1999

Adult Hispanic females: Resiliency and support systems

Rosalina Becerra
Rosalie Arlene Rangel

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ADULT HISPANIC FEMALES:
RESILIENCY AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Rosalina Becerra
Rosalie Arlene Rangel
June 1999
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6-3-99
ABSTRACT

This exploratory study observes the support systems that contribute to resiliency in adult Hispanic females. These women (approximately 30 to 65 years of age) were at one time in adverse or challenging life situations, but were able to overcome potential risk situations. The research design used open-ended interview questions inviting respondents to share what their own support systems were. It was discovered that adult Hispanic females utilized family as their main support system to overcome obstacles. Findings suggest further research is warranted to help social workers and other helping professionals better understand/identify what Hispanic females utilize as their support systems. Identifying Hispanic females' support systems in today's society is of great importance. The Hispanic population is growing rapidly; therefore, understanding what helps them to reach their potential is vital. This study will also add to the social worker body of knowledge for working with adult Hispanic females.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research project could not have been completed without the gracious and sincere cooperation of those Hispanic females who shared their hearts, laughter, inspiration, and, at times, tears. Their support systems appear to teach them hard work ethics, value, pride, and life lessons to help them to evolve into the resilient Hispanic females they are today.

Words cannot express the time each of our families have sacrificed without us during this research project, especially our children. Their patience and understanding were true blessings in completing this project.

We are also very grateful for our California State University, San Bernardino, professors, as well as our elementary and high school teachers, for their knowledge, insight, and time have been invaluable. We are also thankful for our own negative and positive life experiences, as we both truly feel that they have contributed to our own resiliency as Hispanic females.
ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES

This research was a team effort where both authors worked collaboratively in all phases of the study. However, each researcher assumed separate responsibilities for the actual writing. The responsibilities were assigned as follows:

1. Data Collection
   Rosalina Becerra & Rosalie A. Rangel

2. Data Entry and Analysis
   Rosalina Becerra & Rosalie A. Rangel

3. Report Writing and Presentation of Findings
   a. Introduction and Literature Review
      Rosalie A. Rangel
   b. Methods
      Rosalina Becerra
   c. Results
      Rosalina Becerra
   d. Discussion
      Rosalie A. Rangel
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INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Why do some individuals succeed against the odds and others don't? There may be personal as well as environmental factors that contribute to their success. The notion of resiliency is a characteristic of such individuals.

Resiliency is the skills, knowledge, insight, and ability that accumulates over time as people struggle to surmount adversity and meet challenges in their lives. Resiliency is a developing and ongoing fund of skills and energy that can be used in present struggles (Saleebey, 1996).

Werner (1992) defines resiliency and protective factors as positive counterparts to vulnerability and risk factors that increase the likelihood of a negative developmental outcome. Ford (1994) conveys that resilient individuals are proactive towards obstacles and they see a difficulty as a challenge that can be worked on, changed, overcome, endured, or resolved in some manner.

Comprehensively challenging or adverse situations may be severe and infrequent or chronic and consistent. Examples of severe and infrequent circumstances include an earthquake or a divorce. Examples of chronic and
consistently challenging circumstances include cancer, poverty, and low social economic status (Gordon, 1996).

Understanding what support systems mediate negative effects is significant in order to offer preventive and interventive approaches to treating clients who are considered "unsuccessful." This may imply the need to avail and promote such factors in order to help individuals overcome adverse situations. In addition, even resilient individuals may continue to be helped. According to Werner (1989) even the most resilient individuals can develop problems where challenging life events outweigh the protective factors (e.g., support systems and coping skills).

This study is needed because obstacles are an important part of life which will present themselves continuously. Becoming aware of what support systems and protective factors contribute to overcoming challenges, instead of simply looking at the fact they do exist, is a vital part of overcoming adversities and placing meaning in one's life.

This research may help social workers and other professionals to move beyond the focus of "risk" and treatment of "unsuccessful" individuals. And instead focus on solutions that successful individuals have used to
Societal changes are demanding that existing approaches be altered. According to Hoffman and Levy-Shiff Barr-IIan (1994) conceptualization of coping in children has been looked at periodically over 60 years. Over the past decade, the importance of youth's ability to cope with stress in their lives has received increased emphasis. Werner (1992) adds that the paradigm shift which reflects less emphasis on negative developmental outcomes, and a greater focus on successful adaption, in spite of childhood adversity is presenting itself through a multi-disciplinary team approach.

