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Perceptions of social services among immigrants

Javier Martín Panameno
Carlos Morales

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PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL SERVICES
AMONG IMMIGRANTS

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
Javier Martín Panameno
Carlos Morales
June 2007
PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL SERVICES AMONG IMMIGRANTS

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

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ABSTRACT

This project focused on immigrants’ perceptions of social services and social workers. The study employed the post positivist paradigm. The project was conducted with legal and illegal immigrants who received services at Bilingual Family Counseling Service in the City of Ontario, CA. The participants in the study were men and women with ages ranging from 19 to 44 years old. All of them had come from Mexico or Central America. The analysis identified open codes, core categories and dimensions, and the relationships between them. The study found that the immigrants’ perceptions about social service agencies and social workers were multi-determined by at least three elements: knowledge, experiences, and attitudes. The dynamic interaction between experiences and attitudes shaped the immigrants’ perceptions. Most of the respondents had a positive attitude toward social workers and social service agencies. However, some expressed negatives attitudes. Social service agencies and social workers can work to change the negative perceptions into positive ones. The extent of the interventions can start at the micro level and reach to the macro level.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to God for his guidance and strength; to my mother Hilda, for her constant prayers; to my sister Marta for her unconditional support; to my wife Virna, for her patience and encouragement; to my three children Michael, Abraham, and Sarah; for their patience waiting for dad to graduate; to my cohort and professors for their camaraderie; and to Carlos for putting up with me for the duration of this project.

Javier Panameno
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CHAPTER ONE

ASSESSMENT

Introduction

This project focused on immigrants' perceptions of social services and social service practitioners. The study employed the post positivist paradigm. The literature review includes data about immigrants, immigrants' limitations to accessing social services, social services to immigrants in general, social services received by Latino immigrants, and the perceptions immigrants have about social services and social service practitioners. This study contributed to the body of knowledge of social work practice by researching the attitudes immigrants have about the services that are accessible to them, the attitudes derived from the contact they had with social service agencies and practitioners, and the attitudes they have toward social workers. With this additional knowledge, social workers may improve the quality of services provided for this population.
Research Focus and/or Question

This study is focused on immigrants' perceptions of social services and social service practitioners. Specifically, this project explored the knowledge immigrants have about the services that are accessible to them, the attitudes derived from the contact they had with social service agencies and practitioners, the attitudes immigrants have toward social workers, and the suggestions immigrants have regarding changes in the social services they receive.

Paradigm and Rationale for Chosen Paradigm

The study employed the post positivist paradigm in order to research the subject. According to Morris (2006) the post positivist researcher "takes an inductive exploratory approach to understanding an objective reality. To research a topic, he or she interviews people or observes naturalistic settings...Post positivists collect qualitative data through interviews, observations, and reviews of documents using an inductive exploratory approach" (p. 71).

The perceptions immigrants have regarding social services institutions and practitioners is the objective
reality that was explored inductively via interviewing the participants of the study. Qualitative data was collected. The data was analyzed utilizing a "bottom up" approach. An analysis of the data was developed and theory was built regarding immigrants' view of social service institutions and social service practitioners. The analysis also revealed suggestions about changes in the delivery of social services.

Literature Review

The literature review focused on the following areas: statistics about immigrants, problems for this population when accessing social services, social services to immigrants in general, services to Latino immigrants, and the perceptions immigrants have about social services and social service practitioners.

The first four areas are well covered in the literature consulted. However, there is a void regarding how the specific population of immigrants in Southern California views social services and social practitioners. The theories guiding the conceptualization in this study are discussed below.
Theoretical Orientation

Immigrants, like any other human beings, have needs. Regardless of their country of origin, people struggle to survive to the best of their abilities. Due to multiple factors found in third world countries, many people take the risk of coming to the United States illegally. In addition, many come legally but overstay their visas. Most immigrants come to the U.S.A. with the hope of improving their lives.

Once in the United States, many immigrants struggle to survive. One way of viewing the daily vicissitudes these people face is by considering Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1954; 1968; 1971). According to Maslow, human beings constantly strive to satisfy their needs. The needs (in ascending order) are physiological, safety, belongingness and love, self-esteem, and self-actualization.

Physiological needs include: breathing, food, water, sex, sleep, homeostasis, shelter, and excretion. Safety needs comprise: needs for stability, security, and predictability. Needs of belonging and love include: intimacy and affection given by friends, family, and lover. Needs of self-esteem comprise: self-esteem,
confidence, achievement, respect of others, and respect by others. The need for self-actualization encompasses: integrity, inventiveness, naturalness, problem solving, lack of prejudice, and acceptance of facts (Hergenhahn, 1984; Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2004).

Immigrants, as well as other populations, are seeking to satisfy their basic needs first (physiological, safety) and then move on to the other needs (belongingness, self esteem, and self-actualization). Many times, illegal and newly arrived immigrants have no choice but to take menial underpaid jobs in order to satisfy their basic needs such as food and shelter.

