the decision to migrate had been great and that they are now doing very well overall. Bianca discussed that although her family suffered the tragic death of her oldest brother, who was involved in a car accident, for her and her family, moving to the U.S. was the best move they ever made. Also, although they faced adversities during their initial migration period, the participants talked about several resiliency factors that allowed them to continue and flourish in their new country, these factors include the attitude of determination, faith in God, support from family, friends, and community, and risk-taking.

### Attitude of Determination

All participants' descriptions of the early years strongly emphasized an attitude of determination to succeed in the new country. This sense of determination kept them from failing regardless of the circumstances. It created a mindset that giving up was not an option and they described being very proactive, whether in school or finding jobs. Celia for example described her experience finding work, where she went from job to job, but slowly advancing.

After I arrived, I started calling the phone numbers given to me in Colombia, of people my friends and acquaintances knew, and asking if they needed someone to work for them. I met a Colombian woman who had a temporary employment agency. I started working as a live-in nanny. Three months later, I moved



to another job where I earned more money. I stayed in this job for five months until I saved enough money to buy a car and rent my apartment. I became more independent. I was able to make some professional connections and started working teaching domestic violence and drug and alcohol classes, as well as babysitting. I studied English at night with a private teacher. I was determined to succeed, especially to make money to achieve financial stability in Colombia. I was open to working any legal job available.

Marcela, who is now a university professor, stated that it was her experiences with discrimination that gave her identity and perspective, and the determination to continue and succeed. She said, "This experience made me recognize the situations that many immigrants suffer. This knowledge has made me stronger as a person and a professional. It has helped me understand my identity". This attitude of determination to succeed in their early years in America was emphasized by all 8 participants in the study.

### **Faith in God**

Many of the participants admitted that their determination and resilience are propelled by their faith in God. Although they faced numerous forms of adversity, including new challenges, as well as trauma they carried from their life in Colombia, one constant that helped them get through their adversities was their faith in God. For example, Natalia came to the United States with a fiancée visa. Three days after she married the man who had been the love of her life, he had a car accident and nearly died. After 79 days in the hospital and her constant care, he was released from the hospital but informed her that he no longer wanted to be married to her. She detailed:

I almost died when he told me he no longer wanted to be married to me and that I had not done anything to help him. I know I had been by his side all along, so I thought that maybe caring for him had been "my mission in life," even if he did not remember it. Although my first instinct was to return to Colombia, I stayed, became a U.S. citizen, worked a part-time job, and had numerous friends. My faith in God has sustained me through the difficult times.

Similarly, Flor mentioned her ability to overcome her adversities and have an attitude of gratitude due to her faith in God.

I came to the United States with my two sons after my husband was killed in Colombia. I was a political refugee and received help from peace activists to come to the United States. Once we arrived, we were assisted by other community members. My sons and I always had faith in God. There were difficult times, but after hearing many stories, we now know we were very fortunate here.

### **Social Networks**

Most of the women reported having family members, friends, or acquaintances living in the U.S. Furthermore, they all reported meeting people from the community who helped them through their immigrant experience. As some of them explained, it is through these internal social networks that they got the initial assistance they needed to gain stability to continue. For example, Diana reported:

I was 16 when I arrived in the United States... I came with my mother and younger brother. I had several family members living in the United States. We arrived in New York and stayed there for three days with my sister. Although I liked the city, I did not want to live there. We came to stay with my father who was residing in a small town in PA. We found several Colombian families that had relocated years earlier. Although there were some problems, they were very welcoming and helped me get a job. I have maintained contact with many of these Colombians. I felt fortunate that they had already learned how things were, so I did not suffer much not knowing the culture and the language.

Blanca described the support she got from her family members as crucial to starting her life. She related:

I arrived in the U.S. at the age of 17. My father and older brothers were already living in a very nice and quiet town and working at different companies. They felt "rich" because their earnings were higher than in Colombia. My father filed the paperwork for us to come because there was a law that would help families reunite in the U.S. We obtained our legal residency in Colombia before we came to the U.S. My whole family moved to the USA to reunite with my father and brothers.

