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LATINAS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: OVERCOMING BARRIERS

OF TEENAGE PREGNANCY

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A Project

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Social Work

_____

by

Gabriela Alonso

June 2002

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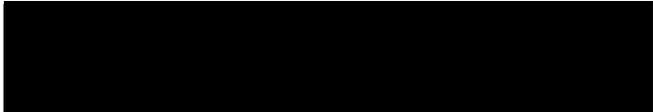
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Social Work

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ABSTRACT

This project was an exploratory study that examined college achievement in Latinas who experienced a premarital teen pregnancy. A qualitative method was used to investigate individual characteristics and resources to higher education. This study analyzed contributing factors that allowed college achievement in Latinas despite the myriad of challenges resulting from teenage pregnancy. Nine categories that influenced strengths in young Latina mothers were examined. Results from this study revealed that individual strengths along with support from family and friends strongly contribute to academic achievement in Latinas. Because, previous studies have shown that Latina teen mothers are less likely to complete high school (Rich & Kim, 1999) this study is important to social work practice. Specifically, programs that address the unique social and educational needs of pregnant and parenting teens. Results from this study may provide the resources and interventions to allow other Latinas similar educational accomplishments.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this project was possible with guidance and knowledge provided by Dr. Jette Warka and Dr. Elsa O. Valdez who inspired me to embark on this research. This project could not have been possible without the sincere cooperation of Latina participants who shared their personal struggle, perseverance, and educational successes. May their dedication and persistence inspire other women to follow their own dreams.

This project is the result of unconditional support and encouragement from family and friends. Words cannot describe my appreciation and love for them. To my brother and three sisters who helped me so much with my parental responsibilities and made this process possible. Particularly, to Robert for his patience and reassurance.

More than anything, this project has been the result of many hours of sacrifice away from my son, Cristian; he is my life and inspiration. His love and affection truly made this project possible. I am eternally grateful to my parents who have sacrificed so much to provide me this educational opportunity.

Ultimately, this research project could not have been possible without my hopes, dreams, and eternal faith in the Lord. Thank you Lord, for all your blessings.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Latinos are the least educated major population group
in the United States (Bureau of the Census, 1994). In
1995, Latinos accounted for only 4.9 percent of all
college enrollments, obtaining only 2.9 percent of the
bachelor degrees conferred in the United States (Justiz,
1995).

The disproportionately low representation of Latinos
in higher education is the product of several
circumstances; extremely high drop-out rates before high
school graduation, inadequate preparation for continued
study, and the tendency for many college-eligible Latinos
to eschew four-year institutions (Rumberger, 1991).

Similarly, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen
Pregnancy (1999) reports Latina teens have the highest
teenage birth rate among any major group in the United
States. According to the National Council of La Raza, the
nation's largest Latino civil rights organization, Latina
teens between the ages of 15-19 years of age are twice as
likely to become parents as are Caucasian teens. Moreover,
a high percentage of Latina teen births occur

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out-of-wedlock, contributing to an increase in single-parent families and the greater likelihood that these mothers will spend some or all of their lives in poverty (Perez & Duany, 1992).

Because the Latino population is the fastest growing ethnic group in the country, the persistence of low college participation among Latino students is of serious concern. It is imperative that as a society, we begin to increase opportunities and access to higher education for every Latino. Similarly, because Latina teen mothers are considerably less likely to complete high school, to be poor after the birth of the child, and to become dependent on public assistance (Geronimo & Korenman, 1992), the consequences of teen parenting on educational achievement deserves immediate attention. More importantly, because higher education may enable Latina teen mothers to compensate for some of the disadvantages, it is imperative to examine and strengthen educational and social programs that can improve the educational achievement of Latina mothers.

Problem Focus

With the high prevalence of teen pregnancy and barriers to complete high school, this study examined contributing factors that enabled college achievement in

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Latinas who experienced a premarital teen pregnancy. This study focused on strengths to educational achievement and investigated individual characteristics of Latina mothers who continued with their educational goals.

Implications for Social Work Practice

A thorough understanding of what allows college achievement following a premarital teen pregnancy is needed to evaluate existing social service programs and non-profit organizations that assist at-risk minority populations. It is hoped that results from this study can provide knowledge of strengths found within the Latino family, culture, and traditions. Through awareness and recognition of personal and cultural strengths in Latinas, results from this study can suggest possible interventions for the removal of structural and social barriers ingrained in school policy and curriculum that prevent educational attainment (Aguilar, 1996).

Moreover, this study sought to uncover individual successes which can be utilized to generate interventions that acknowledge the Latino culture and which can help mitigate the hardships of premarital teen pregnancy, including the challenges to educational achievement in Latina teen parents. Ultimately, results from this study

will permit young Latina mothers to see positive solutions and envision their own potential for college achievement.

Operational Definitions

"Hispanic" as an ethnic label was the product of a 1978 decision by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to operationalize the label as "A person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central, South American or any other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race" (Federal Register, 1978). Nonetheless, it should be noted that "Hispanic" is not universally accepted, and for the purpose of this study "Latina" will be the ethnic label of choice. The Latino label is perceived as more accurately reflecting the political, geographical, and historical links present among various Latin American nations.

"Cultural values" are values and beliefs central to a human being within the Latino family and consists of rules and expectations related to individual behavior and to the way people react to others. Moss, Barnett, and Alvarez (1982) argue that within the Latino culture, the family is the basic source of emotional support throughout the life span. The family is regarded as the primary social unit and given the relationship-centered values of the Latino family and community, Latinos more often attend to the

needs, goals, and opinions of others to a greater extent than they do their own needs (Marin & Marin, 1991).

