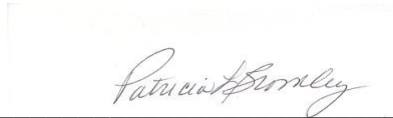


PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS ENCOUNTERED BY LATINO IMMIGRANTS
ADJUSTING TO UNITED STATES CULTURE

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Abstract

The problem presented in this paper is to identify whether or not there are emotional or psychological effects as first generation Latino/a immigrate to United States. Another objective is to discover whether the effects of adjusting to a new country have an impact on the statistics of education and socio-economics of the Latino/a population in United States. A brief review of literature on the history of Latino/as immigration (1840s-present) was conducted. A second review of literature relating to research, studies, and anecdotal evidence of Latino/a immigrants and methods was created to address psychological effects.

Through a review of the literature, it becomes evident that most research conducted on the Latino/a immigrants adjusting to a new country is incomplete yet in process to create new methods. Most of the research states that Latino/a immigrants suffer a number of effects that correlate to the census and that there are a number of ways to address such effects, yet the biggest challenge is in teaching the Latino/a community how to access such resources.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Many researchers have explored the challenges that first generation immigrants face as they adjust to a new country. Many of them include language and socio-economic adjustments. At the same time, research explores the difference between of assimilating to a country by leaving the native culture behind versus acculturating to a new culture while at the same time keeping the native culture. Research examine, the consequential effects on an individual and ultimately affecting the Latino/a/a immigrant culture as a whole.

Many believe assimilation will have lower psychological effects than acculturation because the individual will adapt to the new culture while keeping part of their own (Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, Gallardo-Cooper, 2002). Others believe that acculturation is best and has less negative effects to, adjustment because the individual can identify as part of their new environment without having the past culture become a barrier to the new one (Golash-Boza, 2006). Others say, regardless of assimilation or acculturation, both have a psychological effect on the individual that needs to be addressed, otherwise it will hold the individual back from giving closure, to the transition (Suarez-Morales, Dillon, & Szapocznik, 2007).

The United States has faced immigration in different ways throughout history. Native Americans were treated as immigrants and forced to assimilate or be killed. Africans during enslavement were not even allowed to be part of society. Latino/a and Asians were assimilated during the Vietnam War. Today, the United States is making decisions that will affect the Latino/a community for many generations to come and it is

Important to realize the consequences that Latino/a immigrants already face (Branton, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

The problem presented in this paper is to identify to what extent Latino/a immigrants to the United States face psychological effects that relate to the census. Anecdotal evidence and societal perception seems to indicate that there are psychological effects although research provides a different perspective. Another objective is to discover whether there are methods to address such issues and to evaluate their effectiveness.

Purpose of the Research

At this moment, United States society cannot agree on whether Latino/as should be part of this country. Nevertheless this vacillation on the part of the American people at its best does not focus on the after effects that individual face and the impact on future generations. Anecdotal evidence seems to indicate this. The United States provides for each individual based on their needs. The purpose of this research paper is to determine whether or not the Latino/a population are psychologically affected as immigrants to this country. A further purpose is to understand what methods are provided to this population to deal with a transition to a new country.

Significance of the Problem

Latino/as face a number of challenges from the moment they decide to move to a new country until 8-10 years later when they are able to master a second language and new culture (Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, Gallardo-Cooper, 2002). There is anecdotal

evidence that supports that this transition can be emotionally draining as well as life altering, nevertheless changing the individual's cultural image. Research seems to indicate the Latino/a population within United States struggles with education and socio-economics and it is important to find out how all these factors are correlated to the psychological impact. Further, this paper seeks to find out what research has been done to identify methods to assist the Latino/a community to find their identity as immigrants.

Assumptions

For purposes of this paper, it was assumed that all research and review of the current literature was accurately reported. It was also assumed that the literature would make recommendations on how best to apply the research findings.

Delimitations of the Research

The research was conducted in and through the Karrmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, over thirty (30) days. Primary searches were conducted via the Internet through EBSCO host with ERIC and Academic Search Elite as the primary sources. Key search topics included "Hispanic first generation immigrants," "Immigrants and emotional effects," and "Hispanic population census."

Method

A brief review of literature on the history of Latino/immigrants to United States (1840s-present) was conducted. A second review of literature relating to research, studies, and anecdotal evidence of Latino/a immigrants and psychological effects while

adjusting to United States was conducted. The findings were summarized and recommendations were made.

Definition of Terms

Latino/as In the United States, Latino/a refers to non-Anglo-American citizens who are living in the United States of America and are of Hispanic background. The feminine form of the word is Latina. "Latino/a" is a shortened form of the Spanish word for a Latin American individual.

Acculturation. Two indicators are used to operationalize the measure of acculturation: generational status and language competence. Generational status is an indicator of whether a respondent is foreign-born (first generation), native-born with foreign-born parents (second generation), or native-born with native-born parents (third-plus generation).