Much of the current knowledge regarding resiliency has been focused towards children. The current study addresses resiliency in adulthood, more specifically, resiliency in adult Hispanic females. The existing research on children, combined with resiliency into adulthood may prove to be relevant. The current study would add to an area which is desperately needed.

Problem Focus

In this study the researchers will interview 20 Hispanic adult females between the ages of 30 to 65 years who were at one time in adverse or challenging situations, but were able to overcome those potential risk situations.
The research will explore and unveil what "support systems" respondents felt impacted their resiliency as early as childhood.

An exploratory approach using qualitative research methods is used for this study. Support systems that foster resiliency are considered noteworthy in the current study. According to Gonzalez and Padilla (1997) for an individual to be considered resilient the individual must be "at risk" for negative outcomes.

The results of this study will contribute to social work practice in general by allowing individuals to see the positive solutions which contribute to overcoming obstacles. The study would provides a better understanding of how clients can envision and ultimately reach their own potential by examining what others have utilized for their success. This would help clients to empower themselves which would in-turn help social workers and other professionals to carry out their job more effectively.

Since social workers usually serve what society has deemed the "unsuccessful" or " unmotivated" client (due to failure of overcoming obstacles), it is vital that the practitioner promote factors such as support systems which can help children/adults by reversing and preventing further failures. This would be more cost effective and
humanitarian than treating the negative results which may surface at a later time. Failure to foster protective factors might compromise the ability of practitioners to fully understand their client's perspective and reality, which would limit the success of helping the client.

Promoting resiliency in Hispanic females can help to diminish the results of individuals becoming unsuccessful by society's standard. In addition, such promotion can also limit the results of individuals having low self-esteem, lack of motivation, and distorted perceptions.

Since vulnerability is the opposite of resiliency, social work practitioners need to help identify the protective factors which help to mediate the hardships of individuals in challenging or adverse situations (positive risks). This study will promote advocacy, installation of hope, and give guidance and understanding in relation to adverse or challenging situations.

The major research question in the current study is: "What support systems contribute to resiliency in adult Hispanic females?"

Operational Definition

For the purpose of this study, "resilient" individuals are those who have overcome "challenging or adverse" situations as defined by: Minority status (female and
Hispanic); neither parent received an education beyond the high school level; and neither parent held a professional white collar position. In spite of "challenging or adverse" situations these individuals are productive citizens.

"Productive citizens" is defined as individuals taking on a role meaningful to societal norms (i.e. non-criminal activities as well as being at least a high school graduate or obtaining GED status).

"Potential risk" is used in this project to mean an "identifiable challenge" which can possibly affect areas of one's life in a negative manner.

In addition, "support systems" will be defined as buffering factors which help an individual to overcome challenges or adversities.

Literature Review

This literature review provides perspectives on resiliency. Many of the perspectives are related to resiliency in children. Limited research is found on adult Hispanic females. In studying resiliency in adult Hispanic females, longitudinal studies are needed. According to Werner (1989), a major challenge is the examination of the individual links in longitudinal chains. The changes in the links occur not only with the stages of the life cycle,
but also with the gender of the individual. A common limitation, as conveyed by Luther and Zigler (1991) are early studies on resiliency that reveal the absence of a control groups.

Gonzales & Padilla (1997) conducted a study which identified factors that contribute to academic resiliency and achievement among Mexican American high school students. Supportive academic environment, family and peer support, and a sense of belonging to their school were significant predictors of resiliency. A sense of belonging to a school is believed to derive from the role of community and family with the Hispanic population. This study's resilience construct is to view achievement, instead of focusing on the shortcomings of students at risk.

Gonzales and Padilla (1997) indicated that Gandara was one of the first researchers to attempt to study the academic achievement of Mexican Americans who had completed postgraduate degrees. Gandara conducted a qualitative study of 50 subjects whose parents had not completed high school and who were skilled or unskilled laborers. The study concluded that family support and individual persistence were significant factors that contributed most to academic success. Parental involvement, by the way of
assistance with homework (even if the parents own level of education were low) and instilling high standards, ensuring placement in a college preparation track, and mentoring with the family unit were all identified as significant contributors to resiliency.