"Acculturation" is defined as a bi-directional process that involves the interaction between an individual and the environment (Berry, 1993). Acculturation reflects changes in the individual's behavior and thinking as a result of contact with the host culture and the retention of one's native values, beliefs, customs, and traditions (Sodowsky, Lai, & Plake 1991). That is, as the individual assimilates, they acquire the values, attitudes, and behaviors of the host country.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Little is known about the educational attainment of Latina women. Few studies have looked at college enrollment and the extent to which enrollment among these women results in the completion of degrees or additional years of schooling (Rich & Kim, 1999). Furthermore, Rich and Kim (1999) found that available research has failed to adequately examine the extent to which teen mothers, who are especially likely to experience disruptions in their schooling and have been a focus of numerous programs to improve their educational attainment, return to school later in life.

The Context of Education for Latinas

Vasquez (1982) asserts that the role of acculturation, adapting to the values, attitudes and behaviors of the majority culture, has wrongfully been argued as the guiding philosophy to educational achievement among Mexican Americans. Unfortunately, this implies that the identification with the values, attitudes, behaviors and language of the Hispanic culture is a liability to academic achievement.

Vasquez (1982) further expresses the importance of addressing and clarifying the negative stereotypic myths that have been perpetuated by studies that have utilized a pathological model of cultural deficit to account for low educational achievement and whose interpretations are biased. Likewise, McKenna and Ortiz (1998) argue that academic failure in Latinos has been attributed to the personal and family sphere with little or no attention given to institutional factors that can intervene in the educational process.

Similarly, most research on Latina teen pregnancy is limited by lack of information on the important differences found among ethnic subgroups. Limitations exist not only in terms of ancestry, but also in terms of other significant characteristics that define each particular ethnic group. Castro and Baezconde-Garbanati (as cited in Marin and Marin, 1991) suggest differences within Latino subgroups include race, self-identification, ancestry, generational history, and acculturation levels.

Padilla, Salgado de Snyder, Cervantes, and Baezconde-Garbanati, (1987), also argue that the role of culture, sex-role behaviors, religion, and class, have not been fully explored. According to Staples and Mirande (1980) much of the literature on minority families has

been distorted by a failure to distinguish between factors related to ethnicity versus factors related to social class, resulting in an overemphasis on the dysfunctional aspects of minority family life.

Furthermore, Zayas and Schinke (1987) observed that the lack of attention to family interaction is surprising because Latinos possess a strong devotion to the family. It is within the Latino family that individuals learn expected attitudes, behaviors, rituals, values, language, and appropriate gender roles (Mayo, 1996).

Barriers to Higher Education

Vasquez (1982) examined barriers as well as solutions in regards to Mexican American women in higher education and found that sex role restrictions and the oppressive effects of low socioeconomic status accounted for limited participation in post-secondary education. In her research, Vasquez found that traditional roles created sex role conflict in many Mexican American women and that these women experienced isolation and perceived very little support from the college environment.

Sex Role Socialization

Sex role socialization is affected by stereotypical attitudes about role definitions for men and women within

the traditional Latino culture. Latinas often experience stressors resulting from sex role conflicts due to the traditionally high value placed on the family, the struggle between the pursuit of an education, and the traditional role of wife (Vasquez, 1982). Furthermore, because many Latinas may be the first in their family to go to college, they may experience role conflicts as they attempt to balance the relative rewards and costs of marriage and children with an education, and ultimately, a career.

Also, many Latinas often struggle between the pursuit of an education and the traditional role of wife and mother, causing them to doubt the pursuit of higher education (Vasquez, 1982). Similarly, Ortiz (1995) found that working-class Mexican American females often experience conflicts among traditional roles of motherhood, family responsibilities, and academic success.

For example, East (1998) examined high school completion rates in teenage mothers from various ethnic groups and found Latina teens to be more pessimistic about their futures, desired to take on marital and parenting roles at the youngest ages, and had mothers with the least education and who were youngest at marriage. Upon his findings, East further argued that Mexican American girls

were being socialized for marriage and childbearing roles to the exclusion of work related roles.

Similarly, Becerra and deAnda (as cited in Weinman & Smith, 1994) studied cultural differences among 43 English-speaking and 39 Spanish-speaking Mexican-American pregnant and parenting teens and found that the Spanish-speaking group were less likely to be in school, more likely to be economically depressed, and more likely to be married. In fact, almost half of 13-17 year-olds in the Spanish-speaking cohort was married compared to 23% of the English-speaking group.

Furthermore, Weinman and Smith (1994) examined factors related to postpartum compliance in a group of 154 U.S. and 127 Mexico-born Hispanic teens who gave birth in a county hospital in Houston, Texas. In their study, the authors found that of the combined group of U.S. and Mexico born Hispanic teen mothers, ninety-nine reported they had no further educational plans, placed significantly less importance on achieving school and career goals, and considered it less likely to achieve these goals.

Consequently, Romo (1998) posits that when Latinas do not see possibilities for doing well in school or pursuing

postsecondary education or a career, they often leave school and start a family.

Socioeconomic Status

It has been argued that the primary barrier to higher education for Latinas is the multiplicity of effects attached to low socioeconomic status. Mexican women in particular are reported at the lowest levels of occupational, educational, and financial indices (Vasquez, 1982). For example, the Bureau of the Census (1993) reported that the median family income for the adult Mexican American female head of household, with no husband present, was at $12,714.

Indices of social economic class and their relationship to academic performance frequently report that the lower the level of parental education, occupational position, and income, the lower the academic performance. However, Anderson and Johnson (1968) suggest that while social and economic indices do relate to academic performance, achievement motivation of Latino students mediate the otherwise deleterious effects of socioeconomic status.