In addition, illegal immigrants cannot access many basic services provided to American citizens and legal residents. In this sense, immigrant populations may be denied basic services due to language and cultural and legal barriers making their survival in this country very difficult. In addition, many immigrants do not know how to access the services that may be available to them.

The Ecological Perspective derived from systems theory can also shed light on the issue of immigrants' survival in our society. According to Zastrow and
Kirst-Ashman (2004), individuals must have effective interactions with the surrounding environment in order to survive and thrive. Germain and Gitterman (1995) add: "Both person and environment can be fully understood only in terms of their relationship, in which each continually influences the other within a particular concept."

(p. 816). Immigrants face a greater number of challenges compared to native-born U.S. citizens when it comes to the interactions and relationships with the larger society. For immigrants, legal, cultural, and linguistic barriers serve as obstacles in order to interact successfully with the social environment here in the U.S. To compound matters, illegal immigrants lack basic documents that can help them navigate successfully in American society. The anti-terrorism laws enacted after 9/11 have made the acquisition of driver's licenses, passports, social security numbers, and bank accounts a challenging process. The wave of anti-terrorism atmosphere has been mixed with anti-immigrant sentiments in our society. Life has become harder for immigrants in the last few years.

In order to have a clear picture of the challenges immigrants face to meet their needs and navigate
successfully in the larger societal context, it is necessary to review some statistical figures along with the implications immigrants face when trying to access social services in the U.S.A. A short discussion will follow of the services to immigrants and their perceptions of social services and social service practitioners.

Literature Review

Statistics about Hispanic Immigrants

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2001) in the year 2000, there were 35.3 million Hispanics residing in the United States. Also, the Bureau notes that the largest percentage of Hispanics in the U.S.A. resides in California. The number of Hispanics in that state is about 10,459,616 or 31% of the total California population.

Recent efforts to curtail immigration (both legal and illegal) have not stopped the influx of immigrants into the U.S. In fact, "despite tougher border scrutiny after 9/11, a total of 7.9 million immigrants have come to the U.S.A. since 2000, more than in any other five-year period in the nation's history...Almost half,
or 3.7 million, entered illegally" (El Nasser & Kiely, 2005). In a survey of 4,836 Mexicans conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center it was found that “most of the estimated 6.3 million Mexicans who are in the U.S.A. illegally came because of family connections and better job opportunities here, not because they were unemployed or destitute in their homeland” (El Nasser, 2005).

The increasing number of immigrants poses great challenges for social services practitioners for today and the future. Popple (2000) quoting Morganthau (1997) and Sheppard (1999) explained that while in 1999, Hispanics comprised 11% of the U.S. population, by the year 2050 they will grow to become 25% of the population.

**Immigrants’ Access to Social Services**

Hispanic immigrants have access to a variety of social services. For example, in the medical area, they have access to emergency Medi-Cal, low cost dental treatment, and free planned parenthood. In the mental health realm, immigrants may access free or low cost counseling, victim and battered persons crisis counseling, and free or low cost alcohol/addiction programs. They also have access to a variety of other services including immigration/refugee legal aid, anger
management groups, homeless shelters, English as a Second Language classes, and self-help/support groups. However, many of these services are not used by immigrant populations due to ignorance of their existence (Lessard & Ku, 2003).

In addition, the state and federal governments have made sure during the years to enact limitations in the type of services immigrants can access, making life difficult for this population (Lessard & Ku, 2003).

Immigrants’ Barriers to Social Services

The large number of immigrants residing in the U.S.A. and specifically in California raises questions for social work practitioners about the multiple needs and barriers the immigrant population faces. Among the barriers to accessing social services are: legal status, lack of insurance coverage, and language limitations.

Legal Status

The legal status of immigrants affects the eligibility of this population for many services provided by either the state or federal governments. In general, legal Latino immigrants have a larger range of services available in comparison with undocumented Latino
immigrants (National Immigration Law Center, September 2005). For example, U.S. citizens are eligible for Medicaid and/or the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP); however an undocumented alien is not eligible for these services. On the other hand, a lawful permanent alien (a non-citizen with permission to live and work permanently in the U.S.) is ineligible to receive these services during the first five years in the U.S., but may receive emergency medical treatment during this period. Undocumented aliens are not eligible for Medicaid or SCHIP, but may enroll in emergency Medi-Cal care.

Adult immigrants sometimes fear revealing their illegal status and therefore do not enroll in emergency medical coverage, even though they may be eligible (Lessard & Ku, 2003). Undocumented immigrants are not eligible for food stamps; however, their children are fully eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) (Berk, Schur, Chavez, & Frankel, 2000).
Lack of Insurance

One of every five American children belongs to an immigrant family and these children usually lack health insurance (Passel, 2001; Lessard & Ku, 2003). According to Ruiz (2005), Hispanics are the ethnic minority group with the highest uninsured rate (33.4%). The rapid growth of this population in the U.S. will challenge social workers in the future (Castex, 1994).

