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LATINO EMANCIPATED FOSTER YOUTH
PERCEPTIONS

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
Minerva Barcenas


June 2004

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6/2/05
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research project was to assess the strengths and challenges of Latino emancipated foster youth. Face-to-face interviews with Latino emancipated foster youth took place. The content of the interview focused on Latino emancipated foster youth perceptions of their life here in America. The factors that were looked at were as follow: important factors, challenges face upon existing the foster care, independent living program assistance and suggestions, future plans, and connection to the community and resources, acculturation, and strengths. This research effort has enhanced our understanding of factors that contribute to independent living among Latino emancipated foster youth. Equally importantly, these factors were used to develop a profile of foster Latino emancipated youth.

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I have not come this far without the loving support of my family, friends, and Professors. A mi familia quien siempre han estado a mi lado, les agradezco por todo su amor y carino. Muchisimas gracias por todo realmente estoy muy afortunada de tenerlos como mi familia. Le doy gracias a mi hermana Paty y Louis quienes siempre me brindaron su amor y apoyo financiero en el verano. In the same way I'm forever grateful for the friendship and encouragement from my two roommates Daphne and Pereiza, thank you. All in all my family and friends have pulled me through the hard times when I just didn't feel like writing anymore especially since writing is not my cup of tea. But in the end it was all worth it because I got the opportunity of meeting ten courageous outstanding emancipated foster youth. I will never forget their words and their voices thus I will be a more understanding and empathetic social worker toward emancipated foster youth.

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there that I learned how societies are developed and what are the means that drive societies. I also want to thank my graduate professors who were ever so supportive throughout my graduate studies. I was blessed with many good professors such as Tom. Thank you Tom! You are an inspiration to me because I've never had a professor who saw so much potential in all his students. I will never forget you. I will pass the baton to others as you have done for me. Whenever I think of you I think of Empowerment. Furthermore, I'm forever grateful to Dr. McCaslin for seeing me through in writing this thesis. Even though you are so scholastically knowledgeable you are still very down to earth. I admire that of you. Another professor I won't forget is Dr. Taylor, thank you Dr. Taylor for your smiles and encouragements that you provided us all. When school seemed overwhelming you somehow manage to make us laugh. Finally but not the least is Dr. Liles and Jane thank you for being so understanding and helpful. And even though Dr. Doe you are no longer here at CSUSB. Thank you for providing me with the opportunity of working at your side with the city of Highland. I realized that my thesis came about through the inspiration of many which I crossed paths with in undergrad and graduate school.

DEDICATION

This thesis I dedicate to all the emancipated foster youth especially to the ten Latino emancipated foster youth who participated in this research project. Thank you for sharing part of your life with me. It was a privilege and honor to have this opportunity. Your stories have provided us all a better profile of Latino emancipated foster youth.

I only wish good things to all of you that you may excel in whatever you set your mind on.

Remember this Bible text:

"For I know the plans I have for you... plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Foster care Latino immigrant adolescents, on emancipation, have many obstacles before them because of cultural barriers. For these adolescents, the future is a challenge.

Immigrants throughout U.S. history have faced difficulties in assimilating into American society and darker skinned immigrants have had a harder time assimilating than others. In America, the dominant group is the White/Anglo-Saxon/Protestant majority. Since 1815, they have appointed the English language and customs, along with their ideas regarding commerce, law, government, and religion as the dominant culture (Lemay, 2000). For newcomers, assimilation is not easy, especially if they happen to be dark skinned.

Contrary to assimilation theory, most Latinos do not become more like the native born population. Many of them face barriers acquiring social capital; thus they don't become less distinct socioeconomically (Lemay, 2000). In addition, poverty seems to prevail among the Latino population; Latino poverty appears to be linked to their

low occupational background and low levels of education (Lemay, 2000). As a Latino immigrant adult, it is hard to acculturate into American society as well as rise above poverty.

The probability of an emancipated foster Latino adolescent immigrant facing these challenges is very high. Many never manage to build strong relationship with their immediate family after they leave foster care.

Immigrants may experience a sense of loss and confusion over their sense of identity and self-worth when integrating into the American society. The longer the migratory process and distance between their original country and new country, the greater the adjustment difficulties (Mortland & Egan, 1987). Our study demonstrated that migrant youth experience an increased risk of physical and mental illness. It was also found that it becomes harder for immigrants to adjust if they have less information and resources available to them to deal with the situations and events by which they have been engulfed (Mortland & Egan, 1987).

Yet facing cultural barriers is only part of their troubles. They also have to face the difficulty most foster adolescents face after emancipation such as lack of

housing, minimum wage jobs, high cost of living, or scarce resources to move up economically.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to obtain a profile of San Bernardino Latino foster emancipated youth regarding their positive and challenging experiences. The main focus of the study was on emancipated youth and immigrant acculturation. This study examined what kinds of programs and factors have had the most success in enabling foster youth to become independent adults.

The age span from 17 to 22 demarcates the transitional period that immediately precedes early adulthood. Human development theory suggests that it is an important transitional period in the life cycle (Mech, 1994). It is a time that is characterized by the uncertainties that adolescents face in learning how to respond to a series of new and unfamiliar developmental challenges. According to Mech (1994), some of the issues that foster care adolescents face are associated with independent living, deciding on a career direction, personal relationships, responsibility for decision-making, and the acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary for adult living. It is important that

the child welfare system understand these needs that foster Latino immigrant youth experience during the emancipation process.

Mech and Fung (1999) discovered in their study that two-thirds of foster youth who were in less restrictive placements attended post secondary education versus the one third that were placed in highly restrictive settings. Finding factors that influence foster youth in a positive way in becoming independent adults is crucial for the social worker and social service community. Having an increased awareness of the positive and negative factors that affect the lives of foster youth can provide a better perspective for the child welfare system, social workers, and social services, to develop more effective emancipation programs.