Individual Characteristics

Individual characteristics found to interfere with barriers to higher education in Latinas include motivation, self-expectations, and self-esteem (Vasquez, 1982). According to Vasquez (1982), the above variables result from positive support, particularly from mother encouragement, teacher expectations, positive identification with one's language and culture, and, from programs designed to provide an advocacy role.

Similarly, Cordoza (1991) found student aspirations, levels of self-esteem and motivation, having a role model, and student's perceptions of what significant others aspired for them, were significant factors affecting college attendance and persistence in general.

In the same way, Gandara (1982) studied 17 Mexican American women, between the ages of 28 and 40, who came from low socioeconomic backgrounds, yet still succeeded in completing J.D., M.D., and Ph.D. degrees. The women reported experiencing a lot of conflict between meeting expectations of their families and the demands of school. The women further indicated that a "hard work ethic" modeled by their parents, as well as setting high standards to do well, helped these women strive for excellence.

Motivation

Furthermore, personal commitment to either an academic or occupational goal has been identified as one of the single most important determinants of persistence in college (Vasquez, 1982). Motivation is defined as the inspiration to achieve, the desire to learn, to perform a task, to create things, and it is the result of self-confidence and sense of personal power (Fernandez, 1997).

Positive Self-Expectations

Positive self-expectation is a variable that may result from positive support and encouragement, particularly from the mother's reassurance, teacher expectations, and positive self-identification with the language and Latino culture (Vasquez, 1982). According to Cardoza (1991) one of the most important predictors of college attendance and persistence for Latina women, is their educational aspirations.

Self-Esteem

Similarly, Gil and Vasquez (1996) define self-esteem as the ability to accept oneself as competent, successful, worthy, and the ability to love oneself. Self-esteem is tied to perceived skills, competencies, and successes. It

is believed that individuals with high self-esteem believe in their own abilities to make changes and control their own situations. The authors further posit that self-esteem is tied to approval and that a female's self-esteem is not only developed but also affected by the socialization process, either positively or negatively.

As a result, Vasquez (1982) argues that overt as well as covert subtle patterns of prejudice and discrimination often result in negative internalized messages about one's general worth as a woman, as a member of an ethnic minority group, and, in many cases as a member of the lowest socioeconomic group in this country. In the same way, according to Vasquez (1982), many first generation Latina college students must fight against the crippling effects of having a "triple minority" status; as a woman, as a member of an ethnic minority group, and as a member of the lowest socioeconomic status group.

Theories

Of the various theories examining solutions to educational achievement, the strengths perspective is invaluable in investigating solutions to educational barriers. Research indicates that by viewing individuals from the strengths they have. can help those individuals

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experience a sense of empowerment as well as hope for their situation (Saleebey, 1997).

Saleebey (1997) defines strengths in a number of ways. These include things people have learned about themselves, others, and their world as they have coped with issues in their lives; personal qualities; what people have learned either educationally or intellectually about the world around them; various talents; individual and cultural stories; and pride and support from the larger communities in which they live. Moreover strengths can be identified in the domains of cognition, emotion, motivation, coping, and interpersonal.

Similar to the strengths perspective, resiliency is defined as the skills, knowledge, insight, and abilities that accumulate over time as people struggle to surmount adversity and meet the challenges in their lives.

Saleebey (1996) defines resiliency as a developing and ongoing fund of skills and energy that can be used in present struggles. While, Werner (1992) defines resiliency and protective factors as positive counterparts to vulnerability and risk factors that increase the likelihood of a negative developmental outcome. Moreover, Ford (1994) conveys that resilient individuals are proactive toward obstacles and tend to see a difficulty as

a challenge that can be worked on, or changed, overcome, endured, or resolved in some manner.

Moreover, of the various theories related to consequences of teen parenting on educational achievement, theories of acculturation are notable. Domino and Acosta (1987) describe acculturation as a psychosocial human adaptation and adjustment process.

Acculturation is the process of changes in behavior and values, and refers to the culture learning that occurs when immigrants come in contact with a new group, nation, or culture (Marin, Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal, & Perez-Stable, 1987).

Once individuals migrate to the United States, the new culture and the experience of adjusting to new environments can be expected to change people's behavior as well as their world-views (Berry, 1980). Moreover, Berry (1980) argues that as individuals are exposed to a new culture, a process of culture learning and behavioral adaptation takes place.

Berry (1980) has proposed that upon contact with a new culture, individuals undergo a process of change in any or all of six areas of psychological functioning, language use, cognitive style, personality identity, attitudes, and stress. Thus, as a minority group, Latinos

are exposed to the mainstream cultural patterns of the
United States and modifications in their values, norms,
attitudes and behaviors may be expected to occur because
of this contact.

According to Vasquez (1982), some literature has
negatively implied that the Latino culture and use of the
Spanish language are barriers to educational achievement.
Many discussions have implied that identification with the
values, attitudes, behaviors, and language of the Latino
culture is a liability to educational achievement and that
acculturation should be the guiding philosophy of
educational programming and interventions.

Likewise, according to Escobedo (1980), these
discussions are based on a social pathology model of
cultural deficit and on stereotypes of cultural
disadvantage that fail to thoroughly examine the
environmental impacts which limit educational resources in
individuals.

Furthermore, Vasquez (1982) argues that low
socioeconomic status, a negative family environment, and
limited exposure to cultural and intellectual resources
may be considered indicators of a disadvantaged situation,
and may be associated with many Hispanic individuals for

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economic and social reasons, but, should not be

constructed as arising from the Hispanic culture per se.