Gandara (1982) provided another study of 17 Mexican American women, between the ages of 28 and 40, who came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, yet they still succeeded in completing J.D., M.D., and Ph.D. degrees. Contributing factors to the respondents' success were that they attended integrated schools and their mothers served as strong role models and provided emotional support. The study also indicated that a "hard work ethic" modeled by parents, as well as setting "high standards" to do well, helped these women to strive for excellence. The respondents reported feeling a lot of conflict between meeting expectations of their families and demands of school.

Gandara (1982) adds that most studies on resiliency have focused on Caucasian middle-class males, thus excluding other groups with limited social and economic resources. Furthermore, even less is known about the Chicana and Chicano. When research is done on Hispanics, it often times focuses on underachievers, therefore new
insights into the success of the Chicana and Chicano are not provided.

Vasquez (1982) examined barriers as well as solutions in regards to Mexican American (Chicana) women in higher education. Sex role restrictions and the oppressive effects of low socioeconomic status accounted for limited participation of Chicanas in post-secondary education. Traditional roles of being a wife and a mother in the Chicano family were described as areas where Chicanas need support in dealing with the stress of sex-role conflict. Isolation and alienation that Chicanas often experience due to lack of support and "goodness of fit" in the college environment can often discourage college participation by this underrepresented group. There are many barriers which contribute to lack of resiliency, but motivation and positive self-expectation were found to mediate the barriers. Variables such as mothers' support and encouragement, teachers' expectations, and positive identification with the Latino culture and language seem to be motivators for resiliency. In addition, financial aid and emotional support were clearly required to advance resiliency.

Gorena (1996) conducted a national survey on the perception of 68 Hispanic women administrators in higher
education concerning factors that positively influenced or hindered their advancement to leadership positions. Family/friends, colleagues/peers, spouse/significant others, and non-Hispanic administrators, both males and female, were identified as positive influences. Also, Gorena noted American colleges and universities must be prepared to meet new challenges in education and training because of the changing demographics and projected increase of Hispanics and women in the workforce by the year 2000. As conveyed by Gorena (1996), meeting these challenges means the community and educators must become familiar with the Hispanic population and factors that positively affect success.

Gomez and Fassinger (1995) produced a qualitative investigation of 17 prominent United States Latinas across seven occupational fields. The investigation described cultural, personal, and contextual variables in regards to career development of the Latinas. In addition, it addressed the specifics of cultural identity and the work/family relationship. Their findings concluded that it was one important individual who positively influenced their lives and career self-efficacy. All spoke highly of support from spouse or significant other. Married women interviewed stated that their partners assumed non-
traditional cultural roles (e.g., helping with chores). The respondents' "family" was found to be "central" to all women interviewed. Additionally, in their investigation, the centrality of building trust, relationships, and the social script of "simpatia" were found to be important in the Latino culture. The code of "simpatia" is looked at as friendliness carried out in an interested, amicable, and caring way. Parents, teachers, professors, spouses, partners, and co-workers supported, nourished, and encouraged the talents of the participant. All of this suggest that mentors are very important in the career development of Latinas. The women in this study all revealed how difficult and stressful it was balancing work and family responsibilities.

Women of color, particularly Latinas, are severely underrepresented in the women's career development literature. Often studies leave many unanswered questions such as: "What are the sources of encouragement and support for Latinas to succeed?" How have they succeeded even though they had to encounter racism, sexism, and cultural pressures?

Qualitative research may be more conducive to answering these questions. Qualitative research focuses on creating a theory from extensive interview data, rather
than testing existing theory for "fit." Since Gomez and Fassinger (1995) interviewed the respondents in their barrios, environments, and Spanish/English, this helped the researchers to better understand the respondents' reality.

Their study also utilized self-disclosure in the initial contact letter which helped to create a relationship based on trust. In another study of 36 Hispanic youth taken from a pool of 123 Hispanic youth completed by Gordon (1996), the perspective took on the roles of self-concept, environmental, and motivational factors which were important in pacifying risks and promoting resiliency. Their findings indicated that there was importance in youth's self-concept, sense of belonging and cognitive abilities. Also the school environment had to be supportive of the youths personal and social needs.

In support, Gordon (1996) discussed beliefs about the environment as being important aspects of self-concept. It was further discussed that ethnic minority adolescents are bi-culturally resilient. Therefore, minority adolescents can operate effectively in both their own and the mainstream culture. However, culture alone did not have a significant impact on resiliency. Further, Werner (1989) relates that one of the largest investments in the roots of resiliency is a longitudinal study from birth to 32 years.
Such an interdisciplinary study would address the biological and psychosocial risk factors, stressful life events, and protective factors. The relative impact of risk and protective factors appear to operate both directly and indirectly as a chain reaction fluctuating over time.