It is important to understand and address the adaptability challenges of foster Latino youth. Emphasis is placed on foster Latino youth, since this population is increasing. Today, the growth rate for Latinos is 13%, and by the year 2010, Latinos will represent 20% of the United States population (Coohey, 2001). Empowering Latino youth will prove beneficial to both society and Latino youth.

Therefore, this study consisted of interviewing foster Latino emancipated youth regarding their positive

and challenging experiences in foster care in the San Bernardino County. This study provided valuable data that will assist the child welfare system, social workers, and social services in providing effective emancipation programs that meet the needs of foster youth. Ideally the researcher would have preferred to interview Latino immigrant emancipated youth. But due to the minimal number of Latino immigrant emancipated foster youth and the difficulty in locating them, this study focused on Latino emancipated youth.

Data collected in this study were obtained through interviews with foster Latino emancipated youth that live in San Bernardino County. The interview questions were aimed at the perceptions of foster Latino emancipated youth. Data collected were used to assess the strengths and challenges that foster Latino immigrant youth may experience. This design provided a profile of foster Latino emancipated youth.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

This study examined the strengths and challenges that foster Latino youth face on emancipation. Research like this is needed so that social workers can prioritize in addressing foster youth's most important needs first. It

provided a better picture of the characteristics of Latino foster youth. Increased knowledge of foster Latino youth will increase awareness among social workers regarding biopsychosocial assessment and treatments plan, and will improve the emancipation process for foster Latino youth. Social workers with this additional research data will be able to advocate for the needs of foster Latino youth at the micro and macro levels. This study will also increase cultural awareness regarding the special needs of foster Latino youth.

This research determined whether foster Latino youths' needs are different from those of other foster youth upon emancipation, due to cultural barriers and difficulty acculturating into the American society. In this study there will be two questions as follow: "What are the greatest strengths foster Latino emancipated youth possess?" and "What are the greatest challenges that this population faces?"

concluded that the program did not sufficiently address the prior experiences of these youth with dysfunctional families and multiple losses in the past and present. Limited opportunities were offered for the fulfillment of their internal personal void created by their earlier life experiences (Timbelake et al., 1987).

Another study by Mech (1994) focused on the issues and needs that adolescents face upon emancipation. He discussed the following skills related to independent living: career directions, personal relationships, responsibility for decision-making, and acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary for adult living. Mech contends that part of assisting foster youth to transition into early adulthood consists of encouraging behavior, which is associated with self-direction, self-expression, personal initiative, and taking responsibility for one's decisions. According to Timberlake and Verdick (1987), adolescent personal histories and problems, flaws within the system, and the way they are shuffled from one placement to another, lead to a loss of continuity in the process of growing up. The transition does not occur in a vacuum, but includes such critical factors as social competence, self-direction, self-esteem, the acquisitions of values, standards of conduct, preparation in

life-skills, and interaction skills in the family, school, workplace, with peers, friends, neighbors, and in relationships with community organizations and religious institutions. In reviewing different studies Mech (1994) found a need for further research on: (1) education, (2) readiness for independent living, (3) transitional supports, (4) support networks (5) and caregivers as developmental resources.

Independent Living Programs

Mauzerall's (1983) provides data that can help current foster youth. Most of the teenagers in this study had lasting trauma from rejection due to never having experienced love or security. As a result, they had low self-esteem, and their behavior ranged from being passive-aggressive to resistive. A group approach was used in her study. The first group she observed was a group of seven older teenaged girls who met with their social workers for eight weeks in an educational group focusing on life skill development. A workbook was provided which included information about working papers, checking accounts, and employment applications. They also had discussions on strategies for renting apartments, budgeting, finding jobs, and successful interviewing.

Audiovisual equipment helped the teenagers to learn to interview effectively and improve their self-presentation skills. All group members improved in verbal skills, posture, eye contact, grooming, and poise; the teenagers also demonstrated increased confidence. The girls identified and addressed issues within the group. By sharing their feelings about foster care, self-esteem, identity, and independence, the teenagers were able to create a valuable support and resource to one another (Mauzerall, 1983).

The second group she studied was coed, and the group leaders interspersed values-clarification material throughout the course (Mauzerall, 1983). The discussions in this group were broad. Many foster youth spoke about what it was like to go to a new home and leave a home. A large number of them had a huge gap in their life history. Mauzerall states the following in her study: "This process of putting together the pieces of their past and present gave support to the effort toward independence of the group as a whole."

Her conclusion is that independent living is a tumultuous process for troubled foster youth. It is a time when they may have recurrent fears of separation, and struggles toward identity (Mauzerall, 1983).

Hawkins, Meadowcroft, Trout, and Luster (1985) studied a foster family-based treatment for troubled children and youth. The treatment model was focused on treating troubled youth individually in a normal family setting versus treating youth in a group home. The program is called Positive Responsible Individual Desiring an Education (PRYDE). In this program parents were selected and trained to address issues that each child or youth is facing (Hawkins et al., 1985).

Pryde has demonstrated a viable alternative to institutionalization for extremely difficult to treat youths. In this study, 82% of the youngsters discharged were successfully returned to communities, either to their families or independent living. The Pryde model of foster-based treatment provided alternatives for treating seriously disturbed and disturbing youngsters in a minimally restrictive setting, an alternative that provides a normal family life (Hawkins et al., 1985).

Mech and Fung (1999), focused on placement restrictiveness, and how it correlated with educational achievement among emancipated foster youth. Data were collected on 171 foster youth in Illinois. All of them were in an independent living program; the authors used various methods to calculate the cumulative restrictive

levels of various living arrangements. Then, at the age of 21 years old, a follow-up educational progress report was collected. Their findings showed that two-thirds of emancipated youth that were in less restrictive placements gone on to post-secondary education. As for the foster youth that were in more restrictive placement settings, only one-third of them pursued post-secondary education.