The American Council on Education (1985) has proposed

that prior to becoming college candidates, Hispanic

students are subject to school, home, and community

experiences that profoundly affect chances for college

candidacy. Moreover, factors such as the economic needs of

student's families, the expectations of parents about

their children's education, high school counselors,

college orientation and the socio-cultural influence of

students' communities and peer networks affect Hispanics

decision and choices for college candidacy. The

socio-cultural background of Hispanics, including value

orientation and language background, also exerts an

influence on student's decision to plan for college

candidacy. It is proposed that a combination of these

factors contributes to the fact that Hispanic students are

more likely to attend community college, and are more

likely to attend school on a part-time basis than are

their non Hispanic peers (American Council on Education,

1985).

Other discussions have further proposed a positive

relationship between a bilingual, bicultural identity to

academic success, psychological adjustments, and social

flexibility (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1978). For instance, Szapocznik, Kurtines, and Fernandez (1980) in their research found that youth who adapt to the host culture while retaining involvement with the culture of origin were better adjusted than youth who rejected their culture of origin.

In summary, this literature review supports the need to further investigate and understand individual strengths and the educational accomplishments of Latina women. As previously noted, very limited information is known about the educational attainment of Latina women from available research. Few studies have looked at college enrollment and the completion of college degrees of young Latina women who first gave birth as teenagers. Moreover, information on individual characteristics of Latina teen mothers and strengths within the Latino culture are limited.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Study Design

The purpose of this study was to explore individual characteristics that allowed college achievement in Latina women who experienced a teenage pregnancy. A specific objective of this study was to examine strengths for overcoming barriers and obstacles to higher education. This exploratory study made no attempt to explain why teenage pregnancy exist, but studied factors that allow Latina teen mothers to succeed into higher education.

Grinnell (1997) explained that, qualitative designs are particularly beneficial for studying hidden or obscured phenomenon, specifically when studying family process and family interactions that are not transparent, too personal, and too complicated. As a result, use of a qualitative design for this study was most appropriate in interviewing Latina women who have experienced a teenage pregnancy and whose life event was too personal and too complicated to fit into a quantitative survey.

Furthermore, use of a qualitative approach maximized the depth of understanding, provided deeper meaning of the

human experience, and assisted in discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships.

Sample

Participants for this study included 16 Latina women between the ages of 18 and 30 years of age. Subjects were located through use of a snowball sampling technique that allowed initial participants to refer other college Latina women. This approach was used due to the social disapproval surrounding teen pregnancy and the possible difficulty of locating Latina women who fit the criteria.

Initially data were collected on six Latina women. Each of these individuals were then asked to refer at least two college Latinas who also experienced a teenage pregnancy and who would be willing to participate in the study.

Participants were selected based on the following criteria: Female, Latina (from any Latino subgroup), between the ages of 18 and 30 years of age, college student or college graduate, residing within Riverside or San Bernardino county, functioning at normal levels, and have had experienced a teenage premarital pregnancy.

The total sample consisted of 16 participants whose ages ranged from 18 to 30 years with a mean age of 24.56

years. Age at birth of their first child ranged from 15 to 19 years with a mean age of 17.31 years. Ethnic identity reported, 62.5% of Latina participants identified themselves as Mexican American, 31.25% identified themselves as Mexican, and 6.25% identified themselves as Salvadorian.

Generational history of participants showed 25% of participants were first generation Latinas, 50% identified themselves as second generation Latinas, and 25% were third generation Latinas. Generation was computed by asking respondents to indicate their place of birth together with that of their parents. Of the 16 Latina women interviewed 75% were born in the United States, 18.75% were born in Mexico, and 6.25% in Central America. The majority of participants' parents were born in Mexico, 68.75%, while 25% of parents were born in the United States, and 6.25% were born in Central America.

The educational levels reflected 75% of participants were obtaining an associate degree at a local community college, 18.8% were enrolled at a four year university and obtaining a baccalaureate degree, and 6.3% were enrolled in a graduate degree program. Only 37.5% of the women interviewed attended school full time, while 62.5% of

participants were employed and attended school on a part time basis.

Data Collection and Instrument

Due to the sensitive nature of disclosing personal information, face-to-face interviews with Latina participants were the principal approach of data collection. Methods of measurement involved interviewing individual women about the characteristics that enabled their participation into higher education.

The extent to which the family's value on education influenced and shaped educational goals and successes were examined. While, Participant responses provided information on the personal characteristics that influenced their academic achievement. The dependent variable for this study was college attendance in Latina women who experienced a teenage pregnancy and the independent variable consisted of perceived strengths and characteristics that enabled college achievement.

The instrument utilized for this study consisted of a questionnaire with fifty-six open-ended questions. The first section of the questionnaire consisted of demographic characteristics that asked the participant's age, marital status, college attendance, and questions

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pertaining to their pregnancy and motherhood. The second page consisted of family demographics and identified family composition, parental education, parental occupation, and sibling academic success. The third section asked questions pertaining to ethnic identity and parental place of birth.

In the fourth section, participants were asked about religion, including the religion practiced during their childhood, the role of religion within their family, and the role religion played in their lives. Next, parental characteristics were identified through open-ended questions pertaining to participants' relationship with their parents, family activities, expectations for behavior, and their family value system. The sixth section asked about the family's value on education, particularly which parent had the greatest influence on the respondent's educational goals.

The next section explored the respondent's school characteristics, including grade point average in high school, their involvement in school activities, and any concerns in finishing their education after becoming pregnant. Furthermore, participants were asked to provide information regarding their decision to go to college and their use of financial assistance. In the last section,

questions concerning respondents' attitudes, specifically individual characteristics, family strengths, and supports systems were examined.

The instrument for this study was created based on a pre-existing published study pertaining to the educational mobility of first generation Hispanics by Vasquez (1982). Questions regarding the effects of teenage pregnancy were constructed based on concepts derived from existing literature by Rich and Kim (1999) who examined the educational attainment of teenage mothers.