Even more, Werner (1989) adds that certain protective factors or support systems have a greater effect on adaption than specific risk factors. A number of characteristics were found with individuals, their families, and outside the family circle that contributed to resiliency. It was shown that resilient women draw on friends, siblings, older relatives, co-workers, and self-help groups.

Werner & Smith (1992) provide information on how the current understanding of roots of the resiliency and factors that protect against the psychosocial risk associated with, come from a small but diverse body of literature produced by various professional populations. Most researchers on the subject of resiliency are psychiatrists, psychologists, and sociologists. Most of the research is done in short-term studies on adolescence and young children. Studies on adulthood are still rare. Many adulthood studies vary in design (i.e. prospective vs. retrospective), selection of subjects (i.e. community
cohorts vs. clinic population), measures and definition of quality of adaption, and the timing of the assessment with individual lives.

Of the various theories related to resiliency, "Attachment Theory" is notable. It indicates the importance of early attachments in relation to psychological health and coping skills that are acquired in adulthood. For example, children identified as securely attached to a caregiver during infancy will overcome obstacles more readily. Also with more longitudinal studies in resiliency, the individual with long term caregiver relationships is shown to have a positive impact on resiliency (Basic Behavioral Science Task Force of the National Advisory Mental Health Council, 1996).

The strengths' perspective is also related to resiliency. The Health Realization Community Empowerment Model is an example. This model indicates that individuals reconnect people to the health in themselves and then channel people in a direction to bring forth the health of others in the community. The criticism of this strengths' perspective is that it is ignoring the real problems. In contrast, this model provides an emerging body of principles and methods that look at and use what is working to empower the person (Saleeby, 1996).
A study of 22 women, as discussed in Valentine & Feinauer (1993), explored what kinds of experiences survivors of childhood abuse perceived as helpful in assisting them to overcome those earlier experiences. All of these women were currently employed, not on welfare or public assistance, and had not been institutionalized in hospitals, prisons, or shelters. Most of the women described support systems (e.g., immediate and extended family) to be significant. These supports helped them to develop a sense of meaning in their lives. This study emphasized that clinicians and researchers can learn much from listening carefully to what people say about what assists them in coping with difficult experiences. This information can then be generalized and used to assist others having difficulties. In general, the study renders adversity coherent in terms of risks and protective factors and the manner in which they are interpreted.

Luther and Zigler (1991) list specific life stressors as an approach to operationalize stress of high risk condition on resilience. Life events and family circumstances ranging from service disaster, war and floods to socio-demographics, and familial stressors such as economic deprivation are addressed.

Furthermore, Luther and Ziegler (1991) include Social
Economic Status (SES) apart from low parental occupation status as a "criterion for high risk." In addition, low maternal education, large family size, membership in a minority group and absences of one parent are identified as criterion for high risk.

Again according to Luther and Ziegler (1991) there are various theoretical models used in the study of vulnerability and resilience. The compensatory model indicates that stress can lower levels of competence, personal attributes, or improve adjustments levels. The challenge model shows that stress continues to enhance competence, provided the levels of stress are not too high. Luther and Ziegler (1991) further inform that empirical studies have just only begun to investigate successful engagement and coping with risk.

In addition, Luther and Ziegler (1991) relate that the methodological concerns of the "life events approach" require further exploration. Some researchers have used "controllable" versus "uncontrollable events" on resiliency. There still remains a need to look at how small events may be linked to major life stresses. The author concluded that focusing on competence rather than maladjustment is an excellent approach.

This literature review supports the argument that
resiliency studies are needed. As previously indicated there is limited research on adults, more specifically, on adult Hispanic females. Also, clear definitions of concepts used when researching resiliency is a concern. Current research conveys that resiliency is multi-faceted and is viewed from different disciplines and approaches. The criteria for risk and protective factors are any.

Because of the concerns found in the literature, it is important to continue to study the current topic. Even though the current study specifically addresses support systems of resilient Hispanic females, the study does build upon existing studies that link to resiliency. The list of contributing factors to resiliency can be endless, therefore this study addresses a specific area.