Barth and Courtney (1996) demonstrated pathways of foster youth following emancipation. They sampled 2,653 foster youth in California who had spent at minimum of 18 months in care prior to discharge. Data were derived from Children's Services Archive (CSA) at the University of California, Berkeley.

Their findings showed that multiple moves in the foster care system are correlated with an increased likelihood of unsuccessful discharge outcomes. There was a significant pattern in the sample where youth who were moved a lot tended to have a history of running away and not reuniting with their family (Barth & Courtney, 1996). Foster youth who never reunited with their family remained unsettled. Also, the longer the foster youth remained in foster care, the less chance he or she had of successfully discharging from the foster care system. Group home foster

youth that have a higher level of emotional or behavioral problem disturbances were more likely to be incarcerated.

Foster youth that had a smooth transition were the youths that were placed with kin. Things to take into consideration are the lengths of stay in foster care, kinship, and instability of not reuniting with their families.

Adolescence Immigrants

Adjusting to a new society and environment can bring adolescents potential distress and malfunctioning (Sharaga & Slonim-Nevo, 2000). According to Sharaga and Slonim-Nevo, immigration is a difficult process, since immigrants face several barriers such as learning a new language and new behavioral patterns. Immigrants also have to make new friends and find a job. These changes in an immigrant's life promote many kinds of internal and external stresses. According to Sharaga and Slonim-Nevo's studies, these stresses are factors that may cause many immigrants to have physical and emotional difficulties (Sharaga & Slonim-Nevo, 2000). They found more research suggesting that immigrant adolescents demonstrate learning disabilities, psychological and social difficulties.

Levels of Adjustments

Eyou, Adair, and Dixon (2000), reported that New Zealand school counselors and other mental health professionals noticed an adverse association between migration and minority status, affecting the psychological adjustment of Chinese immigrant in New Zealand.

Enyou, Adair, and Dixon (2000), also found that first generation adolescent Chinese immigrant cultural identity was correlated with their psychological adjustment. Four adolescent groups were identified in their study: assimilated, integrative, marginalized, and separated groups. Integrative adolescents that associated with the New Zealand culture had a higher self-esteem than the youth that separated or had marginal association with the New Zealand culture. But it is important to question whether the high self-esteem influenced the youth to culturally identify or whether the integration increased the youths' self-esteem (Enyou, Adair, & Dixon, 2000).

In this study, depression varied among the adolescents groups: the youth that completely assimilated with the New Zealand culture had higher levels of psychosomatic symptoms than all other groups. They concluded that cultural identity has important implications for the adolescent's psychological

adjustment. For this reason, it is important that parents, schools, and mental health professionals assist adolescents to build a strong identity as well as an association with the mainstream society (Enyou, Adair, & Dixon, 2000). Their findings also suggested that adolescents should maintain a close relationship with their Chinese ethnic group. Another recommendation was that in order to promote integrative youth, the approach must focus on attitudes, behavior, and identity exploration. The outcomes of this approach will not only provide psychological well-being but also improve the relationships between immigrants and natives.

Adolescent Immigrants and Education

In 1988 the U.S. Census Bureau predicted that by the year 2000, 33 percent of the school-age population would be minority children (Brown & Chavkin, 1992). In a study by Brown and Chavkin (1992), a description was provided of a coalition in which the business community, social services agencies, and families collaborated to reduce the high drop out rate in schools. This program consisted of parent involvement in education, teacher training, case management, cultural sensitivity, and mentorship programs.

The results of this multiethnic program provided increased awareness of community resources, and more knowledge of the educational system. In addition, people learned to be more flexible, as well as participate in collaborative planning, and most importantly, they all had one mission, which was to improve the quality of education for minorities (Brown & Chavkin, 1992). The results of this study suggested that the success of the coalition was due to the emphasis on multiethnic family-school-community collaboration.

Informal Support for Latino Families

According to Burnette (1997), grandparents have served in the past as primary nurturers to children whose parents are unwilling or unable to care for them. Her research implied that Latinos have a strong perception of family commitment. Latinos have high levels of familial support and tend to live geographically closer to family than Caucasians. The role of Latina grandmothers may be changing, however, from a maternal role to a caretaker, due to changes in acculturation, socioeconomic and labor market conditions (Burnette, 1997).

According to Burnette (1997), the overall outcomes of acculturation in immigrant Latino families are unclear.

She mentions that there are studies which associate acculturation with increased family dysfunction, and personal disorganization such as teen pregnancy, deviant behavior, and drug use.

Unfortunately, Latina grandmothers' role has changed from being only a nurturer to a childcare provider and financial supporter. There seems to be a trend of increased responsibilities for the Latina grandmother (Burnette, 1997). In this study, the family members allowed some time out for the grandmother, helped decrease the stress and anxiety of the grandmother. Other sources of support included church, grandparents support groups, senior centers, community centers, and grandchildren's schools (Burnette, 1997).

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Theories guiding this study are Erickson's developmental stage model and an integrative model of family development theory. Erickson's psychosocial model along with attachment theory emphasizes the importance of an individual's developmental stages that affect their well being (Castro & Kirst-Ashman, 2001). These theories can help us understand why so many foster youth have become troubled. Attachment theory and Erickson's

developmental theory explain how the dissociation and separation from their birth parents have impacted their lives psychologically and socially. When a child does not bond with his or her parents at a very young age, the results can be devastating. Children that don't attach or successfully complete the basic trust versus basic mistrust stage have a hard time bonding or trusting others in relationships. Both theories explain why foster youth have psychosocial issues and are not competent in this area.