1st generation immigrants are the first generation of a family to live in a particular country. Generally, first generation immigrants can speak both their parents' and the country's native language equally well (without the natural accent of their non-native parents and older siblings).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Correlation Between Assimilation and Acculturation to Mental Health Care

Afadable-Munsuz and Brindis (2006) define acculturation as a linear progression, whereby immigrants gradually adopt the values, behaviors and traits of their host culture and discard those of their country of origin. These authors explain that studies of “integration” or “assimilation” have focused on immigrants’ educational and employment status as compared with the native population. Yet it has also found that an immigrant can adopt behaviors of the new culture or achieve social mobility without fully identifying with the new culture. Castro (2007), who presented some of the physical and psychological effects of acculturation, explained that acculturation is associated with higher rates of mental disorder and substance abuse. These diseases are found more likely in Latino/women than Latino/men.

Acculturation (Castro, 2007) is associated with socioeconomic status but it is difficult to determine to what extent, since the research needs to adapt variables. For instance, some of those variables are focused on whether to track acculturation as a family and see how the first generation psychological effects compare with those of 3rd or 4th generation people. Other variables include whether the research should center attention on whether there is a way to constitute healthy or unhealthy acculturation.

Afadable- Munsuz and Brindis (2006) present two theories of acculturation among Latino/a youth. The first theory explains how acculturation influences sexual and reproductive health among Latino/a youth depending on the “stress theory” each faced. Stress theory is based on the adapting experience faced by the youth as they enter a new country. If there is a high level of stress, youth are more likely to engage in unsafe behaviors including early sexual initiation. The second theory explains that depending on the level of acculturation, youth may or may not engage in safe sexual and reproductive health behaviors. Since virginity is a Latino/a value acculturation could cause a young woman to engage in behavior that is disapproved of by her family. According to Suarez-Morales, Dillon, and Szapocznik (2007) the process of acculturation is also accompanied by a number of stressful psychosocial experiences, such as personal and institutional discrimination, underemployment or unemployment, and (specifically for immigrants) leaving family and friends behind in a country of origin, and learning a new language (Fuentes & Westbrook, 1996). Although certain levels of acculturative stress may be common in ethnic minority populations undergoing the process of acculturation, elevated levels of acculturative stress has been shown to be related to mental health problems, such as increased depression and substance use, as well as general distress symptoms in children and adults (Cabassa 2007). Stress was conceptualized as difficulties that come about from differences in language, culture, and environment in immigrant populations. Studies using this measure found that the Social, Attitudinal, Familial, and Environmental (S.A.F.E.) scale adequately distinguished between immigrants of first, second, third, and mixed generations of Japanese-Americans and Mexican- Americans, as well as between

individuals of varying levels of acculturation (Fuertes and Westbrook 1996). Specifically, individuals with low levels of acculturation or cross-cultural competence reported the greatest acculturative stress, whereas individuals with high levels of acculturation or cross-cultural competence reported the least acculturative stress.

Another related study looks at stress experienced by Latinos from a different point. The study looks into Latinos who may have experienced political violence in their native countries and how it may create a higher risk of mental health (Fortuna 2008). Such condition is referred as prevalence of exposure to political violence (PV). The study's results expose how eleven percent of immigrant Latinos reported PV exposure and 76% described additional lifetime traumas. Further research explained that, out of 919 patients 54% reported political violence, including 8% who reported torture. Of those exposed to political violence, 36% had symptoms of depression and 18% had symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Eisenman, Gelberg, Liu, & Shapiro, 2003). Within those people who experience a history of PV, the more the persons were likely to use mental health care due to reasons such as anxiety, substance disorder, experiencing personal assault and perceived discrimination. A study conducted by Lee, Lopez, Cobly, Tejada, Garcia-Coll, & Smith (2006) concluded individuals who come from countries with a history of political violence often have multiple traumatic experiences. Therefore is suggested to have a systematic screening for trauma and other related psychiatric disorders.

In regard to substance abuse as part of the Latino community, Lee, Lopez, Cobly, Tejada, Garcia-Coll, & Smith (2006) a study focused on how acculturation can be correlated to the drinking behavior among Latino immigrants (Lee, Lopez, Cobly, Tehada, Garcia-Coll, & Smith, 2006). The study found that within Central and South American Latino immigrants who used social drinking during their daily lives for socializing, bonding and within the cultural tradition, now abuse it in United States as means to reminisce of their native country. It further explains that adults of Latino origin at “medium” to “high” acculturation levels are at more risk for problematic alcohol use than those who are less acculturated.

A recent look into Latino immigrant youth and substance abuse provides further information on acculturation. The study explains that one in five students currently enrolled in U.S. public schools is an immigrant or a child of an immigrant. More than 55% of these immigrant children were born in Latin America (Blanco-Vega, Castro-Olivio, & Mentrell, 2008). Acculturation plays an even bigger role now that a study by Hiott and Grywacz (2006) found immigrants who are experiencing depression and anxiety that impair functioning. Social marginalization was associated with higher depression symptoms in men, and separation from family stress was associated with more depressive symptoms among women. The study stressed that when caring for immigrant Latinos, questions about social isolation and separation from family may provide insight into stress and its contribution to clinically significant anxiety and depression. These characteristics should also be considered when offering a treatment plan for anxiety and depression (Hiott & Grywacz 2006).