In order to ensure reliability, the instrument was pre-tested for clarity and practicality. The researcher read each question to allow respondents a clear understanding of what was being asked of them and to clarify the meaning of questions. The questionnaire was designed with sensitivity to all educational levels and the terminology used was thought to be comprehensive to all participants.

According to Grinnell (1997) use of a semi-structured interview allows for follow-up questions that may vary from participant to participant, and allows for the probing of more elaborate responses or specific meanings. Moreover, semi-structural interviews allow the interviewer the ability to exchange thoughts, allows for clarification

of responses, the ability to make observations, and to attentively listen to the respondent.

Procedure

All data were collected through field interviews. Each interview took place in a neutral pre-designated location agreed upon by both researcher and respondent. Each participant was contacted by telephone and invited to participate in the study. Upon agreement, an interview appointment was set up at the participant's convenience.

At the time of the interview the purpose of the study was clearly explained and the length of the interview was provided. Respondents were then given an informed consent form, which they read and signed. The researcher then read each interview question while documenting individual responses.

Protection of Human Subjects

Participants in this study were adult females between the ages of 18 and 30 years of age. All subjects participating in the study were given an informed consent form and were provided with information concerning the purpose of the study, the interview content, and their contribution in examining ways to assist other Latinas in acquiring a college education. All participants were

provided with the name and phone number of the research

supervisor, and were informed about their role in the

study. Each participant was informed about their right to

refrain from answering any questions and their guarantee

to discontinue participation in the study at any time.

To assure confidentiality, participants were informed

that all data collected would be used for research

purposes only and that information would not be shared

with outside sources. Confidentiality was further

established by not identifying any names on the

questionnaire and informing participants that no one other

than the researcher had access to their responses.

Furthermore, upon debriefing subjects were informed

that there were no physical risks from their participation

in the study. Questions about the interview content,

interview process, and clarity of questions were inquired

from each participant. The telephone number of the

professional resource to contact in case of questions or

concerns was also included in the debriefing statement.

Moreover, each participant was provided with a list of

telephone numbers to community counseling centers.

Data Analysis

By taking into considering the context of culture within the Latino family, a major goal of this study was to examine individual characteristics and family influences that enabled Latina teen mothers to succeed into higher education. Through qualitative data analysis this research study sought to understand the personal realities of each research participant, including aspects of their experience that were unique to them. Data were further organized in such a manner that the words, thoughts and experience of each participant were clearly communicated and that themes and interpretations addressed the original research question.

Procedures taken to process and refine data included all steps of qualitative data analysis: transcript preparation, establishing a preliminary plan for data analysis, first-level coding, second-level coding, data interpretation and theory building, and, assessing the trustworthiness of results.

The first step of qualitative data analysis involved analysis of interview responses, including reflection on nonverbal interactions displayed by the participant. Typed transcript information was then categorized into relevant groupings. To assure confidentiality of respondents,

number rather than name identified all data collected. No one other than the researcher had access to the subject's responses and responses were destroyed after the data was processed.

Establishing a plan for data analysis included previewing all data and recording reactions to issues that emerged as data was analyzed. The meaning of data was allowed to emerge from the data collected without influence from preconceived notions or the researcher's personal viewpoint.

First level coding involved identifying meanings as data was analyzed, fitting the information into categories, and then coding the categories. Second level coding, involved interpreting data for underlying meanings by examining categories away from any association with the participant's response. Categories were then integrated into themes by locating patterns that repeatedly appeared among the categories.

Interpretation of data included identifying relationships between the major themes that emerged from the data set. Results from the data set were then extracted by counting the number of times a category appeared and also by observing contradictory evidence, which provided exceptions to supporting ideas.

In this study, major themes that emerged from the data collected are presented without any attempt to formulate a theory. Trustworthiness of results includes a careful analysis that data and not biases or preconceptions dictated the conclusions of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Initially three individuals were contacted through
telephone conversations and were invited to participate in
the study. All three women were interviewed and each
provided at least two additional referrals. Two of the
referrals did not qualify for participation in the study,
but nonetheless provided additional referrals to other
possible participants.

All interviews took place in the respondents' homes.
At the time of the interview the purpose and procedure of
the study were explained to each participant, each
participant was then asked to sign an Informed Consent
Form (see Appendix B). Interviews lasted between
forty-five minutes and one hour and thirty minutes. All
interviews were completed during a two-month period.

A total of 16 Latina women over the age of eighteen
were interviewed for the study. Respondents were
approximately 18-30 years of age, had a high school
diploma or GED, and were enrolled in a higher education
institution. Sixty-nine percent of participants were
single mothers, 25% were married, and 6% were divorced.
The majority of single mothers, 31.25%, lived on their

own, 18.75% lived with their mother, and 6.25% lived with both parents.

The most important financial support available during and after the pregnancy for 43.75% of participants came from parent support. Twenty-five percent of participants reported self-employment was their most important financial support and 18.75% reported benefits from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) was the most important financial support available. Only 2 of the 16 participants reported being financially supported by their boyfriend.

All Latina participants reported their pregnancy was not planned. The most prevalent feelings shared by participants about becoming teen mothers included, feeling afraid, being upset at their behavior and the consequences that resulted from it, and feeling incompetent to parent a child at such a young age. Seventy-five percent of participants initially only confided in their mother about their pregnancy and 87.5% of the women interviewed reported their parent(s) became very upset at the pregnancy, but were nonetheless very supportive.