The approach of exploring support systems in which the individual respondents understand and interpret their own experience is important. This approach assists social workers to better understand what types of "support" have assisted individuals who face adversities or challenges in their lives. More specifically, studying resiliency among adult Hispanic females due to the two-fold minority status that they hold can help to foster a sense of engagement and acceptance among them. Although this study does not look at the negative aspects of high risk, the study promotes
positive solutions to ultimately eliminate the negatives.
METHODS

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore what support systems contribute to resiliency in Hispanic females. Strategies for overcoming barriers and obstacles have been sparsely researched, particularly regarding Hispanic females. Greater insight into resiliency in adults is needed to better understand how they have overcome adverse and challenging situations. This insight would provide a basis for prevention and intervention for adults as well as children. These new insights would benefit the helping professions and other individuals who have experienced adverse situations, as well as assist society in general. Gandara (1982) suggested that "One important reason for our failure to better understand the dynamics of educational attainment within the Chicano community is our over reliance on research that focuses on underachievers" p. 168.

The current study identifies the support systems that a select group of Hispanic females used in order to overcome barriers related to low socioeconomic status, cultural traditions, and language. Valentine & Feinauer (1993) stressed the need for narrative information in studying resiliency. The qualitative approach is used to
maximize the depth of understanding and deeper meaning of human experience. The analysis assists us in discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships in resilient individuals.

Sample

For this study of 20 Hispanic females, a snowball sampling technique was used. Also, a questionnaire was developed to collect data for this study. Participants were selected based on the following criteria: minority status (female and Hispanic which includes Mexican, Mexican American, or Chicanas), approximately 30 to 65 years of age, neither parent received an education beyond high school and neither parent employed in a white collar position. In spite of obstacles and barriers, these selected adult Hispanic females are productive citizens and take on a role meaningful to societal norms (i.e. non-criminal activities, as well as having obtained a high school diploma or possess a G.E.D.).

According to Werner (1989), age 30 is considered the transitional period as well as the peak of adulthood. Age 30 is considered a time of great energy, but still the most stressful point in the adult life cycle. The researchers believe that the approximate minimum age of 30 would have allowed for adverse or challenging situations to occur in
these women's lives. The approximate maximum age of 65 was selected so as to include a broad range and sufficient number of participants. Data was initially collected on 10 Hispanic females who presumably did not know each other. Each of these individuals were asked to suggest at least two other adult females who have overcome adverse or challenging situations and who might be willing to participate in the study.

Thus, the sample that is limited to Hispanic females approximately 30 to 65 years of age prevents a wider generalization to those adults who are younger than 30 and older than 65, male or non-Hispanic. In this select group of Hispanic females, the researchers have created optimistic solutions. These solutions can be incorporated into the systems currently utilized for any age group and can have positive implications for the helping profession.

Instrument

The instrument utilized for the research consisted of a questionnaire with four open-ended questions. The questions focused on support systems in the lives of adult Hispanic females. The questions were designed to identify what assisted them in overcoming barriers. The areas covered were related to being Hispanic and female, educational attainment, career path and the overall
significant support system.

The instrument was created for this study based on concepts derived from both professional and personal experiences, as well as existing literature. In order to insure reliability, the instrument was pre-tested for clarity, specificity and practice. The questions were discussed by the researchers beforehand in order to offer respondents a clear understanding of what was being asked of them. To insure the validity of the responses, clarifying the meaning of questions by the participants was allowed.

The dependent variable is "Resiliency in adverse situations among Hispanic Females." The independent variables are support systems. The open-ended responses are coded into nonnumeric responses for analysis. The responses were collapsed into a limited set of attributes.

The questionnaire was designed specifically with sensitivity to all educational levels of the participants which included professionals as well as homemakers. The terminology used was thought to be comprehensive to all participants. The questionnaire defined resiliency as the ability to recover from disappointments, obstacles, setbacks or stressful situations. In addition, examples for support systems were family, teachers, peers, school,
spiritual support, or any individual who may have impacted them.

Procedures

This study was conducted through field interviews. The interviews took place in a neutral pre-designated location agreed upon by both researchers and each respondent. The field interview is important to utilize in exploratory qualitative research because it helps the researcher to get a better picture of what the respondent is actually saying. First, the participants were contacted by phone and an interview appointment was set up based on the location and time of their preference. Secondly, the purpose of the study was explained to the participants. Then, one researcher asked the interview questions (see Appendix "A") while the other documented the responses. Clarification of issues was addressed within the context of the actual interview.