Effective Methods: Solutions

Understanding the Latino/a immigrant community and the challenges encountered when arriving in a new country would be beneficial for society since it would help the transition of assimilation and improve the well being of the generations to come.

Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo and Gallardo-Cooper (2002) explain that in order to help the transition process Latino/a families must be understood from multiple contexts or frames.

Understanding from these frames of reference what is referred to as “essential frames of reference” will allow us to recognize how identity, race, and adaptation change are faced.

Only by understanding relevant frames of reference can we understand within the values of the individual who belongs to the family-centered value system, their spirituality and religion, their health and illness beliefs, their language, and their gender socialization.

Understanding Latino families by redefining their diversity allows us to further explore their identity.

Counseling issues and intervention is another part of the process to further help an immigrant during acculturation. This step allows the introduction to counseling to be designed to the individual’s needs. From client-counselor matching to the use of a translator, it designs a stable base for counseling. Language –based strategies can be introduced to comprehend how the individual has dealt with acquiring a new language. Meanwhile narratives and metaphors are explored by the individual.

Further study is needed regarding assimilation and acculturation with the mental health care context, especially when addressing substance abuse. Acculturation is

typically perceived as assimilation, a uni-directional process of change whereby immigrants are assumed to shed their cultural practices and adopt the cultural norms of the host society. However, acculturation needs to be understood more broadly as a process that does not follow a single sequence. Assimilation is only one strategy of acculturation. A second critique of acculturation is that it needs to be more broadly studied, extending investigative analyses to people's social and physical worlds. (Lee, Lopez, Cobly, Tejada, Garcia-Coll, & Smith, 2006).

Primary ecological factors that must be considered when working with Latino immigrants students include circumstances of exit and entrance, social-economic status, levels of acculturation, levels of acculturative stress, familial acculturative gaps, previous educational experiences, the context of the host culture, and the perception of community belonging. (Blanco-Vega, Castro-Olivio, & Mentrell, 2008). Levels of acculturation can be defined as the unique circumstances youth face and therefore the unique social and emotional needs. Acculturative stress involves the idiosyncratic pressures an individual perceives from two different cultures: the dominant Anglo culture and his or her own Latino culture. Familial acculturative gaps determine the dynamics of how immigration has been found to undermine parental authority and family cohesion. In addition, Latino parents usually encourage their children to learn the language and to learn to navigate the new society, while at the same time encouraging their children to keep all of these skills outside of the home, for fear of their becoming "too Americanized." Blanco, Castro and Merrell (2008) contend that the behavior and levels of adaptation, acculturation, and acculturative stress of Latino immigrant adolescents are results of the interaction of

contextual and within-person variables. The ecological model created by Blanco, Castro and Merrell addresses the different issues, individual and contextual, that have an effect on an individual's mental health and school outcomes.

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through a review of the literature, it becomes evident that most research conducted on the psychological and emotional effects correlated to immigrating to the United States is incomplete. There are a few efforts to further investigate the correlation between the effects and acculturation to this country, but not enough ways to address them. Clearly, more definitive studies need to be done to present the effects and more efforts to make sure that the Latino/a community is informed of such.

First, more studies need to be done in the first generation of Latino/a community in the United States. There is investigation in regard to the secondary effects of adaptation to this country, but more is needed to identify effects by age, gender, and socio-economic background. Not enough studies emphasize the level of education before arriving to this country and the different struggles faced when arriving to this country. There is also a lack of information of how many times the individuals had to immigrate. For instance, a family immigrating to the United States may have had to migrate to Mexico prior to the United States. This is vital information that is needed to understand the individual's acculturation or assimilation to this country.

Another consideration is the idea that not enough tools are created for the Latino/a community to be aware of such emotional effects. Social workers and other government resources are not focused on providing what can help. Latino/a immigrants face a number of issues that can create a chain of oppressed generations. If further research is not

performed, the future generations will have to deal with a lack of understanding of self-identity.

In conclusion, Ojeda, Patterson, & Strathdee (2008) study showed that by 2005 more than 41.9 million Latinos resided throughout the country and of these, 40% were foreign-born. If current trends continue, by 2045 23% of US residents (approximately 90.3 million people) will be of Latino ancestry. Attending to health and health care needs of Latinos and immigrants is a vital investment in the nation's future health (Ojeda, Patterson, & Strathdee, 2008). It is important to note that throughout the research for this paper, the idea that Latino/as/as face emotional struggles when immigrating to United States is not promoted to educators and other public services like it should be. It is important to create communication of the issues encountered by immigrants so that the rest of the community can understand the struggles faced. Hopefully, as we continue into the 21st century, we can begin to create bridges of communication among the communities residing in this country.

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