The social development model provides a culture perspective and a basis for intervention. According to Shapiro (1984), this model does justice to the complex factors contributing to Latino child and family development under circumstances of migration and cultural change. A social development perspective suggests that developmental transitions are powerful opportunities for altering the balance of stresses and supports so as to improve outcomes (Shapiro, 1984). The social developmental model provides a different perspective for practioners to see the strengths and challenges of the Latino families as an opportunity for them to grow together by the use of their own resources and community support. Through this model Latino families' qualities are taken into

consideration as resources such as the sense of responsibility for each other, affectionate ties with alternative caregivers, sibling care giving, and their strong religious faith.

Using all three theories, Erickson's psychosocial development, attachment, and social development theories can incorporate the individual and family perspective.

Ecosystem theory provides a broader perspective of people being in constant interaction with the environment as well as people (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2001). Therefore, foster youth's lives can be troubled or enhance by their environment. How much of a difference can social workers make in a foster youth's environment?

In the process of promoting a positive outlook on foster youth, it would be wise to use the strength-based approach as well. Through this perspective, as a change agent, one can focus more on the possibilities of the foster youth versus his limitations and assist him or her in mobilizing strengths, which could be their talents, skills, knowledge, capacities, and resources available to them (Saleeby, 1997).

Summary

A number of barriers inhibit the foster Latino immigrant adolescent in foster care. One of the main barriers is the lack of healthy psychosocial development. Its not surprising that they have trouble trusting people, since they have never had a stable home. Studies have shown that psychosocial and self-sufficiency development programs have enhanced the success rate for foster emancipated youth to overcome formidable social, behavioral, and educational deficits. Other studies have shown that foster Latino immigrant youths' biggest barriers are lack of education, poverty, and acculturation. It appears that a combination of programs that focus on cultural sensitivity can enhance foster Latino immigrant youths' self-esteem, as well as prepare them for their educational future. As for acculturation barriers, the schools, businesses, social services agencies, and the Latino communities need to collaborate to build a sense of belonging to the community, but also encourage cultural ties to ones own ethnic community.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this study, and the qualitative design will be explained in this chapter. It discusses the characteristics and size of the sample for this study. Also discussed in depth are the procedures of collecting data.

Study Design

This research project explored the strengths and challenges foster Latino youth faced during emancipation in San Bernardino County. The outcomes of this study helped develop a profile of foster Latino youth in San Bernardino County. The results of the study addressed two questions on foster Latino youth: what are the greatest strengths Latino foster youth possess? and what are the greatest challenges that this population faces? Social workers and social service agencies have gained deeper understanding of the needs of this particular population through the findings of this study.

The design of this study used semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. Ten Latino foster youth were interviewed, eight emancipated female Latina

and two male Latino emancipated youth were interviewed. All participants were selected from a list that Cameron Hills Aftercare. Out of a list of 36 names, these ten participants volunteered to participate. The interviews took place at the Department of Children Services, Starbucks, school, their homes, and the park. Participants' ages range from 18 to 20 years old and their time span in foster care range from 2 months to 7 years.

Sampling

The participants were foster Latino youth, which were active in the Independent Living Program or emancipation program of the foster care agency.

The participants were recruited from the San Bernardino Child Welfare department. Cameron Hills, the Independent Living Program, provided a list of Latino foster emancipated youth. The researcher then contacted each individual through a phone call. There was no preference regarding gender or religion. The requirements of this research were that participants be 18 years and older and that they were of Latino origin. A twenty-dollar gift card from Best Buy was given to each participant, for taking the time to participate.

Collection and Instruments

Data were collected through in-depth qualitative interviews. There were fourteen questions addressing the following areas: adjustments, challenges, Independent Living Program assistance and suggestions, future plans, support system, acculturation, and strengths. The specific questions that were asked are in Appendix A. The length of the interview ranged from 45 minutes to 1 hour: ten participants were interviewed.

The strengths of this study were that it allowed participants to express their own perceptions through open-ended questions. The weakness of this study was that the outcomes of the study cannot be generalized to all foster Latino immigrant youth in the US, since there are a small number of participants.

Procedures

Participants were contacted by phone and a brief explanation was provided to them on the purpose of the study. They were then invited to participate in this study. Some participants agreed to meet at the Department of Children Services office; one of them agreed to meet at her home, others at Starbucks, one at work, another at the park, and the last one agreed to meet at the school. The

time setting was scheduled at their most convenient time. Each participant was provided with an informed consent and debriefing form before they were interviewed.

Protection of Human Subjects

To insure the confidentiality of all participants, the list of names was used only to set up interviews. Once interviewed, numbers were used to identify participants. Interviews recorded or notes taken at interviews were the procedures used to collect data. After the study was completed, the data collected was destroyed. To further protect the confidentiality of the participants, there were no additional personal contacts with them.

Participants were debriefed on the purpose of this study and asked to fill out an informed consent before being interviewed. They were also notified that this interview was completely voluntary and that they could end it at any time. All participants were provided with the number of the researcher's supervisor to obtain the results of the study.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis was used to assess the strengths and challenges of foster Latino youth in this study. The data were collected in a narrative form and separated into

themes. These themes were identified through the process of separating the responses for particular questions into groups. The responses for each theme group were analyzed and summarized. The results of the analysis provided data on the strengths and challenges of the foster Latino youth, which enabled researcher to provide a thematic profile of perceptions of these youth.

Summary

This qualitative research project focused on the strengths and challenges of foster Latino youth. A qualitative analysis was used to develop a profile of foster Latino youth.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter covers the perceptions of foster emancipated youth experiences while in foster care. Their perceptions were obtained through face-to-face interviews in the location of the participants' choosing. The results of these interviews will be elaborated in this chapter as well the common themes.