Protection of Human Services

The participants in this study were adult Hispanic females approximately 30 - 65 years of age. All participants were given an Informed Consent to participate in this study. Respondents were provided with information concerning the purpose of the research, the name of the
research supervisor and his telephone number, the type of questions that were asked of them, and the guarantee that the respondent may discontinue participation in the study at any time. There were no physical risks from participating in this study. To assure confidentiality of the respondents, all data collected was identified by number rather than name. No one other than the researchers had access to the subjects' responses. These responses were destroyed after the data was processed.
RESULTS

Each researcher initially contacted five individuals in order to obtain additional potential respondents for our study. Some individuals did not have any referrals where others had more than two referrals. Six of the referrals did not qualify. Of the original ten individuals contacted by both researchers, three did not qualify and of those three, one gave a referral which was utilized. Each question was open ended which allowed the participants the opportunity to describe their experiences in their own words. Some of the respondents answered with more than one response to each of the four questions and these responses were manually collapsed, categorized and coded for analysis.

A total of 20 adult Hispanic females were interviewed regarding the support systems which helped them to overcome adverse or challenging situations in their early childhood. The sample included five individuals in administration, four managers, three teachers, two students (one master level graduate and one nursing student), one nurse, one computer specialist, one partner in a family run business, one realtor, one full time homemaker and one sales person. The respondents were approximately 30 - 65 years in age and all had received a high school diploma or G.E.D. Of
the 20 Hispanic women interviewed, 18 were mothers. The geographical areas of the respondents included San Bernardino County, Los Angeles County and Orange County.

Seven of the interviews took place in the respondents' place of business, eight took place in the respondents' homes and five took place in restaurants. The purpose and procedures of the study was explained to each participant, and they all signed an Informed Consent (see Appendix B). The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 2 hours. The interviews were completed over a two-month time period. The results of each of the four interview questions asked are provided below. Tables are used to display the most significant findings.

Support Systems Contributing to Resiliency

Question number one asked: Being Hispanic and female, what support systems have contributed to your resiliency? Responses were collapsed into six areas consisting of: 1) family, 2) spirituality, 3) educators, 4) co-workers, 5) friends and 6) necessity. For question number one (see Appendix D), most of the respondents (46%) considered family as the support system that contributed to their resiliency. One participant described how her father had inspired her and she stated, "He stressed the importance of an education, and my desire to learn new things came from
my father's creativity." Another respondent described her support systems as her siblings and her father. The respondent stated, "my dad was a silent leader." A minimal number of respondents (2%) identified "necessity" as their support system. One woman described that she was sat down by her parents who explained to her the "necessity" of remaining in college in order to continue to receive insurance benefits.

Question number two asked: What support systems contributed to your own level of education? Responses were collapsed into eight areas consisting of: 1) family, 2) spirituality, 3) educators, 4) co-workers, 5) personal desire, 6) friends, 7) personal attendant, and 8) necessity. For question number two (as seen in Appendix E), the majority of the respondents (47.1%) considered family as the support system that contributed to their resiliency within their level of education. One respondent described "I always had a liking to school, and I was inspired to pursue more in life through my husband." The next noted response was educators with 25%. One respondent stated, "I knew I had to do something with my life, and school was very important to me." Spirituality, co-workers, and personal attendant received scores of 2.5%.

In question number three, the respondents were asked:
What outside support systems contributed to your resiliency within your own career? Responses were collapsed into nine areas consisting of: 1) family, 2) spirituality, 3) educators, 4) co-workers, 5) personal desire, 6) friends, 7) personal attendant, 8) necessity, and 9) public resources. For question number three (as seen in Appendix F), the majority (34.3%) indicated family as the support system that contributed to their resiliency within their career. One participant stated that both parents always supported her and pushed her to "do it your best." Friends followed at 17.1%. One respondent described, "My friend helped me to see my potential. This was a great support for me." Spirituality, personal desire and personal attendant received scores of 2.9%.

For question number four, the respondents were asked: What do you think was the single most significant support system that contributed to your resiliency? Responses were collapsed into seven areas as follows: 1) family, 2) spirituality, 3) educators, 4) co-workers, 5) personal desire, 6) friends, and 7) necessity. For question number four (as seen in Appendix G), the majority of respondents (52.2%) identified family as their most significant support system. One participant described the support she received from her father and stated, "My dad always believed in me."
She recalls her dad saying, "You can do it." Spirituality followed with a response rate of 21.7%. Educators, co-workers, friends and necessity all received scores of 4.3%.