### **Risk-Taking:**

Several participants related specific circumstances that described risk-taking as they initiated their immigrant experience or during the initial adjustment process. Participants identified these calculated risks as necessary to be where they are today, even though their initial experience was potentially dangerous or caused hardship, or trauma, they were willing to take the chance so they could succeed. Andrea conveyed:

I was 24 years old when I arrived in the States... I came through Mexico without legal documents. I was detained by immigration agents and spent several days in a detention place. I consider myself fortunate because my uncle had a friend who lent me the money to pay my bail. I got out and took a train to Los Angeles. I was scared. I did not know the language, culture, or the system, but I hoped to be able to stay and help my family financially. I got help from many people, including Colombians, and was able to celebrate many of the Colombian traditions.

Cecilia disclosed that she had met a man through a dating agency in her city. They exchanged contact information. She later decided to travel to Los Angeles. She contacted him when she arrived; he was happy to have her stay with him. However, she moved out of his place as soon as she was able to do so. She states: "I was very fortunate that he was a good person and nothing bad happened to me."

Another form of risk-taking was primarily having to make the right decisions. For example, Blanca stated that she had several choices as a new immigrant. She could choose to go to school for one year, graduate, and then start working. However, she recognized the constraints of learning English within a year; hence, she opted to commence work immediately. Improving their finances was the main reason her family moved to the U.S. Several family members were already gainfully employed. She took a chance and decided her path was employment. She had numerous options as there were several companies in need of workers. She indicated that she also considered her age since she was going to turn 18. Blanca added that she continued maintaining contact with her friends and relatives in Colombia and her new home, as she was able to celebrate many traditions from her country, in the United States. According to her, she was able to start living the "American Dream" very soon after arriving in the USA, while remaining very attached to her country.

### **Discussion**

The study's findings indicate that, regardless of the time and age at which these eight Colombian immigrants arrived in the U.S., the coping strategies and resilient aspects experienced by them have been similar, however, their social factors have varied. Results also suggest that all participants arrived in the US during cycle two of the Colombian migration to the United States (from 1966 to 1990). Additionally, several participants arrived in the U.S. under the provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, mainly benefiting from its Family Reunification initiative and America's most prosperous economic period of Golden Capitalism.

Through an examination of the experiences of these eight Colombian women, this study unveiled the intricacies of their migration trajectory, showing the multiple challenges they encountered, the resilience they demonstrated, and the essential role played by social networks in facilitating their adaptation process. By integrating theories of cultural resilience and cumulative social networks, this research addresses the complex dynamics of immigration and the

strategic approaches employed by these women to negotiate their new socio-cultural environment.

Many of the Colombian women in this study cited experiencing and overcoming adversity, taking an attitude of determination, maintaining their faith in God, receiving support through family, friends, and the community, and having the willingness to take risks. The participants reported facing various forms of adversity, obstacles, and setbacks in the form of discrimination, and prejudice, including racial profiling, language barriers, cultural differences, stereotyping, and economic challenges. Despite these hurdles, they demonstrated remarkable resilience, determination, and perseverance in overcoming adversity.

Their religious beliefs were a source of solace and support throughout their immigration journey and served as a cornerstone of resilience, helping them navigate difficult circumstances with hope and optimism. They relied on their social networks, including family, friends, community organizations, and social services, for support and guidance. These networks served as invaluable resources, helping them navigate the complexities of the immigration journey and overcome challenges along the way. These social supports were crucial, providing them with emotional support, practical assistance, and a sense of belonging. As their social networks expanded and diversified, so too did their ability to overcome challenges and thrive in their new environment. Several participants related having to take risks. Despite the uncertainty and the inherent risks involved, the participants pursued better opportunities for themselves and their families. Their willingness to take risks reflects their resilience and determination to create a brighter future.