Presentation of the Findings

Ten emancipated youth whom were formerly under the foster care were interviewed. All emancipated youth were eighteen years old or older. The participants were eight female and two male foster emancipated youth. Eight of them had participated in the Independent Living Program and two were not aware of these services. The interviews took place from March 23, 2004 to April 13, 2004. The following are the locations where the interviews took place. Four of the interviews were at the Department of Children Services office, three were at Starbucks, one at the park, and another at work and the last one was at the school.

The questions were separated into seven themes which are as follow: important factors, challenges face upon exiting foster care, Independent Living Program assistance and suggestions, future plans, connection to the community and resources, acculturation, and strengths. The responses were also categorized in seven themes.

Important Factors

Question 1, "How long were you in foster care?" The respondents varied as follow. One respondent was in foster care for a year, three other respondents were in foster care for three years and two other respondents were for six years. Another respondent was in foster care for four years, and one other youth was two years. The lowest time spent in foster care by one youth was two months and the longest time spent by another youth was seven years.

Question 2, "As a Latino foster youth, what were the most difficult adjustments in foster care?" The responses varied. Six of the respondents mentioned that the most difficult adjustments were dealing with different people, personalities, traditions, and different rules. The most obvious one was being away from their family. Two other respondents stated that it was hard for them to adjust culturally due to the food and differences in language. One Spanish-speaking participant stated that her foster

mom did not allow her to speak Spanish at her home.

Another participant elaborated more on her difficult adjustment:

Everything was difficult. What help me out was that some of my siblings were with me. My foster family was my dad's family. They did not want us at first, but once they found out they could get money, then they agreed to have us. As siblings we had rare contacts, secondary because my dad's family took out everything on us for our parents actions.

Another participant stated the following:

As a strong-headed Latina woman, I had to adjust to their standards. The homes that I was in were Black, Mexican, German/Mexican, and Cuban. It was hard to get along with the social worker. If anything it increase my cultural awareness.

Challenges Faced upon Exiting the Foster Care

Question 3, " What are the challenges you faced upon exiting the foster care system?" Six of the respondents' responses varied as follow. Some emancipated youth did not know what to do, had no guidance, others had a hard time finding an apartment and a full-time job. Overall one of the most common challenges for all was learning how to be on a budget. Two of them upon exiting went to live with their boyfriends. One of them describes her transition out of foster care as follow:

It wasn't a challenge, I wanted to get out, and the foster family I lived with did not trust me at all. I ran away to live with my boyfriend's

family. His family has provided me with a lot of support.

Another female emancipated youth describe her exiting as follow:

Returning home to mom, it was hard to leave my last foster home because I became attach to them. When I was in the foster care my mom spoke badly about me to my siblings and the social worker. My mom tried to manipulate me through my siblings. That is why I did not want to be in the same foster home with my siblings. She convinced the social worker that I was just being a troublemaker. I rarely saw my siblings when I was in foster care; now that we are out I'm very distance from them. My mother, I have always been distance from her since she's been drunk most of the time.

Another respondent stated that while she was in foster care, she became very attached to her foster dad's sister. She refers to her as her adopted mom, she elaborates in the following manner:

Before I left the foster care I returned to live with my uncle. He used to use all the money I received from Medi-Cal and would go to Vegas with his girlfriend every weekend. He would never buy me clothes; as for lunch money he would only give five dollars a week. His girlfriend would get so mad when he gave me five dollars. Whenever the social worker came to my house he would talk to my uncle and never to me. The social worker reported me as run away; I never ran away, I just decided that I didn't want to take that treatment so I went to live with my adopted mother. The social worker never analyzed who was helping me the most. He just went directly to speak with my family versus me.

Question 4, "What are your greatest needs now that you have exited the foster care system?" Six of the respondents stated that education was one of their greatest needs. Two of the respondent stated that finding a full-time or part-time job was very difficult. Five of them emphasized the need to have some kind of guidance, mentoring, and moral support or family support. Other needs mentioned by the respondents were not having transportation, difficulty obtaining drivers license, lack of financial resources, difficulty finding an apartment, and one respondent stated that her greatest need was obtaining her social security card and Medi-Cal card. This same respondent also stated that her adopted mom was her greatest need.

Independent Living Program Assistance and Suggestions

Question 5, "In what ways has the Independent Living Program helped you?" Five respondents stated that Independent Living program (ILP) had helped them learn how to manage their money. Two of them stated that ILP had helped them learn how to be more responsible. Another stated that the ILP was helping them find an apartment. Two emancipated youth stated that the ILP had or was obtaining a car through the car match. School wise, the

ILP had helped one of the emancipated youth in filling out the free application for federal student aid (FAFSA) application and another emancipated youth stated that the ILP had reimbursed her schoolbooks. Two of the respondents stated that they had benefited from the living skills classes provided by ILP. Two other reported that the mock interviews and the workshops on how to dress for an interview were very helpful. Another respondent stated that the class that showed them the different bus route was very helpful.

The CPR ten-week class was very helpful to another respondent. Overall the respondents stated that the extra money obtained by attending these classes was also helpful. One of the respondents that was dissatisfied with ILP stated the following:

ILP helped me once with the car match, and then they gave me promises. Like four different social workers, I hardly see them. I need them now more than when I was in foster care. They promise to provide me with some furniture; they never followed through on their promise. It's hard to get hold of a social worker.

Another respondent stated the following:

Emotionally the ILP has been good. Gregorian was very supportive, she would always check up on me to see how I was. She showed concern, tried to help me. The classes that they offered me helped me take my mind off other problems I had with my social worker regarding what my mom and siblings had told her.

Question 6, "As a Latino emancipated foster youth are there any need's that you would like the Independent Living Program to address?" Four of the respondents stated that they did not need any help them any more. One respondent stated, "No, they have helped me; enough it is a good program."