Language Difficulties

One of the biggest barriers immigrants face in accessing social services is related to language difficulties (Lessard & Ku, 2003; Aspinal, 2005; Kretsedemas, 2005). A lack of good communication skills prevents undocumented aliens from knowing and accessing the services that may be available for them. For this reason, social workers need to be culturally competent and sensitive to the special needs of immigrants (Castex, 1994; Panos & Panos, 2000).

Immigrants' Perceptions of Social Services and Social Service Practitioners

Some studies focus on the importance of relationships in the social worker-client dyad (Russell &
White, 2001; 2002); others on health services use by
immigrants (Sowers-Hoag & Siddharthan, 1992; Sharlin,
1998); and others on the mental health needs of
Spanish-speaking Latinos in Southern California (e.g.
Kanel, 2002).

Russell and White (2001) found that a good
relationship between a social worker and the client is an
excellent predictor of a positive outcome in the services
being provided. Services to immigrants may be enhanced if
social workers have an understanding of their clients'
culture. The study also states that the social workers' relationships with their clients are benefit if social
workers are able to speak in the clients' language.

Other studies, Sowers-Hoag and Siddharthan (1992);
Sharlin (1998) have indicated that, even though
immigrants may be informed of the availability of social
services, they may still be reluctant to use them.

Sowers-Hoag and Siddharthan (1992) found that
elderly immigrants are less likely, compared to
native-born elderly, to be aware or utilize health
related social services. One possible reason may be the
lack of advertising of available services in the
immigrants' language.
Kanel (2002), found that Hispanics do not seek assistance from mental health service professionals because the immigrant population may not have insurance, may want to avoid being prescribed medication, or may not understand how to use utilize mental health services. Many immigrants may avoid the use of social services because of fear of disclosing their immigrant status (Lessard & Ku, 2003).

Besides the fear of disclosing their immigrant status, immigrants have multiple other reasons for not using social services. For example, Sharlin (1998) found that some immigrants were not accustomed to asking for assistance; others had a lack of confidence in governmental assistance, while others had a lack of information about the services. In Sharlin's study, "misinformation may have served to reinforce the immigrants' lack of confidence" (p. 465). In addition, lack of time may also contribute to the reluctance of immigrants to use the services (Kanel, 2002).

There is a gap in the literature regarding Hispanic immigrants' perceptions of social services and social service practitioners in the Southern California area. The immigrant population continues to increase in the
U.S.A. (and particularly in California); therefore, immigrants' perceptions of social services and social service practitioners need to be investigated.

This study focused on uncovering the knowledge and attitudes immigrants have regarding social services and social work practitioners, specifically social workers. This project was a basic type of research in which the purpose was to discover knowledge and build theory (Morris, 2006).

Potential Contribution of Study to Micro and/or Macro Social Work Practice

Social workers need to be aware of the attitudes and limited knowledge Latino immigrants have regarding social services and social service practitioners. Such awareness will help social workers improve the quality of services for immigrants at the micro and macro level. Individual practitioners, agencies, and institutions may use this study to improve the services provided to immigrants. Social service agencies may improve social workers understanding of what the immigrant population needs and knows regarding social services.
Summary

This project focused on immigrants' perceptions of social services and social service practitioners. The study employed the post positivist paradigm. The literature review revealed a void regarding the subject of study. This study contributed to the body of knowledge regarding social services provided for this population by exploring the knowledge and attitudes immigrants had about the services that were accessible to them; the attitudes derived from the contact they had with social service agencies and practitioners; the attitudes they had toward social workers; and the suggestions the immigrants interviewed had for the betterment of the social services being provided to them. This study should help in the planning and implementation of social services tailored to serve the immigrant population in Southern California at the micro and macro levels.
CHAPTER TWO

ENGAGEMENT

Introduction

The study was conducted with legal and illegal immigrants who receive services at Bilingual Family Counseling Service (B.F.C.S.) in the City of Ontario, CA. Formal permission to contact research respondents at the Bilingual Counseling Center was obtained by the intern/researcher of the site by contacting the Executive Director. She wrote a letter authorizing the study at the agency.

B.F.C.S. was founded in 1976. The agency runs many programs including: drug and alcohol treatment, Preserving Safe and Stable Families Program (PSSF), individual and group therapy, and school counseling. The clientele served includes a diverse population composed of many ethnic, social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. The ages of clients vary according to the programs. In general, children, teenagers, adults, and seniors may all benefit from the agency.
Research Site and Study Participants

The study was conducted with legal and illegal immigrants who receive services at B.F.C.S. The agency operates in three small buildings. B.F.C.S. had a budget of almost two million dollars for the fiscal year 2006-07. The mission of the agency is "To ensure change which strengthens and empowers individuals, families, and communities by providing a wide range of services promoting personal growth and responsibility in collaboration with other service providers" (B.F.C.S.inc.org, 2006).