Based on the research question "What support systems contributed to your resiliency as an adult Hispanic female?" the results suggest that the "family" is the overall support system that contributed to each of the respondent's resiliency.
DISCUSSION

The findings in this study reveal that the family support system strongly contribute to resiliency in adult Hispanic females. In the literature review, Gonzales and Padilla (1997) support these findings based on a qualitative study which concluded that family support and individual persistence contributed most to academic success in Mexican American students. The results of this study not only answered the research question, "What support systems contributed to your resiliency as an adult Hispanic female?" but the results also lend support to existing literature.

The respondents described the hard work ethic that was taught to them by their parents. Again, according to Gandara (1982), the "hard work ethic" modeled by parents in addition to setting high standards helped students. Even when their parents had limited education, the parents were still the major support system that contributed to their resiliency. The parents were unable to provide guidance in areas of education or career. However, these women generally tended turn to their parents for emotional support.

For this study, a few respondents gave "necessity" and "personal desire" as support systems. These responses were
unanticipated results. As one woman described, she was told by her parents that she needed to remain in college in order to continue to receive insurance benefits. This experience served as an aid to push her to aspire to a higher level of education. Because of the experience, it exemplifies how she was forced into a stressful situation and was able to benefit. Luther & Ziegler (1991) support this by stating that the challenge model indicated that "stressful" situations continue to enhance competence and benefit from it, provided the levels of stress are not too high.

Another participant described her personal desire to achieve more in life, however, she felt that she had been motivated by her father who stressed the importance of education and was also very supportive of her. Another respondent described her own personal desire as her support system but was also motivated by her family members and her father who she saw as a "silent leader." Although one's personal desire can be considered an inner drive, it can also be speculated that outside support systems contribute to one's motivational level.

Limitations and Recommendations

Some of the limitations of this study include the "snowball" sampling which invited miscommunication of the
criteria that each potential respondent needed in order to qualify for the study. For future studies, defining criteria in written form so that the exact criteria can be communicated will eliminate miscommunication with the potential respondents. Gomez & Fassinger (1995) also validated that a written contact letter helped to clarify problem areas in communication. Although the researchers felt that the interviews went well, allowing the respondents the option of conducting the interviews in Spanish might have allowed for a more natural environment for the respondent. For instance, Gomez & Fassinger (1995) described a qualitative study where the respondents were invited to be interviewed in their environment, in the barrios, and in Spanish/English. This helped the researchers better understand their respondents' reality. In this current study, since one of the researchers was not able to communicate in Spanish, all interviews were conducted and recorded in English. For future studies, it is suggested that the respondents be given the option of interviewing in Spanish or English.

The sample size, if critiqued individually, could also be viewed as a limitation. However, this small size allowed the researchers to develop rapport with the respondents. Future studies should solicit a larger number
of respondents. An additional limitation of this study included the coding process. Since the researchers interpreted the meaning of the responses, it opens the possibility of misunderstanding. There may also be attempts by the participants to convey sincere responses where the possibility of miscommunication may occur with the researchers.

Some of the strengths of the project was having two researchers conducting the interviews. This allowed for lack of confusion to any of the responses if something was not understood. There was also an advantage of direct observation by the researchers which allowed for questions to be asked and answered. Eye contact and body language were important aspects of understanding communication patterns of the participants.

Implications

Since family appears to be the strongest support systems with adult resilient Hispanic females, there is a need to understand if the family support system carries over in other areas within the lives of this population. For example, do educators, peers, colleagues and supervisors become "family" while the individual is in a given environment?
Becoming culturally sensitive and identifying support systems in helping overcome obstacles within Hispanic families can promote strengths in this population. Saleebey (1996) states that the strengths perspective has an emerging body of principles and this perspective looks at what is working to empower individuals. Since 18 of the 20 women interviewed were mothers, it is important to be familiar with the traditional roles of women in Hispanic families. Vasquez (1982) described the traditional roles of being a wife and mother in the Chicano family as an area where Chicanas need support in dealing with the stress of a sex-role conflict. Hispanic women have "traditionally" been given the role of a wife and a mother and it is not characteristic of them to pursue a higher education or a career outside the family.

Furthermore, Gomez & Fassinger (1995) conducted a study where all Latinas conveyed how difficult and stressful it is balancing work and family responsibilities. They concluded that the family was found to be "central" to all women interviewed. The centrality of "simpatia" (building trust, relationships) is so important in the Latino culture that high energy is placed on maintenance of relationships above personal goals. This corroborates with the findings in this study and prompts the need to support
Hispanic females in these areas. Social workers and other helping professionals need to be sensitive to the Hispanic cultural tradition and understand that the family is the central unit of support.