Four participants strongly stated their great need to know about financial schooling options, as well as guidance in choosing a career, and seeking out grants for school. Two emancipated youth mentioned the need for mentorship and guidance since they are on their own. Two others stated that it would be helpful if they were able to obtain their Medi-Cal and social security cards with more efficiency. One respondent stated the following:

It would be helpful if they gave self-esteem classes, when you're in foster care- first your parents don't want you, then your foster parents don't want you, then you just feel unwanted by parents and family because of money. You feel like property.

Future Plans

Question 7, "What is your highest level of education?" Three of the participants finish high school; two others finish up to 10th grade and 11th grade. Another foster youth was finishing 12th grade and four other foster youth were freshman in college.

Question 8, "Do you have plans for further education?" Five of them wanted to finish their bachelor's degree and wanted to continue on to graduate school. The following are the majors they would like to pursue: double major in philosophy and environmental or philosophy and political science, bachelor in electrical engineer, criminal justice to eventually work with the FBI; Master's in guidance and two wanted to obtain a degree in business. Three of the emancipated youth wanted to return to junior college, one in particular wanted to finish her prerequisite at a junior college to apply at UC Davis; then eventually she plans on applying to veterinarian graduate school. Another youth is looking forward to becoming a dental assistant. One of the participants that had just finish school up to tenth grade stated the following:

I plan to enroll this summer in some classes that are fun, possibly take some classes that involve children. Classes that teach you how to take better care of your children.

Question 9, "After you exit the foster care system, what is the one thing you wish to accomplish?" Overall, all of them wanted to finish their education, be successful, and get a stable job. About five of them wanted to have a family and one of these five stated she

wanted to provide good care for them. Two of them stated that they wanted to be able to support themselves. Another emancipated youth stated that she would like to pick a career related to children and take some drawing classes. An emancipated female youth stated she wanted to travel for a year and go to other countries.

Connection to the Community and Resources

Question 10, "Are you close to your family or someone in the community?" One male emancipated youth stated that he was close to his to his sister. Another stated that she was close to her sister and mom. The emancipated youth that saw her foster dad's sister as her adopted mom stated that she was very close to her adopted family. The other male emancipated youth stated that he was now closer to his mom and sisters than before he exited foster care. One youth stated that she was close to her boss, who has helped her a lot in the past. One of the youth elaborated as follow:

One of the foster families that I had, I consider them as parents. I do have contact with my mom, but most of the time I'm with my boyfriend's family and his friends. We live in a small town; my boyfriend's family knows the doctor, the chiropractor, and many people in the community.

Another emancipated youth stated the following:

I'm not very close to my biological family, my siblings go to the same school that I go to but we really don't talk that much. Although I am close with the faculty at school and the community, my teachers give me a lot of support and guidance.

Out of the ten respondents, two were not connected to any family, friends, or to the community. One of young lady stated the following:

I am not close to my extended family or immediate family, too much turmoil. I wish I could be close, but I've never felt I could talk to anyone. Whenever I have a problem, I just drive and listen to music.

Question 11, "What community resources do you find useful?" Five of them stated that Cameron Hills Aftercare classes were very helpful. Two of the four youth stated that the after care workers were very helpful. One youth stated that she really appreciated her after care worker Elaine because she took the time to help her go to a summer law camp. This summer law camp made a big difference in her life. Another youth out of these five stated that Cameron Hills Aftercare helped her obtain her car license. The career institute center in Victorville directed by Cameron Hills Aftercare staff was mentioned by one of the youth as being very helpful. Two of them stated that the transportation was very convenient. The library,

police department, amusement park, waterslides, recycling, and public bathrooms were found to be very useful. For one of them the school was very helpful, her teachers stimulated her to do better and to take different classes. Others reported that family and friends were useful. Support resources such as victim advocate services counseling were useful to two of the emancipated youth.

Question 12, "How much support or community resources do you find available?" One emancipated youth stated that her family and friends supported her a lot with her financial problems. Two of them stated that there was not enough community support. One of them stated the unemployment office was useful. Another emancipated youth suggested that the unemployment office should have a program specifically for foster youth to assist them in finding a job. One youth stated that Elaine, her social worker, was very helpful because she comes every month to help her plan her goals and present her with different schools she can go to. One youth elaborated as follows:

You have to have an initiative. Obviously I don't have a lot of money to go to college, but I know who to talk to. It's not so much what you know, but who you know.

Acculturation

Question 13, "As a Latino foster youth has it been easy to acculturate successfully in this foster home?"

Out of ten, only two emancipated youth stated that they had a difficult time. A foster youth had a difficult time because she had to get use to the food, language, and was told by her foster parents not to speak Spanish.

The other foster youth stated that when he entered foster care he was put in English speaking foster homes. At the time it seemed ok, but now that he has exited foster care he feels that he has lost part of his identity. As a child he use to speak Spanish with his mom and now he is having a hard time speaking Spanish. The other eight youth whom were either born here or came to the U.S at a very young age had no problem in acculturation. Four of the participants were biracial, their ethnicities included one who was half German and half Mexican, two who were half Caucasian and half Mexican and another one was half Asian and half Mexican. One emancipated youth stated that, as a foster youth, it was hard to acculturate into the Latino community. She elaborated in the following words:

It's been hard in foster care because of different cultures. Outside: Latino families have a hard perception of foster children. They

think we are bad kids and have bad parents. They are very close-minded, and have very old habits of thinking. It has taken me a long time to assimilate and assess issues.

Strengths

Question 14, "what are your greatest strengths?" Many of the responses were very inspiring. Motivation and the drive to move forward no matter what were very common responses. One young man described himself as having brainpower and being persistent. Another young lady described herself as a very strong person, not being one to give up, and always getting what she wanted. One young lady described herself as having optimism, and persistence to become someone and prove to everybody that they were wrong- "I'm sweet and determined." Being a young mother was one of the greatest strength of one young lady. Last but not least, one young lady explained that her leadership skills were her greatest strength. She stated the following:

I believe that my leadership skills come from being by myself. I have the ability of helping other people; obviously I have had my own troubles.