At the time of this study, the facility was running the following programs: chemical dependency treatment, drug and alcohol prevention education services, Preserving Safe and Stable Families, child abuse treatment services, school based counseling, mental health counseling, Emergency Funds Provision (funded through United Way and Chapman Associates), and Health Service Alliance (funded through United Way, permitted the agency to provide community planning for the residents of Montclair, CA). The agency's staff was composed of a Board of Directors and Administration, Counseling and Outreach Staff, Special Contracts...
(Associates, Interns, Graduate Students), Support Staff, and Consultants. The Board of Directors had a Vice-President, 3 members, and the Executive Director. The Counseling and Outreach Staff was made of 28 employees (among them, LCSW's, LMFT's, MSW's, and BA's). The Special Contracts unit had 6 students working towards their Master or Doctorate degrees. The Support Staff consisted of 5 employees (Secretary, Network Coordinator, Program Analyst, Bookkeeper, and Receptionist). There were 4 consultants (Medical Director, Chief Financial Officer, Montclair Collaborative, and Parent Educator).

Most of the staff either possessed or were working toward the completion of graduate degrees. Among the staff were: LCSW's (4), LMFT's (1), MSW's (4), MFTI's (4), MFTT's (5), MS's (4), and MSWI's (10). There were other staff with other degrees: BA's (6), BS's (1), and CAADAC credentials (1). The agency continuously trained the staff in order to keep up with the development of new theories and procedures. Most of the staff had worked in the field for several years. The majority of employees were bilingual in order to serve the Spanish-speaking population. The cultural make up of the staff was varied and included several races and ethnic backgrounds.
The majority of the clientele was Spanish-speaking and had a Latino heritage. The participants in the study were men and women with ages ranging from 19 to 48 years old. All of them had come from either Mexico or Central America. Their educational background, marital status, and length of stay in the U.S. varied greatly.

Engagement Strategies

Formal permission to conduct the study at the Bilingual Counseling Center was obtained by the intern/researcher of the site from the Executive Director. CSUSB IRB approved the format of the interviews. A poster was used at the agency to recruit participants. The poster indicated that a $10.00 gift certificate was to be presented to the participants at the time of the interview. Initially, the poster was placed in strategic locations throughout the agency in order to engage potential participants. However, after a couple of weeks, no one had volunteered to participate in the study. The interns approached the Executive Director and asked permission to present the project in groups being run at the agency. Permission was granted. As a result, the researchers recruited volunteers from two
groups: a men’s substance abuse treatment group and a women’s support group. The women’s group was run by MSW interns on Monday afternoons. The men’s substance abuse group was run on Monday evenings. Both groups were run in Spanish and composed of Spanish-speaking immigrants. In the women’s group, participation was voluntary; whereas, the substance abuse group was composed mainly of mandated clients. Most of the mandated clients were referred to the agency by the Probation Department and Drug Court via Proposition 63 funding. The researchers went to the groups on repeated occasions to recruit participants.

Self Preparation

To prepare for the interviews with the participants, the researchers studied articles and books on this population. This literature review described issues the researchers needed to be prepared for when dealing with legal and illegal immigrants. The first issue was gender. Since the researchers were male, sensitivity was used when interviewing females in the study. The interviews were done in individual offices throughout the facility. This arrangement provided a familiar and secure environment for the interviews.
The second issue was education. Some participants may have felt intimidated by the researchers' educational level. Special attention was given to making the respondents feel appreciated and valued as human beings regardless of educational level. The researchers made a conscious effort not to use erudite vocabulary to avoid confusing or intimidating the participants.

A third issue was socioeconomic status. The researchers used caution in the way they dressed for the occasion in order to avoid intimidating the participants. For this reason, the researchers dressed in casual clothing. They also used warm and friendly words to instill confidence and build quick rapport with the interviewees. The researchers had the advantage of coming from similar backgrounds as the participants. This fact allowed them to connect and establish rapport with the participants rather easily.