The immigration journey of the eight Colombian women in this study is marked by adversity, resilience, and the crucial role of social networks. By examining their experiences through the lens of cultural resilience and cumulative social networks, this study offers valuable insights into the dynamics of immigration and the strategies employed by these immigrant women to navigate their new lives. As they continue to overcome challenges and build better futures for themselves and their families, their stories serve as a testament to the resilience and strength of immigrant women everywhere.

### Study's Limitations

Some limitations of this study include the small number of participants, the fact that all participants are females and of similar age, the limited research on the topic from which the researcher can draw, and the inability to analyze all possible themes. Also, this study employed convenience and snowball sampling techniques. While participants did not indicate immigration-related fear, the findings may display a bias towards a particular group of participants sharing comparable characteristics.

### Relevance for Social Work Practice

This study holds significant relevance for social work practice, particularly in the context of immigrant populations. By examining the experiences of Colombian women navigating the immigration journey to the USA, social workers gain valuable insights into the challenges, resilience, and social support networks that shape the adaptation process.

Firstly, social workers can utilize the findings of this study to inform their practice with immigrant clients. Understanding the multifaceted challenges faced by Colombian women, such as language barriers, economic hardships, and discrimination, allows social workers to tailor interventions that address these specific needs effectively. Moreover, recognizing the role of social networks and religious faith as sources of support and resilience empowers social workers to leverage existing strengths within immigrant communities to promote positive outcomes.

Additionally, the study underscores the importance of culturally competent practice in working with immigrant populations. By acknowledging and respecting the cultural heritage and values of Colombian women, social workers can establish trust and rapport,

facilitating more meaningful engagement and collaboration in the intervention process. This cultural sensitivity also extends to recognizing the diverse ways in which individuals may express resilience and cope with adversity, thereby ensuring that interventions are both culturally relevant and effective.

Furthermore, the study highlights the systemic factors that influence the immigration experience, such as immigration policies, access to resources, and societal attitudes toward immigrants. Social workers can advocate for policy changes and social justice initiatives that address these structural barriers and promote the well-being of immigrant communities. By advocating for equitable access to resources and opportunities, social workers contribute to creating more inclusive and supportive environments for immigrant populations.

In summary, this study offers valuable insights that can inform and enhance social work practice with immigrant populations. By understanding the challenges, resilience, and social support networks of Colombian women in the immigration process, social workers can develop culturally responsive interventions, advocate for systemic change, and ultimately promote the empowerment and well-being of immigrant communities.

### Recommendations for Future Research

Future research could look into understanding the long-term effects of immigration on the mental health and well-being of Colombian women. Exploring how cultural and religious factors shape resilience among immigrant populations could provide valuable insights into developing more effective interventions. Additionally, investigating the impact of social support networks on the adaptation process of Colombian women in the USA could help understand the role of community and interpersonal relationships in facilitating successful integration.

Examining the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity, and immigration status would contribute to a more subtle understanding of the experiences of immigrant women. Furthermore, exploring variations in the immigration journeys and adaptation processes of Colombian women in different regions of the USA could provide valuable context-specific insights. Longitudinal studies examining the experiences of Colombian women who have been in the USA for an extended period would offer insights into long-term adaptation outcomes and challenges. Lastly, research focusing on the effectiveness of policy interventions and social services in supporting the integration and well-being of immigrant women could inform evidence-based practices and policy development in the field of immigration.

### Conclusion

The study of Colombian women's immigration experiences in the USA offers valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of migration. The findings underscored the importance of understanding the subtle factors that contribute to the resilience of Colombian immigrants, recognizing the interconnectedness of the economic situation experienced in the home country, the policies and social conditions of the receiving country, challenges faced, the resilience demonstrated, and the role of social networks in the adaptation process. Furthermore, the study highlighted the need for tailored social work practices and policies that acknowledge and support the positive indicators while addressing stressors and traumatic events in the adaptation process. Future studies could build upon these findings and address existing gaps in the literature. By addressing these gaps, immigrant communities can be supported with evidence-based practices, policy development, and program planning and implementation in the field of immigration. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the immigrant experience.