Summary

As stated previously these responses were collected through ten face-to-face interviews. The data collected

was gathered through note taking and audio taping and later analyzed. The purpose of the analysis was to obtain a profile of emancipated youth through the perspective of the emancipated youth.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This was a qualitative study designed to obtain a better profile of Latino emancipated youth. This study focused on the following: challenges emancipated youth face upon exiting the foster care; ILP assistance and ways that ILP can assist more; future plans; connections to community and resources; acculturation; and strengths of emancipated youth. Ten interviews were conducted to assess these issues.

Discussion

Sharaga and Slonim-Nevo (2000) suggested that adolescents may have potential distress and malfunctioning if they are introduced to a new society and environment. In this study potential distress and malfunctioning was not noted, possibly due to the fact that the researcher was not able to locate emancipated immigrant youth to interview as had been desired originally. Most of the respondents were born in the U.S.; the ones that were immigrants came to the U.S. at a very young age. Therefore, eight of the emancipated Latino youth did not

experience difficulty in acculturating into the foster care system.

Mech (1994) states that adolescents upon exiting the foster care need encouraging behavior, self-direction, self-expression, personal initiative, and taking responsibility for one's decisions. In this study the respondents did state that one of their greatest challenges was not having guidance, or mentoring. Other needs were not being able to find a job or an apartment.

Mauzerall's (1983) study of the life skills program that assisted foster youth is in agreement with the findings of this study. Eight out ten had benefited from the ILP extended classes that help them learn how to manage their budget, life skills, interviewing skills, filling out the free application for federal student aid and helping them obtain a car through the car match program.

All emancipated Latino youth interviewed had been placed in foster homes. Eight out ten of them have desire to pursue further education beyond high school. This study is in agreement with Mech and Fung study (1999), which suggested that two-thirds of foster youth that were in less restrictive placements had gone on to post-secondary education. The researcher noted that the only thing that

was preventing them from already being in post-secondary education was lack of guidance and mentoring.

According to Rycus and Hughes (1998), the amount of trauma to a child depends on the amount of time they are separated from their parents. The ten emancipated youth that were interviewed had foster care stays ranging from 2 months to seven years. However, the ones that were most affected were not the ones that were in foster care the longest. The two that were most affected were in foster care from one in half years to three years. The difference between them and the other eight was that they never were able to bond to anyone emotionally. One participant had never been close to her mom even before she was in foster care due to her mom being drunk most of the time. Even though the other participant's foster home was with her paternal biological grandmother, she was never able to feel at home due to their constant criticism toward her parents, her and her siblings. The eight other emancipated youth that were interviewed were able to create bonds with their biological families, friends, teachers, foster families, boyfriend's family or adopted families.

Kortemkamp and Ehrle (2002) suggested that children in child welfare are likely to have behavioral and emotional problems. All the participants in this study,

even the ones that did not close relationships with anyone, had a positive outlook on life and their future. They had a lot of strengths such as motivation, optimism, persistent, and a strong desire to not give up. As one emancipated youth said, "my parents may have given up on me, but I cannot give up on myself."

Limitations

This study is limited to a small population since it only consisted of ten interviews within San Bernardino County. Obviously it cannot provide a generalized profile of all emancipated Latino youth.

The youth that were interviewed were at one time receiving services from Cameron Hills Aftercare, which means the list from which the sample was drawn was not a random list from all of the emancipated Latino youth in San Bernardino County. Unfortunately, it was not possible to interview other emancipated Latino youth that may not have a home or a positive outlook as these respondents. Even so, it was possible to develop a profile of emancipated Latino youth that are striving to create a better future.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

In this study all emancipated youth were aiming toward a positive future; the one common denominator for most of them was that they all have built relationships with someone, although not necessarily their biological family. It is important to realize as social workers that keeping the family together is priority, but one has to realize other relationships are just as crucial. A mother may not have the most adequate home, or place to live, but if she has good attachment with her children, it may be beneficial for her children to be with her. Or perhaps the biological family is providing the child with basic needs but no emotional needs are being met. Social workers have to be ever aware of how that child is bonding with her or his parents. One cannot know how the child is doing just by word of mouth from the parents; one must know the child as well.

Further research should be done on mentoring programs that already exist. There is a great need for these young people to have someone to guide them and check up on them. Many of them are literally all alone; they need someone by their side more than ever since this a turning point in their life. Once the most successful mentoring programs

are discovered there should be a mentoring pilot project implemented as an extension of the Independent Living Program.

Conclusions

In conclusion, building a relationship with these young people and encouraging them to have strong connections with others is crucial. There is a strong need for educational guidance for this population. The Children's Service Department should provide, if it does not already, services to all emancipated youth that are seeking to go to post-secondary schools. These services include testing that will help them locate careers that are suitable to them. Assistance is also needed in applying for different schools, grants, and scholarships. These two suggestions are important because they will make a huge impact on their future.

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

1. How long were you in the foster care system?
2. As a Latino foster youth, what were the most difficult adjustments in foster care?
3. What are the challenges you face upon exiting the foster care system?
4. What are your greatest needs now that you have exited the foster care system?
5. In what ways has the Independent Living program helped you?
6. As a Latino emancipated foster youth are there any needs that you would like the Independent Living Program to address?
7. What is your highest level of education?
8. Do you have plans for further education?
9. After you exit the foster care system, what is the one thing you wish to accomplish?
10. Are you close to your family or someone in the community?
11. What community resources do you find useful?
12. How much support or community resources do you find available?
13. As a Latino foster youth has it been easy to acculturate in foster care?
14. What are your greatest strengths?

