The Well-Being of Immigrant Latino Youth: A Framework to Inform Practice

A presentation based on the work of Mimi V. Chapman and Krista M. Perreira

UNC School of Social Work

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Overview

This presentation summarizes findings regarding the well-being of Latino youth in several domains important to functioning later in life (e.g. mental health, substance use, school functioning, early adult role-taking). Risks and protective factors that impact the adaptation of Latino youth in immigrant families are also discussed. A framework of practice guidelines is proposed to guide helping professionals in assessing the needs of Latino youth.

Introduction

- Latino population living in the U.S. increased by 58% over 10 years
  - 22.4 million in 1990 to 35.3 million in 2000 (Schmidley, 2001)

- Health and social service workers are working with an increasing number of Latino clients
  - Helping professionals must understand the risk and protective factors for Latino youth

Introduction

- Latino youth face multiple threats: substance use, poor school functioning, early adult role-taking (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001)

- Risks are particularly acute for those who immigrate in adolescence (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001)

Mental Health

- Latinos more likely to be diagnosed with adjustment disorders, anxiety disorders, and psychotic disorders compared with non-Hispanic Whites (Yeh et al., 2002)

- Latinos less likely to be diagnosed with ADD (Yeh et al., 2002)

- Latino females at particular risk for depressive symptoms and suicidal behavior (Yeh et al., 2002)

- Latino youth may be engaging in behaviors that put them at increased risk for mental health difficulties (CDC, 2002; Kaufman et al., 2001; Tienda & Kleykamp, 2000)

Substance Use

- Substance abuse of illicit drugs and alcohol is a problem among Latino youth (Gil & Vasquez, 1996; Warheit, et al., 1996)
  - Alcohol use is culturally accepted and may serve as a gateway to illicit drug use
- Percentage of Latino adolescents who use marijuana, cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamines during their lifetime is higher than for African Americans or non-Latino Whites (CDC, 1999)
- Substance abuse disorders in adolescents are often comorbid with mental health diagnoses and are often missed by clinicians (King et al., 2000)

School Functioning and Early Adult Role-Taking

- Completion of high school predicts improved life chances
  - School functioning influenced by individual, family, and institutional characteristics (Fernandez & Velez, 1989; Kao & Tienda, 1995; Ogbu, 1987; Rumberger, 1995; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000; Velez, 1989)

- Many Latino youth fall below grade-level work or drop out of school (CDC, 2002; U.S. Census Bureau, 1999)
  - In 1995 38.2% of young adult Latinos did not have a high school diploma (National Center for Education Statistics)

School Functioning and Early Adult Role-Taking

- Accelerated role-taking interferes with school performance - particularly relevant to Latino youth
  - Latinas are less likely to use contraception or terminate pregnancy resulting in teenage parents and early adult role-taking (Erickson, 1998)
  - For boys family monetary needs push them into the workforce earlier than their non-Latino peers

The Migration Experience: Leaving Home and Entering the United States

- Stress is inherent in immigration (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001)
- Parents and youth experience immigration differently
  - Parents may have made decision to immigrate
  - Youth may not have participated in decision to immigrate
  - Degree of voluntary choice of a stressor is theorized to be related to how one copes with that stressor (Boss, 1998; Rumbaut, 1991)
- In a completely foreign culture youth must make new friends, plan for adult life, learn to operate in the world outside of home

The Migration Experience: Leaving Home and Entering the United States

- Dual frame of reference: One's current circumstances, no matter how dire, are viewed positively compared with difficult situation that prompted immigration
  - Children may have been protected from poverty or danger (unlike their parents) in their country of origin, creating a sense in children that what they gave up is not worth the hardships they endure as new immigrants
- Support in coethnic communities; attitudes toward immigrants; work opportunities; affordable housing; level of community services influence level of adaptation by the new immigrant (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Zayas et al., 2000)

Acculturation and Assimilation

- Classic Assimilation (pre-1965): (Gordon, 1964)
  - Adaptation to U.S. gradual, but inevitable
  - Immigrants abandon culture of homelands and adopt cultural and behavioral patterns of U.S.
  - Full assimilation = complete abandonment of cultural identity; no longer differ significantly from European Americans
- More recent assimilation studies challenge classic assimilation perspective
  - High levels of assimilation associated with outcomes that differ from American norms (Zhou, 1997)

Acculturation and Assimilation

- ☐ Acculturation:
  - ■ Process of assuming the values, language, and cultural practices of the new culture, which result in assimilation (Castro et al., 1996)
  - ■ May put one at risk for problematic behaviors (i.e. substance abuse and mental health problems)
- ☐ Acculturation strain: (Gil & Vega, 1999)
  - ■ Emotional difficulties experienced as immigrants adapt to new environment
  - ■ Combined with previous stressful experiences and recent life events, this strain has been shown to impact depressive symptoms and other manifestations of stress