Diversity

Diversity issues that needed to be acknowledged were the participants' current immigration status, language limitations, personal/cultural background, and values and spiritual beliefs.
First, the issue regarding immigrant status referred to the legality or illegality of the participants. Some interviewees identified themselves as being illegally in the country. The researchers treated this issue tactfully; confidentiality was reassured to the respondents at this point. Second, when speaking to the participants, researchers were able to speak the respondents' language (Spanish). The researchers' ability to speak the participants' language increased the comfort of the interviewees. Third, researchers' knowledge of the participants' culture was important because in the Hispanic tradition, privacy from strangers is encouraged. The interviews were conducted in private settings (offices) assuring confidentiality to the respondents. Fourth, understanding the participants' values and spiritual beliefs was important to prevent the researchers from offending the respondents. The researchers took special precautions not to offend or criticize the interviewees regarding their particular ideas or beliefs. According to Gonzalez (2002), understanding how Hispanics view the world is important in order to deliver good mental health services to them.
Ethical Issues

Because this study was of a post positivist nature, the researchers underwent a human subjects review and developed procedures for informed consent, confidentiality assurance, and debriefing. The informed consent procedures were thoroughly considered. The interviewees were informed at the start of the interview about the subject of the study and the amount of time the interview was going to take. Informed consent was obtained before starting the interview. In addition, assurance was conveyed to the participants that their identities would remain anonymous and confidential and that their responses would be strictly private. Names, addresses, and phone numbers were not recorded during the interview to ensure the interviewees' anonymity. After the study was completed, the information was destroyed. The Executive Director of the agency agreed with the procedures. After finalizing the session, the participants were debriefed about the nature of the study. They were informed that their responses were not going to have any negative effects on the quality of services they would continue to receive at the agency and that the data was
going to be presented to the university and the agency in a summative format with the omission of specific names.

Political Issues

The agency and the participants expected the researchers to assure the interviewees' confidentiality, anonymity and protection. The agency and participants expected the researchers to keep all personal information from being exposed to anyone but those who were conducting the research study. This was especially critical for undocumented participants. Researchers did not divulge any personal information regarding the participants. The personal information obtained during the interview phase of the research was destroyed after the research project was completed. The agency and the respondents also expected the researchers to keep the interviewees' identity obscured. The researchers destroyed the participants' responses after the project was finalized. The Executive Director was approached by the intern at the site and asked what the implications would be if any of the participants expressed discontent with the services provided by agency. The Executive Director said that there would be no consequences for the
participants if they were not happy with the services provided by the agency. Also, the Executive Director wanted to know about the results and opinions of the participants in general form. For this reason, names were omitted in the presentation of the final results of the study.

Summary

The study was conducted with legal and illegal immigrants who receive services at B.F.C.S. in the City of Ontario, CA. The participants in the study were men and women with ages ranging from 19 to 44 years old. All of them had come from Mexico or Central America. Their educational background, marital status, and length of stay in the U. S. varied greatly. The researchers recruited participants from two groups: a men’s substance abuse treatment group and a women’s support group.
CHAPTER THREE
IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

The study was conducted with 20 legal and illegal immigrants who received services at B.F.C.S. in the City of Ontario, CA.

The participants were Spanish-speaking clients ranging from 19 to 48 years old. All of them had come from either Mexico or Central America. Their educational background, marital status, and length of stay in the U.S. varied greatly.

Selection of Participants

The researchers recruited volunteers from two groups: a men’s substance abuse treatment group and a women’s support group. Both groups were conducted in Spanish and composed of Spanish-speaking immigrants. In the women’s group, participation was voluntary; whereas, the substance abuse group was composed mainly of mandated clients. The researchers went to the groups on repeated occasions to recruit participants.

This study employed a combination of three sampling strategies: intensity, criterion, and snowball sampling.
The intensity sampling was utilized because each interview represented a rich case offering in-depth understanding of the knowledge of the participants regarding social services. The criterion sampling applied because the sample was based on a particular characteristic of the population. This characteristic is their immigrant experience. The snowball sampling came into place when, after finishing each individual interview, the participants were asked to connect the researchers to friends and family members that would also like to participate in the study. However, there was only one instance in which this referral actually happened.

Because the researchers followed the post positivist methodology, the data collected was qualitative and obtained by the use of interviews. However, the first part of the interview consisted of the collection of structured demographic information.

The demographic information collected during the 20 interviews is summarized in Table 1.
Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steady Relationship</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married for the first time</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remarried</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced/Separated</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education Completed</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Secondary School</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed Secondary School</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade Training</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University (undergraduate)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University (graduate)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Country of Origin</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 - 30</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 - 40</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 and higher</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of years in the U.S.A.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 - 5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - 10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 - 15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 or more</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There were 12 males and 8 males. Regarding marital status, 5 respondents were single, 5 in a steady relationship, 6 married for the first time, 1 remarried, 2 divorced/separated, and 1 widowed. In regards to education, 4 interviewees had completed primary school, 7 some secondary school, 6 had completed secondary school, 2 had trade training, and 1 had a graduate degree. The vast majority of participants (16) had come from Mexico; 2 were from El Salvador and 2 from Nicaragua. The average age of the respondents was 35.5 years. The average length of stay in the U.S. was 15.6 years.

Phases of Data Collection

Because the type of research conducted was of a post positive nature, the data was gathered using interviews with most of the questions translated into Spanish (see Appendix A).