Questions pertaining to religion showed that the majority of respondents were Catholic 81.25%, while 18.75% were Christians. When asked what role religion played in

their family, 31.25% of participants reported their family was not active in their religion. Twenty-five percent of respondents claimed the family was somewhat active and 12.5% said the family was involved in their religion. Only 25% of respondents claimed the family was very active and involved in their religion. In response to what role religion played in the participant's overall life, most participants, 56%, claimed religion was not a part of their lives. Thirteen percent of respondents felt religion had some importance in their life, while 31% claimed religion played a very important part of their everyday lives.

Six of the Latina women interviewed did not provide any information about their fathers. Questions pertaining to the father were thus only extracted from information provided by the remaining ten participants. Family demographic questions indicated that fathers had less than a high school education and were employed in low paying jobs. While, participant information about their mothers showed 6.25% held an elementary level education, 43.75% a middle school education, and 31.25% had acquired some high school education. Only 12.50% of mothers had a high school diploma and 6.25% had some college education. Moreover,

56.25% held full time employments and 43.75% were reported as homemakers.

Questions regarding sibling educational achievement revealed 3 participants had a younger sibling also attending college and only one respondent indicated that an older sister had formerly acquired a baccalaureate degree.

Parental characteristics reflected 68.75% of participants characterized their family's value system as typical of Latinos. Most prominent responses included clearly defined gender roles, father as head of household and the family provider. While, the mother was characterized as the nurturer who was responsible for parenting and the household, but took a strong role in family decision-making.

Expectations for behavior were rated as strict and were defined as set rules and consequences for inappropriate behaviors. Family's value on education proved positive for both parents. Forty-four percent of participants stated their mother highly valued their education by supporting and encouraging them to go to college. While, 38% stated their mother valued their education but did not encourage college attendance.

Questions pertaining to father's value on education also showed that 31.25% expressed their support and encouragement toward college attendance. When asked which parent offered the greatest influence on the development of educational goals 68.75% of participants attributed college attendance to their mother. None of the 16 participants experienced any parental expectations to put aside their studies in order to care for their child. Similarly, 62.5% of respondents were not concerned about continuing their studies after their pregnancy, although, 37.5% experienced uncertainty about their capacity to handle both parenting and school responsibilities.

Respondent's school characteristics showed 81.25% of participants reported having a significant teacher, who showed interest and concern for them, during their schooling. These teachers were positive and supportive, and motivated them to continue with their education. Similarly, 43.75% of respondents stated a significant teacher was the person who most influenced them to set educational goals.

Respondent's college characteristics indicated that 43.75% of participants decided to attend college during high school and 25% of respondents became motivated only after their child was born. Those respondents who became

motivated only after their child was born reported they wanted to provide a better life and more secure future for their child. The majority of participants, 93.75%, decided to attend their particular college only because it was close to their home.

Forty-four percent of participants claimed their high school counselor assisted them with college information, including enrollment and financial aid applications. Sixty-three percent of respondents stated college attendance would not be possible if financial aid was not available to them.

Fifteen of the 16 respondents claimed the support of their family has helped them get where they are at academically. Seventy-five percent of participants attributed friends and family to have positively influenced their educational goals. While, thirty-eight percent considered the family to be their most valuable support system and the reason they are able to manage both school and parenting.

When asked what important characteristic in their mother most helped them get where they are at academically responses consisted of, mother's strong character, her self-confidence and independence, her dedication to goals and dreams, and her high self-esteem. While, respondents

claimed their father's most important characteristic consisted of, a strong work ethic, high self-efficacy, responsibility and dedication, perseverance, high-expectations, and strong motivation to improve oneself.

The three most important supports available to participants that have allowed them to stay in school were indicated as friends, family, and the availability of subsidized child-care. Seventy-five percent of respondents indicated they had never experienced a conflict between caring for their child and continuing with their education due to the availability of child-care, family support, and the absence of a serious illness.

Inner strengths and abilities believed to have helped respondents succeed academically were, motivation, following goals, confidence in self, high work ethic, strong character, academic values, independence, persistence, and a responsibility to provide a better and more secure future for their child. When respondents were asked if their career path would be different had they not become teenage mothers, 37.5% disagreed, while 31.25% agreed by expressing they would have finished college sooner and would be established in a career.

In describing what motherhood meant to them, respondents expressed it provided satisfaction and enjoyment, a motivation to lead a positive life, and an inspiration to strive for their academic goals.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Results in this study revealed that individual strengths along with support from family and friends strongly contributed to the academic achievement of Latina participants. These findings were found to support Gandara's (1982) qualitative study that concluded that family support and individual persistence contributed most to the academic success of Mexican American women. Results from this study further supported that for most Hispanics, the family continues to be the most important resource for coping with life's stresses, regardless of the length of time in the United States, social class, religious preference, or geographical area of residence (Sotomayor, 1991).

Individual characteristics that mediate barriers to higher education in Latinas (Vasquez, 1982), were also supported by results of this study. Personal motivation, positive self-expectations, and high self-esteem were found to be important contributors to academic achievement. Moreover, results supported Anderson and Johnson's (1968) findings that concluded that while social and economic indices do relate to academic performance,

the achievement motivation of Latina students mediate the otherwise deleterious effects of socioeconomic status.

In support of Vasquez's (1982) findings, respondents attributed their participation in higher education to their mother's support and encouragement and value placed on their educational goals. Participation in college was further attributed to a significant teacher as well as the assistance of a high school counselor who assisted them with the college enrollment process and acquisition of financial aid funds.

Parental demographics also proved low levels of parental education, occupational position, and family income. It was found that only 31.25% of parents regularly attended parent and teacher conferences, while 68.75% of parents did not participate due to a language barrier. Furthermore, even when parents had limited education and had limited contact with teachers and school activities, they were still reported as the most important support system to contribute to the respondent's educational resilience.