APPENDIX B
ONE PAGE PROPOSAL

March 9, 2003

Department of Children's Services
County of San Bernardino
1504 S. Gifford
San Bernardino, CA 92415-0021

To the Department of Children Services:

The purpose of this letter is to ask for permission to administer a research project entitled "Latino Emancipated Foster Youth." This research project is a requirement for graduation of Master of Social Work program at California State University, at San Bernardino. As a second year student, I will be serving as an intern this fall at Child Protective Services at the San Bernardino Office. My Supervisor will be Sally Richter, LCSW.

The purpose of this research project is to assess the strengths and challenges of Latino emancipated foster youth. Through this process this study will be able to develop and provide a profile of Latino emancipated foster youth. The data will be collected through face-to-face interviews with Latino emancipated foster youth. The content of the interviews will focus on the Latino emancipated foster youth perceptions related to the strengths and challenges that they face upon emancipation.

This research effort will enhance our understanding of factors that contribute to independent living among Latino emancipated foster youth. Importantly, these factors will be derived from Latino foster youth. Each interview will take approximately 45 minutes for the participants to complete. The data collection will be collected from March 11, 2004 to May 31, 2004. The results of this study will be available after July 16, 2004.

The rights and welfare of all the participants will be protected in this study. Participation by the participants will be completely voluntary and may withdraw at anytime. All participants that do decide to participate will sign a letter of informed consent. This study is a non-stressful and non-manipulative study on social workers perceptions.

In this study all participants will be identified by a number not by a name; therefore at all times the participants will be anonymous. All responses will be reported in-group form. A report of the results will be provided to Child's Welfare Services.

If the Department has any other questions or concerns, I may be contacted at (909) 799-1417. The Department may also contact my supervisor, Sally Richter, at (909) 386-1378, or my research advisor, Dr. RoseMary McCaslin at (909) 880-5507.

Respectfully,

Minerva Barcenas

APPENDIX C
AUTHORIZATION FORM

Dr. Rose McCaslin
Department of Social Work

California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, CA 92407-2397

To Dr. _____

This letter serves as notification to the Department of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino, that Minerva Barcenas has obtained consent from the Department of Child's Welfare Services, San Bernardino County, to conduct the research project entitled " Social Workers Perceptions on Foster Latino Immigrant Youth."

If you have questions regarding this letter of consent, you may contact

Cathy Cimbalo at (909) 388-0242.
Name/ Title Phone Number

Sincerely,

Signature

Date

Name (printed)

Director
Title/Position at DCS

APPENDIX D
CONFIDENTIALITY FORM

Project Title:
Social Workers Perceptions of Foster Latino Immigrant Youth

PUBLICATION

Minerva Barcenas will submit final drafts before publications of all printed materials, audio, visual aids, curricula, educational and training materials, and periodicals relation to this project for review, comment, and cause to determine if there is any information that would in any way identify a client or, in the opinion of the Director of Children's Services, would release invalid or inappropriate information. At least two copies of all printed material, audio visual aids, curricula, education, and training materials and periodicals developed pursuant to this agreement will also be filed with the Department Prior to Publication. All such materials developed under this agreement shall acknowledge the Department for its contributions.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Minerva Barcenas agrees to comply with the provisions of Section 10850 and 827 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, and Division 19 of the California Department of Social Services Manuel of Policy and Procedures to assure that:

- A. All records concerning any individual made or kept by the Department of Children's Services will be confidential and will not be open to examination for any purpose.
- B. No Person will publish or disclose or use or permit or cause to published or disclosed or used any confidential information pertaining to an applicant or recipient of services. Revealing or acknowledging an individual or family is receiving services under the terms of this agreement falls within the definition of disclosure and shall not be done for nay purposes. Minerva Barcenas agrees to inform all participants in this project that any person knowingly and/or intentionally violating the provisions of this paragraph is guilty of a misdemeanor.
- C. Nothing this section will be construed as relieving Minerva Barcenas of the obligation to make reports mandated by laws and regulations.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX E
DEBRIEF FORM/INFORM CONSENT

Latino Emancipated Foster Youth

Debriefing Statement

This interview you have just completed was designed to obtain the opinions about the strengths and challenges you face when you exit foster care. By sharing your opinions with me, I will be able to provide a clearer picture of who Latino emancipated foster youth are and what are some of their specific needs. This information will enhance our understanding of the factors that affect Latino emancipated foster youth.

Thank you for your participation and for not discussing the interview questions with other youth that are being interviewed. If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact Dr. RoseMary McCaslin at (909) 880-5507, the Social Work department of San Bernardino State University. If you are interested in the results of the study, there will be a copy of the study at Children Services of San Bernardino County in July 2004. John M. Pfau Library in San Bernardino State University will also have a copy.

INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to investigate the opinions of Latino emancipated foster youth. This study is being conducted by Minerva Barcenas under the supervision of Dr. McCaslin, Professor of Social Work. It has also been reviewed and approved by the Department of Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board of California State University San Bernardino.

In this study you will be interviewed; the interview questions will only pertain to your opinions on the strengths and challenges you face as Latino emancipated foster youth when you exit foster care. The interview should last approximately 45 minutes. You have the option of being recorded or not in this interview.

Please be assured that the information you share shall be strictly confidential. In this study you will be identified by number not by name; therefore at all times what you say will be confidential. All responses will be reported in-group form only. If you wish, at the end of this study you may receive a report of the results.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. The service you receive from the Independent Living Program will not be affected by your answers. If you have any questions, please call Rose Mary McCaslin at (909) 880-5507.

I acknowledge that I have been informed, and understand, the nature and purpose of this study, and I agree to participate. I am at least 18 years old.

_____ Agree to be interviewed

_____ Agree to be recorded _____ not recorded

Participant's Mark

Date

Researcher's Mark

Date

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