The researchers obtained permission to draw participants from two groups: women’s group and substance abuse treatment. The interviews were conducted during the summer/06, and it took the researchers about two months to complete the 20 interviews.
During the interview, skilled questioning and active listening were employed. For example, the researchers used rephrasing and summarizing in order to clarify the meaning of the answers. Before the actual interview, the researchers reviewed the information about the topic of social services in Southern California. The researchers also prepared themselves by being conscious of their own biases, which could influence the data gleaned. The interviews consisted of four stages:

1. Engagement phase. At this stage, the researchers discussed the general details of the study with the participants. The participants' informed consent was secured, ensuring privacy and confidentiality. Any questions the interviewee had regarding the research were answered before the interview was conducted. In addition, throw away questions were used to build rapport with the participants. For example: Where were you born?

2. Development of focus. In this stage the demographic information was collected. For example, researchers found out the marital
status and the highest level of education of the participants.

3. Maintaining focus. In this phase, the essential questions were asked. For example: What are your feelings toward social workers? Probing questions, such as: Why do you feel this way? followed some of the essential questions.

4. Termination. In this stage, the researchers signaled the end of the interview by offering an overall summary of the session and then asked for names and phone numbers of potential participants. The participants were given $10.00 gift cards as a thank you for participating in the study.

After the first two interviews, the researchers recorded findings in journals and reflected on the interview process. The reflection journals were written after each interview in order to improve the data gathering method. The feedback from the journals allowed the researchers to improve the quality of the interview process and the richness of the interviewees’ responses.
Data Recording

The researchers took notes from the participants during the interviews. The researchers had the questionnaire on a clipboard and utilized pencils and paper to collect data. The researchers did not use any other type of recording mode (e.g. video, tape recorder).

Summary

The researchers recruited 20 volunteers from two groups: a men's substance abuse treatment group and a women's support group. The interviews were conducted in the summer/2006. The researchers wrote journals after the interviews in order to improve the quality of the interviews.
CHAPTER FOUR
EVALUATION

Introduction

The interviews were analyzed utilizing the program Atlas.ti. The researchers identified open codes, core categories and dimensions, and the relationships between them. A further analysis let the researchers identify the relationships between the core categories and the overall theory of the study.

Open Coding

The interviews were typed and then loaded onto the Atlas.ti program. The analysis of the material identified 18 initial open codes. These were: Knowledge about social worker’s (SW’s), Limited knowledge, Negative experience, Negative attitudes toward social workers, reasons for negative attitudes, negative treatment, positive experiences, positive attitudes toward social worker’s, reasons for positive attitudes, no impact on family, negative impact on self, negative impact on the family, services known, services used, services most needed, services needed by immigrants and changes needed.
Knowledge about Social Workers

This code was created because the respondents seemed to have different knowledge about what social workers did. For example, a Mexican widow (44 years old) who had been in the U.S.A. 24 years stated, “Social workers collect and revise applications at the welfare office, conduct evaluations of applicants of welfare benefits, and respond to questions regarding the application process.” A married Mexican female (32 years old) who had been in the U.S.A. 6 years affirmed, “Social workers are those who visit homes in which there has been a call to investigate domestic violence. These workers prevent children and adults from getting hurt.” She added, “Social workers also give therapy at schools.” Her son was receiving therapy at a school site.

During the course of the interviews, it became evident that the women participating in the study had more knowledge compared to the men. The women gave more abundant information regarding what social workers did. Most of the time, the social workers’ roles were related to welfare and/or Child Protective Services.
Limited Knowledge

This code was created because several respondents simply did not know what social workers did or who they were. For example, a Mexican single female (30 years old) who had been in the U.S.A. 4 years stated that she, "had no clear idea about who social workers were or what they did." Some of the interviewees confused social workers with other professionals. For example, a Mexican male (43 years old) who had been in the U.S.A. for 18 years believed that his probation officer was a social worker. In other cases, interviewees affirmed that clerks working at the welfare or Social Security offices were social workers.

Negative Experience

This code encompasses the negative experiences that the respondents had when trying to access social services. For example, one Mexican widow (44 years old) mentioned that Black and Caucasian workers sometimes treated her with disdain. She felt that she was being treated as an inferior citizen. She experienced this when she was applying for welfare and food stamps. However, it was not clear whether she encountered social workers or clerks. In another interview, a male Salvadorean (43
years old), who had been in the United States for 24 years, stated that he felt ignored by social service employees because they did not speak his language. The interviewee believed that although the social service employees could have looked for an interpreter in order to assist him better, they did not want to spend the time to do so. This respondent also felt that the social service worker ignored his request for forms because he was an immigrant. A Mexican single female (30 years old) mentioned that she had many negative experiences at the offices where she received social services. She stated that one of the receptionists treated her with disdain especially because she was not able to communicate in English. The respondent felt that many receptionists and secretaries did not want to talk to her in Spanish even though they could. The participant felt humiliated in several instances and found herself not knowing what to do or how to ask for help. According to the interviewee, part of this disdain may have been prompted because she was carrying basic Medi-cal insurance and not private coverage.
Negative Attitudes towards Social Workers