Cultural expectations that participants felt they had to overcome to succeed academically were, not conforming to gender role expectations, including marital expectations, overcoming negative stereotypes attached to

Latino women, and having to work extra hard at proving their abilities and skills. Cultural expectations that participants felt could impede other Latinas from educational accomplishments were, conforming to gender role expectations, accepting marital expectations, putting other's needs before theirs, tolerating machismo, and getting caught up with stereotypes that cause barriers to personal and educational success.

As found by Vasquez (1982) Latinas often experience stressors resulting from sex role conflicts due to the traditionally high value placed on the family, the struggle between the pursuit of an education, and the traditional role of wife. However, it was found that traditional role expectations were not followed by participants in this study and that the stresses of balancing family, school, and work responsibilities were relieved by strong family support and encouragement.

Furthermore, participants in this study were reported as first generation college students, to be enrolled in a community college, and attending college on a part-time basis. Thus, supporting the American Council on Education (1985) who found that a combination of socio-cultural factors, including value orientation and language, play an important role in a Hispanic student's decision to go to

college. Moreover, the American Council on Education found that the above factors contribute to a higher proportion of Hispanic students attending community college and attending college on a part-time basis than their non-Hispanic peers.

Positive identification with one's language and culture was expressed through positive expressions of family characteristics and values, including the family's value on education that shaped educational goals. Participant responses supported Szapocznick, Kurtines, and Fernandez (1980) research which found that youth who adapt to the host culture while retaining involvement with the culture of origin were better adjusted than youth who rejected their culture of origin.

Furthermore, results from this study supported Marin and Marin's (1991) findings on the label preference of Hispanic populations. It was found that first generation participants preferred to use the label "Mexican" or "Guatemalan" to define themselves, while second generation Latinas identified themselves as Mexican American. Moreover, for the purpose of this study all sixteen participants agreed on "Latina" as opposed to Hispanic as the ethnic label of choice.

Limitations and Recommendations

The limitations and results of the current study lead to several recommendations for future studies on the academic achievement of Latina women. One limitation to this study was the small representation of Latina women who experienced a teenage pregnancy. The sample of Latina women in this study is limited to a small segment of Latinos and is not representative of the overall Latino population.

Because there are important differences across individuals and among specific subgroups based on such characteristics as national origin, migration and generational history, religious faith, and linguistic preference, results from this study should not be generalized. Future studies that include a more representative sample are needed to better understand the strengths and needs of Latina college women.

Further limitations to this study include the validity of acculturation levels. Measures used for acculturation level include ethnic identity, generational history, and length of residence in the United States. Language used in answering the interview was not used to measure acculturation level, but it is important to note that all participants were fluent in the English language.

Moreover, all participants had completed high school in the United States and have been residing in the United States for more than ten years. Since a published acculturation scale was not used to measure acculturation level in this study, information regarding acculturation is subjective.

In summary, this study should only be seen as one step in the attempt to explore and gain a better understanding of the educational resilience of Latina women. Recommendations for future research include greater exploration of individual characteristics as well as family strengths that contribute to the educational achievement of Latina mothers.

Implications

Since it was found that individual strengths along with support from family and friends strongly contributed to the academic achievement of Latina women, identifying those support systems that act as buffering factors which help an individual overcome challenges and adversities must become central to our interventions.

Through awareness and recognition of personal and cultural strengths in Latinas, social workers can help mitigate the hardships of teenage pregnancy along with

existing barriers to higher education. Given the wealth of knowledge and skills that social workers posses in dealing with environmental issues, the profession has a unique opportunity to make a contribution to enhance the educational outcomes for Latino youth. Moreover, social workers posses knowledge of systems and organizational theory, human development, and have expertise in assessing the impact of environmental stressors such as poverty on individuals and family functioning that can guide the way in which we currently work with Latino families (Curiel, 1991).

Moreover, Gorena (1996) conveys that research on Latinas is essential and that colleges and educators must become familiar with the Latina population, including looking at factors that positively affect the success of college Latinas and other women. Thus, the responsibility for improving access to higher education for Hispanic students is a shared one, requiring a coordinated, sustained effort not only by policymakers, social workers, and educators but, by the Hispanic community as well (Justiz 1995).

Consequently, because the persistence and complex problem to teenage pregnancy has no single or simple solution, strategies aimed at reducing pregnancy among

Latina teens must be multifaceted. The confrontation of barriers to academic achievement must become a responsibility for all individuals who are in positions to offer support as well as the ability to impact the environments in which such barriers occur.

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

Respondent's Demographic Data

1. Date of birth?
2. Place of birth?
3. Type of College attended: Years attended: Degree awarded:
4. What is your current occupation?
5. How old were you when you gave birth to your first child?
6. Was your pregnancy planned?
7. How do you remember feeling and thinking about becoming a mother?
8. How did your parents find out about your pregnancy and what was their reaction?
9. What was your most important source of financial support during and after your pregnancy?
10. Can you describe what being a mother means to you now?

Family Demographics

1. What was your father's occupation while you were growing up?
2. What was the highest grade in school completed by your father?
3. What was your mother's occupation while you were growing up?
4. What was the highest grade in school completed by your mother?
5. # Of siblings?   High school graduates?   College graduates?
6. What was the composition of your family at the time you finished high school?

Ethnic Identity

1. What is your parent's place of birth?
2. Are you first, second third, or fourth generation?

   First (parents and respondent born outside the U.S.)
   Second (parents born outside U.S. and respondent born in U.S.)
   Third plus (parents and respondent born in U.S.)

3. What do you identify yourself as? (Mexican, Mexican-American, etc.)

Religion

1. What was the religion practiced during your childhood?
2. What role did religion play in your family during your childhood?
3. What role has religion played in your life?