Family Functioning and Attitudes

- Intergenerational stress – exacerbated in immigrating families (Szapocznik & Williams, 2000)
  - Adolescent rebellion is unexpected & compounded when children are exposed to norms and expectations that are different from those in their home country
  - Parental depression may affect youth in a variety of ways
    - Predisposes children to develop their own depressive symptoms
    - Less positive interactions between parent and child due to parental depression (Lovejoy et al., 2000)

School Context and Discrimination

- In school, immigrant youth are exposed to native culture, experience discrimination, and form beliefs about what society expects from them

- For Latino youth, percentage of Latino students in the school is strong predictor of academic success or failure (Rumberger & Thomas, 2000)

- New immigrant parents may not have strategies for coping with racism that parents in other minority groups use to help their children cope

Protective Factors in Latino Families

- Respect:
  - Teaching children courtesy and decorum in various social context with people of a particular age, sex, and social status
  - Among adolescents: emphasis on respect is associated with deference to parental authority, more cooperative behavior, less risk-taking that may be detrimental to health (Flanagan, 1996; Fuligni, 1997; Knight et al., 1993)

Protective Factors in Latino Families

- Familism:
  - Loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity toward family members (Cortes, 1995)
  - Family as an extension of self

Protective Factors in Latino Families

- Familism (continued):
  - Emphasis on family solidarity and support
    - Less child-centered approach to everyday activities
    - Frequent contact between family members
    - Positive attitudes toward parents by their children
    - Greater levels of satisfaction with family life
  - The strong sense of family orientation, obligation, and cohesion appears to improve physical & emotional health and educational well-being of adolescent youth (Bird et al., 2001; Dumka et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2003)

Protective Factors in Latino Families

- Biculturalism: (LaFromboise et al., 1993)

  - Ability to move comfortably between two cultures

  - Ability to interact positively with dominant culture while retaining one's cultural identity promotes optional functioning

  - Bicultural individuals have less stress and anxiety because they are not choosing between cultural loyalties

Proposed Framework: Background

- Rumbaut (1991): general model of how migration affects mental health outcomes
  - Describes interplay among political, social, and economic factors and individual characteristics that shape the context of the migration
    - Factors include: motivations for migration, events preceding migration, demographics, SES, physical health, social supports, acculturation attitudes

Proposed Framework: Background

□ Proposed framework adapts Rumbaut's model to create an ecological framework that conceptualizes relationship between risks inherent in immigration, potential protective factors, and well-being of Latino youth

Proposed Framework

- Table 1:
  - Presents series of potential relationships between exit experiences in home country, entry experiences into U.S., levels of acculturation and biculturalism, family factors, school experiences, and youth well-being

Proposed Framework

- Table 1 (continued):
  - Presents hypothesized progression of variables (moves from most distal elements of immigration experience to those most proximal to the child – the immediate family and school environments)
    - However this interpretation is strictly linear and likely inaccurate

Proposed Framework

TABLE 1. *Ecological Framework of Latino Youth Relationships*

CONTEXT OF EXIT	CONTEXT OF ENTRY	CULTURAL ORIENTATION	FAMILY CONTEXT	SCHOOL CONTEXT	YOUTH WELL-BEING
Socioeconomic Employment Community size Income/wealth	*Socioeconomic* Employment Community size Income/wealth	*Parent* Biculturalism Acculturation	*Structure* Household size Martial status Adolescent parenting	*Youth's Perceptions* School safety Teachers support Satisfaction	*Mental Health Symptoms* Depressive symptoms Anxiety symptoms Aggressive behavior Somatic complaints Trauma symptoms
Parent's Migration Motivation Experience	*Reception* Discrimination Social support	*Youth* Biculturalism Acculturation	*Wealth* Parents' employment Parents' health	*Environment* Student–teacher ratio Ethnic composition Class size	*Substance Use* *School Performance* Academic School drop out
Youth's Migration Motivation Experience			*Functioning* Cohesion Adaptation Familism		*Adult Role-Taking* Adolescent parenting Work participation

Proposed Framework: Applications to Practice

- Proposed framework can assist professionals in working with immigrant clients to consider a broader range of social contexts that may have direct relevance to current well-being

- Framework supports many practice principles:
  - Ask parents and youth about motivations for immigrations and experiences surrounding immigration
  - Determine whether different family members hold different frames of references about the immigration experiences

Proposed Framework: Applications to Practice

- Practice Principles (continued):
  - Assist parents and youth in talking with each other about their immigration experiences and current experiences in the U.S.
  - Assess levels of acculturation and biculturalism and assist parents and youth in understanding the process of acculturation
  - Look for ways parents may already be trying to assist youngsters in coping. Build on strengths.

Conclusion

- When ecological models are combined with a risk and protective factor framework, highly specified models may be created, such as the proposed framework

- Proposed model allows a broader view of the social ecology of new immigrants

  - Risk and protective factors and other contexts are equally important in promoting or hindering adaptation in U.S.

  - This model will assist practitioners in being more mindful of the contexts from which current issues emanate and their inherent risks

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