This code was created because some interviewees had negative attitudes toward social workers. For example, a single 48 year old Mexican female with a graduate degree from Mexico, who had been in the United States for 20 years, affirmed that social workers were uncaring about assisting others. In her experience, social workers were more interested in taking away a service than assisting clients in obtaining it. She felt that social workers appeared uncaring about assisting others and seemed to care more about helping the system move along. She stated that her negative attitude stemmed from the uncaring attitude the social service workers had towards her when she had applied for services. The respondent stated that the workers seemed to care more about the agency, getting as many people in and out of the office without actually helping them or making an effort to explain the various programs. In another interview, a 43 year old Salvadorean male stated that social workers were uncaring about assisting others and they were more interested in taking away a service than assisting people obtain the service.
Reasons for Negative Attitudes

This code is directly connected to the preceding one. In the interview, the respondents were asked what their attitudes toward social workers were. Immediately after, they were asked the reasons why they felt that particular way. A single Mexican female (48 years old) stated that she had a negative attitude towards social workers because when she applied for services, the workers acted as if they were the ones who determined who and who did not receive services, not the policies or regulations. They also acted as if giving services to immigrants was a waste. This made her feel as if she were a drain on the country. The 43 year old Salvadorean experienced the uncaring social worker’s attitude himself. Because of the respondent’s past negative experiences with social service workers when attempting to obtain services he believed that he was legally entitled to, he had a negative view of the workers.

Negative Treatment

This code was created because some of the interviewees experienced bad treatment from other professionals. For example, a 32 year old Mexican married female, who had been in the U.S.A. for 6 years, recalled
being treated badly when her husband was being discharged from a hospital. One of the nurses aides came and talked to the participant and her husband questioning their use of Medi-Cal. This situation was embarrassing because she and her husband had used the hospital services due to an emergency and they had to resort to emergency Medi-Cal. In another interview, a single 48 year old Mexican female stated that the nurses at the County Hospital treated her like a second class citizen in 1989 when she gave birth to her first child. She was made to feel as if she were a drain on the system.

Positive Experiences

The majority of the respondents referred to good experiences when obtaining social services. This code accounts for those experiences. For example, a 19 year old Mexican male, who had been in the U.S.A. 18 years said, “I went to the WIC office. The experience was pleasant.” He utilized this service after his only child was born. In another interview, a Mexican 30 year old female, who had been in the U.S.A. 4 years, stated that she had a good experience when she talked to the social worker that helped her get food stamps. A Nicaraguan married female (39 year old), who had been in the U.S.A.
20 years, affirmed that at B.F.C.S. she had been treated nicely. Like her, most of the interviewees were happy with the way they had been treated at B.F.C.S.

Positive Attitudes towards Social Workers

This code refers to the positive attitudes and feelings the respondents had toward social workers. For example, a remarried Mexican male (40 years old), who had been in the United States for ten years, affirmed that he had a good attitude toward social workers because he was treated well by them when he applied for Medi-Cal and B.F.C.S. services. A 32 year old Mexican female, who had been in the U.S.A. 6 years, stated that she had positive feelings about social workers; the ones that she had met had been nice to her. She did not fear them.

Reasons for Positive Attitudes towards Social Workers

The researchers found that without exception, good experiences and good attitudes were linked. For example, a Nicaraguan male (39 years old), who had been in the United States for 16 years, affirmed that he was treated well by the social workers when he applied for Medi-Cal and B.F.C.S. services. In another interview, a Mexican male (21 years old) stated that the reason he had a
positive attitude towards social workers was because he received assistance from social service workers whenever he needed their help. An example of their assistance was when he applied for Medi-cal for himself. He did not have any problems and was satisfied with their assistance.

No Impact on Family

This code was created because some of the respondents expressed that even thought they were in the U.S.A. illegally, they had been able to access social services for their families with no problem. A 32 year old male from Mexico stated that because his children were born in the United States, they did not have any problems obtaining social services. "No problems, my kids were born in the United States," he said. A 40 year old Mexican male, who had been in the United States for ten years, stated that his family had been treated fairly by the social workers even though he was here illegally.

Negative Impact on Self

This code refers to the negative impact the respondents had experienced to their illegality in the country.

For example, a 32 year old Mexican married female that had been in the U.S.A. 13 years, stated that her
illegality had prevented her from obtaining much needed medical and dental services. In another interview, a single Mexican female (48 years old) stated that because she was in the country illegally, she could only apply for certain services. The services that she did obtain were limited compared to the services someone who was a citizen or U.S. resident could get. "It was difficult to receive services and if I did receive services, some of them were limited," she said.