**Competing Interest:** The author(s) declare that they have no competing interests.

## References

- Willgerodt, M. A., Miller, A. M., & McElmurry, B. J. (2002). Becoming bicultural: Chinese American women and their development. *Health Care for Women International*, 23(5), 467–480. <https://doi.org/10.1080/073993302760190074>
- Zakaria, N., Yusuf, B.N.M. (2023). Sacrifices from relocation to a foreign land: Multifaceted challenges experienced by self-initiated expatriate female nurses during cross-cultural adjustment. *Curr Psychol* 42, 11303–11319. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-02745-4>
- Christopher, K.A. (2000). Determinants of psychological well-being in Irish immigrants. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 22, 123–143.
- Schmitz, P.G. (2001). “Psychological aspects of Immigration”. In L. L. Adler & U. P. Gielen (eds.), *Cross-cultural topics in psychology*, (pp. 229–243).
- Chhabra, D., Fortuna, L., Montano, P. (2023). Stress & Trauma Toolkit for Treating Undocumented Immigrants in a Changing Political and Social Environment. <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/diversity/education/stress-and-trauma/undocumented-immigrants>
- Richmind, J., & Beardslee, W. (1988). Resilience: Research and practical implications for pediatrics. *Development and Behavior in Pediatrics*, 9(3), 157–163.
- Wagnild, G. M., & Young, H. M. (1993). Development and psychometric evaluation of the resilience scale. *Journal of Nursing Measurement*, 1, 165–178.
- Pew Research Center (2023). U.S. Hispanic population reached nearly 64 million in 2022. Retrieved on 9-10-2023 from [https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/09/05/who-is-hispanic/sr\\_23-09-05\\_hispanic\\_1/](https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/09/05/who-is-hispanic/sr_23-09-05_hispanic_1/)
- Moslimani, M, Noe-Bustamante, L., Shah, S. (2021). Facts on Hispanics of Colombian origin in the United States, 2021. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/fact-sheet/us-hispanics-facts-on-colombian-origin-latinos/>
- Chaves-González, D. & Batalova, J. (2023). Colombian Immigrants in the United States. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/colombian-immigrants-united-states>
- Gonzalez-Eastep, D. (2007). *Family support and help seeking behavior of Colombian immigrants*. Boston: Boston College.
- Collier, M. W., & Gamarra, E. A. (2001). *Colombian diaspora in south Florida: A report of the Colombian Studies Institute's Colombian diaspora project*. WPS No. 1. Miami, FL: Latin American & Caribbean Center.
- Sanchez, A. I. (2003). *Colombian immigration to Queens: The transnational re-imaging of urban political space*. New York: Columbia University.
- Madrigal, C. (2008). Acculturation, Ethnic Identity, Resilience, Self-Esteem and General Well-Being: A Psychosocial Study of Colombians in the United States. The University of Texas at Arlington.
- Orjuela-Grimm, M., Marti-Castaner, M., Bhatt-Carreño, S., Castro, M. A., Restrepo Henao, A., Pinilla, H., Rodriguez, D., Ruiz, A., Valentin, M., Richey Levine, A., Gonzalez, R., Zuleta, M., Pharel, M., Medina, P., Lewis-Fernandez, R. (2022). Household composition after resettlement and emotional health in adolescent migrants. *Journal of Migration and Health*, Volume 5, 100103, ISSN 2666-6235. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmh.2022.100103>. (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666623522000265>)
- OECD (2018), “The resilience of students with an immigrant background”, in *The Resilience of Students with an Immigrant Background: Factors that Shape Well-being*, OECD Publishing, Paris. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264292093-5-en>
- Solà-Sales, S., Pérez-González, N., Van Hoey, J., Iborra-Marmolejo, I., Beneyto-Arrojo, M. J., & Moret-Tatay, C. (2021). The Role of Resilience for Migrants and Refugees' Mental Health in Times of COVID-19. *Healthcare (Basel, Switzerland)*, 9(9), 1131. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare9091131>.