Parental Characteristics

1. How would you describe your relationship with your parents?
2. How often did you and your family do things together?
3. Would you characterize your family's value system as typical or atypical of Latinos?
4. How would you describe your parent's expectations for behavior?

The Family's Value on Education

1. What was your mother's attitude toward the value of education?
2. What was your father's attitude toward the value of education?
3. Which of your parents had the greatest influence on the development of your educational goals?
4. During your schooling did your parents regularly attend school conferences and meetings?
5. Did your parents ever indicate a need for you to put aside your studies after you had your baby?

Respondent's School Characteristics

1. During your schooling were there any teachers who were especially significant to you?
2. Do you recall having an important "role model"?
3. During your schooling were you involved in any extra curricular activities? (sports, clubs, leadership)
4. What was your grade point average in high school?
5. Who was the person(s)who influenced you most in setting your educational goals during high school?
6. When you found out you were pregnant, were you concerned about finishing your education?

College Characteristics

1. When did you make the decision to go to college?

2. What made you decide to attend your particular college?

3. Who helped you with the college enrollment process?

4. Who advised you on financial assistance, scholarships, and other types of economic assistance?

5. What has accounted for your full time or part time college attendance?

6. Do you think you would be in college if financial assistance was not available to you?

7. While attending college, who has influenced you the most in setting your educational goals?

Attitude characteristics

1. Do you think your career path would be different if you hadn't become a young mother?

2. Have you ever experienced a conflict between going to college and caring for your child?

3. Would you say the support of your family has helped you get where you are at academically?

4. What important characteristic in your father, would you say has helped you get where you're at academically?

5. What important characteristic in your mother that has helped you get where you're at academically?

6. What inner strengths and abilities do you think have helped you succeed?

7. Who would you consider to be your most valuable support system?

8. What do you consider to be the three most important "supports" available to you, which help you stay in school?

9. Can you think of any traditions or cultural expectations that you have overcome to get where you are at educationally?

10. Can you describe any cultural or traditional beliefs that may impede other Latina mothers from succeeding into higher education?

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

This study in which you are about to participate in is designed to investigate individual characteristics and characteristics within the Latino family that enable college achievement in Latina teen mothers. This study is being conducted by Gabriela Alonso, graduate student in social work, and is under the supervision of Dr. Jette Warka, with guidance from Dr. Rosemary McCaslin Professor of Social Work at California State University San Bernardino. In this study you will be asked to participate in an interview and answer questions pertaining to personal attitudes and behavior, as well as your home environment. The interview will take about one hour and there are no serious risks involved by your participation in this study.

Please be assured that any information you provide will be held in strict confidence by the researcher and all results will be reported in-group form only. The Department of Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board of California State University, San Bernardino, has approved this study. Any questions regarding this study can be addressed to Dr. McCaslin at (909) 880-5507. A report of the results will be available on the Cal State San Bernardino campus after June 2001.

Please be assured that any information you provide will be held in strict confidence by the researcher and all results will be reported in-group form only. Please understand that your participation in this research is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty, and to remove any data at any time during this study. By placing an "X" on the line below, I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and understand, the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate. I acknowledge that I am at least 18 years of age.

Sign with an "X" only _____   Date _____

APPENDIX C

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

The study in which you have just participated in was designed to investigate individual characteristics and characteristics within the Latino family that enable college achievement in Latinas who have experienced a premarital teen pregnancy.

The information gathered from this study will assist in identifying contributing factors that enable college achievement in young Latina mothers. Such factors can then be emphasized and built upon to help other individuals who face similar challenging situations.

Please be assured that the information you provided will be held in strict confidence. If you have any questions regarding this study or have concerns about your participation in this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Rosemary McCaslin, Professor of Social Work at (909) 880-5507. Due to the nature of the study, we ask that you not reveal any information about the study to other potential participants as this may bias the results of the study.

For questions regarding support services, please refer to the attached list of resources and referrals.

<u>Counseling Resources</u>

California State University San Bernardino Psychological Counseling Center
(909) 880-5040
Health Center Room 136

San Bernardino Valley College Student Counseling Services
(909) 888-1153

San Bernardino Family Services Counseling
(909) 886-6737

Riverside Community College Student Counseling Services
(909) 485-6100
(909) 571-6104

Riverside Family Service Association
Individual and Family Counseling Services
(909) 686-3706

APPENDIX D

DEMOGRAPHICS

Occupational Status of Latina Participants

Respondent	RESPONSES										Total
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	
1		X									1
2	X										1
3								X			1
4										X	1
5	X										1
6	X										1
7						X					1
8	X										1
9				X							1
10	X										1
11			X								1
12	X										1
13					X						1
14							X				1
15									X		1
16								X			1
Totals	6	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	16
Percentages	37.5	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	12.5	6.25	6.25	100.00%

LEGEND

A. Full time student
B. Waitress
C. Receptionist
D. Sales clerk
E. Legal assistant
F. Medical biller
G. Office manager
H. Instructional assistant
I. Probation officer
J. Elementary school teacher

APPENDIX E

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUPPORT

SYSTEM

Most Significant Support System

Respondent	RESPONSES					Totals
	A	B	C	D	E	
1		X				1
2	X					1
3		X				1
4				X		1
5		X				1
6	X					1
7				X		1
8		X				1
9	X					1
10			X			1
11				X		1
12			X			1
13	X					1
14	X					1
15	X					1
16					X	1
Total	6	4	2	2	1	16
Percentages	37.50%	25.00%	12.50%	18.75%	6.25%	100.00%

LEGEND

A   Both Parents
B   Mother
C   Grandmother
D   Husband/Boyfriend
E   Friends

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