The results of this study offer insight into what Hispanic females perception and reality are in overcoming obstacles or adverse situations. There are societal changes regarding women in the work force, and since the Hispanic population is the fastest growing minority group in the United States, social workers desperately need to advocate and promote research for this population. Furthermore, as Gandara (1982) describes it, there is more emphasis placed on the underachievers in Chicano families, further research is needed on high achievement within this population. Gorena (1996) conveys that research on Hispanic females is essential. Colleges, universities and the educators must be prepared to meet the new challenges and become familiar with the Hispanic female population and look at factors that positively affect success of Hispanics and other women. Such research is even more important given the increases of Hispanics and women in the work force.
APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

The information listed below are the types of questions which will be asked of our participants. These questions will be pre-tested for accuracy. We will define the following terms prior to our interview survey for clarification purposes to the participants:

Resiliency: the ability to bounce back or recover from a disappointment, obstacle, setbacks or stressful situation.

Support system: i.e. family, teachers, peers, school, spiritual support, or any individuals who may have impacted you.

Questionnaire:

1. Being Hispanic and female (considered a dual minority) what support systems have contributed to your resiliency?

2. Being that your parents did not have an education beyond high school, what support systems contributed to your own level of education?

3. Coming from a household which neither parent held a white-collar position, what outside support systems contributed to your resiliency within your own career?

4. Overall, what do you think was the single most
significant support system that contributed to your resiliency?
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

This study in which you are about to participate is designed to investigate the support systems that contribute to resiliency. This study is being conducted by Rosalina Becerra and Rosalie Rangel, under the supervision of Dr. Ira Neighbors, Assistant Professor of Social Work, California State University of San Bernardino. Dr. Ira Neighbors can be reached at (909)880-5565. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of California State University San Bernardino.

In this study, we are seeking to explore what support systems contribute to resiliency. You will be asked to answer a few questions on the topic of resiliency. You will be one of 20 individuals interviewed about this particular topic. You will be interviewed in person by two researchers. You will also be given the opportunity to ask any questions you may have prior to this study. After your interview, we will give you a brief opportunity to discuss your feelings about our questioning and approach.

Please be assured that any information you provide will be held in strict confidence by the researchers. At no time will your name be reported along with your responses. All data will be reported in group form only.
At the conclusion of this study, you may receive a report of the results.

Please understand that your participating in this research is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time during this study without penalty, and to remove any data at any time during this study.

I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and understand, the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate.
APPENDIX C

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

The study in which you have just participated is designed to investigate the support systems which contribute to resiliency in individuals who have overcome adverse or challenging situations. The support systems which contribute to resiliency refer to underlying causes of resiliency.

The information gathered from this study may help in identifying the contributing factors to resiliency, which then can be emphasized and built upon to help individuals who face adverse or challenging situations.

Be assured that any information you provided will be held in confidence. It is also requested that each participant not reveal the nature of the study to other potential participants.

If you are interested in the results of this study or have any questions about the research at any time, you may contact Dr. Ira Neighbors at California State University, San Bernardino. His phone number is (909) 880-5565.
## APPENDIX D

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### LEGEND

- **A** Family
- **B** Spirituality
- **C** Educators
- **D** Co-workers
- **E** Friend
- **F** Necessity
## APPENDIX E

### Educational Support Systems

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**LEGEND**

- A: Family
- B: Spirituality
- C: Educators
- D: Co-workers
- E: Personal Desire
- F: Friends
- G: Personal Attendant
- H: Necessity
## APPENDIX F

### Career Support Systems

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| Percentages | 34.3% | 2.9% | 14.3% | 11.4% | 2.9% | 17.1% | 2.9% | 5.7% | 8.6% | 100.0% |

### LEGEND

- A: Family
- B: Spirituality
- C: Educators
- D: Co-workers
- E: Personal Desire
- F: Friends
- G: Personal Attendant
- H: Necessity
- I: Public Resources
### APPENDIX G

**Most Significant Support Systems**

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**LEGEND**

- A: Family
- B: Spirituality
- C: Educators
- D: Co-workers
- E: Personal Desire
- F: Friends
- G: Necessity
REFERENCES