- Bennett, K. M., Reyes-Rodriguez, M. F., Altamar, P., & Soulsby, L. K. (2016). Resilience amongst Older Colombians Living in Poverty: An Ecological Approach. *Journal of cross-cultural gerontology*, 31(4), 385–407. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10823-016-9303-3>
- Massey, D. S., (1990).The Social and Economic Origins of Immigration. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*,510(1),<https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716290510001005>
- Massey DS, Alarcón R, Durand J, González H (1987) Return to Aztlan: The social process of international migration from Western Mexico. *California, Univ of California Press*. [www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1ppp3j](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1ppp3j).
- Massey, D.S., & Zeneto, R. M.,(1999).The dynamics of mass migration. *Proc Natl Acad Sci USA*, 96 (9) 5328–5335. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.96.9.5328>
- Poros, Maritsa V. (2011). *Modern Migrations: Gujarati Indian Networks in New York and London*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Turcios, Y. M.P.H., (2023). Office of Behavioral Health Equity Fellow. Supporting Mental Health of Immigrant Women. <https://www.samhsa.gov/blog/supporting-mental-health-immigrant-women>
- Masten, A. S., & Reed, M.-G. J. (2002). Resilience in development. In C. R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology* (pp. 74–88). Oxford University Press.
- Gitterman, A., & Shulman, L. (Eds.). (2005). *Mutual aid groups: Vulnerable and resilient populations and the life cycle*, 3rd ed. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Milas, G., Klarić, I. M., Malnar, A., Šupe-Domić, D., & Slavich, G. M. (2019). Socioeconomic status, social-cultural values, life stress, and health behaviors in a national sample of adolescents. *Stress and health : journal of the International Society for the Investigation of Stress*, 35(2), 217–224. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.2854>.
- Neil, J. (2004). *Resilience and outdoor education: Overview of theory, research and practice*. Keynote presentation to the 1st Singapore Outdoor Education Conference. <http://www.wilderdom.com/theory/ResilienceOutdoorEducation.html>
- Marqua Dazer, D. (1965). The Monroe Doctrine; Its Modern Significance. Alfred A Knopf
- HISTORY.COM EDITORS. (2010). Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965. Retrieved from: <https://www.history.com/topics/immigration/us-immigration-since-1965>
- Osterling, J.P.(1989).*Democracy in Colombia: Clientelist politics and guerrilla warfare*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.
- U.S. Census Bureau (1983). *Supplementary Report. Ancestry of the population by State: 1980*. <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/1983/dec/pc80-s1-10.pdf>
- Shifter, M. (1999). Colombia on the brink: There goes the neighborhood. *Foreign Affairs*, 78(4), 14–20.
- Reimers, D. M. (2005). *Other immigrants: The global origins of the American people*. New York: New York University Press.
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2021). Annual Flow Report. U.S. Naturalizations: 2021. [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/202302/2021\\_0920\\_plcy\\_lawful\\_permanent\\_residents\\_fy2020v3.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/202302/2021_0920_plcy_lawful_permanent_residents_fy2020v3.pdf)

- 
35. U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2021). Annual Flow Report. U.S. Lawful Permanent Residents:2020. <https://www.dhs.gov/search?goog=Colombians%20obtained%20their%20permanent%20residence%20in%20the%20US%20>
  36. Williams, M., Unrau, Y., Grinnell, R., (2005), *Research Methods for Social Workers*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition. Eddie Boers publishing Co., Inc. Peosta: Iowa.
  37. Aspers, P., & Corte, U. (2019). What is Qualitative in Qualitative Research. *Qualitative sociology*, 42(2), 139–160. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-019-9413-7>
  38. Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*, 4th ed., Boston, MA: Pearson.
  39. Glaser, B. G. (1965). The constant comparative method of qualitative analysis. *Social Problems*, 12(4), 436–445. <https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.1965.12.4.03a00070>