Negative Impact on the Family

This code refers to comments made by some respondents regarding the negative impact undocumented family members had when obtaining social services. A 21 year old Mexican male, who had been in the United States for 12 years, said, "Mother did not receive help from Medi-cal because she was here illegally."

Services Known

This code summarized the varied responses the respondents had about the services they had accessed successfully. For example, a 32 year old Mexican married female knew about WIC, English as a Second Language, Medi-cal, B.F.C.S., shelters and several types of counseling services. In another interview, a 32 year old
married Mexican female, who had been in the U.S.A. 6 years, knew about Medi-Cal, WIC, English as a Second Language and counseling. A 48 year old single female from Mexico knew about Medi-Cal, B.F.C.S., shelters, and counseling services.

**Services Used**

This code is a subcategory of the previous one. Some of the respondents had good knowledge about services they had never used. However, in most of the cases the known services corresponded with those that the respondents had accessed successfully. All of the participants in the study were receiving services at B.F.C.S. For example, a Mexican female (32 years old) who had been in the U.S.A. for 13 years, affirmed that she obtained Medi-Cal when she was pregnant with her last child. She also got WIC services for her young children. She attended school for a while to learn English. At the time of the interview, she was receiving counseling services at B.F.C.S. She also had attended parenting classes at her children's school in the past. In a different interview, a 44 year old Mexican widow affirmed that in the past she had used unemployment benefits, Medi-cal, WIC, Welfare, Social Security, CARE utility discount, food stamps and
counseling. The researchers observed through the interviews that the female respondents had usually a more extensive knowledge of services (especially those referring to children). In general, men had used fewer services than women.

Services Most Needed

This code refers to the services the participants felt that they needed the most. For example, a Mexican female (41 years old), who had been in the U.S.A. 16 years, stated that she needed anger management classes for her husband, because he had a problem controlling his rage.

A 39 year old Nicaraguan female, who had been in the U.S.A. 20 years, affirmed that she needed to continue receiving the counseling services at B.F.C.S. because she was benefiting from them. Several interviewees stated that they needed medical and dental services either for themselves or for family members (spouses, children). Many respondents mentioned that medical and dental costs are prohibitive for the majority of the immigrant population. The respondents wished some kind of medical/dental insurance were available for undocumented persons.
Services Needed by Immigrants

A Mexican female (32 years old), who had been in the USA 13 years, stated that some of the services most needed by immigrants include a better system for disseminating information about all the available services that exist for them. A single Mexican male (29 years old) who had been in the USA 10 years, stated, "I believe that Medi-Cal insurance should be available for immigrants and their families." The 44 year old Mexican widow affirmed that the immigrants need medical services. "This is essential", she said. The widow's daughter was to turn 18 very soon and was about to run out of Medi-cal coverage.

Several interviewees affirmed that medical and dental coverage was very important for the immigrant population. They saw no reason why they could not be offered any type of insurance coverage.

Changes Needed

This code was created because the researchers asked the respondents to mention some areas that in their opinion needed to be changed regarding social services available to immigrants. For example, a Mexican female (32 years old), who had been in the USA 13 years, stated,
"Immigrants should be informed of their rights and benefits that they are entitled to. Immigrants need preventive medical services. The government should not wait for the people to get sick; instead, they should try to prevent illnesses." She believed that part of this prevention could be accomplished via vaccination for everyone. A Mexican female (30 years old), who had been in the USA 4 years, stated that people at the hospitals should be patient with immigrants. Such a place should also have bilingual personnel readily available to help those who cannot speak English. In another interview, a Mexican female (32 years old), who had been in the USA 6 years, affirmed that the dental services provided for immigrants and their families should be better because the type of coverage she obtained for her children was "the lowest of the low." She was referring to the basic Denti-Cal insurance her children had.

Based on the interviewees' responses and the journals, the researchers identified the open codes above discussed. A further analysis included the labeling of the open codes' categories and dimensions. Figure 1 depicts the first category found: knowledge.
The collection of the data allowed the researchers to learn that the interviewees' knowledge about social services varied in a continuum. All of the respondents had at least a limited knowledge of services because they all were involved in at least a program at B.F.C.S.

Figure 1. Category: Knowledge

The knowledge being considered here was related to social workers and social services. Several respondents simply did not know what social workers did or who they
were. For example, in the case of the 30 year old Mexican who had no clear idea about who social workers were or what they did.

Part of this limited knowledge was evident in several cases when some of the interviewees confused social workers with other professionals (e.g. probation officers). In other cases, interviewees believed that clerks working at the welfare or Social Security offices were social workers.

During the course of the interviews, it became evident that the women participating in the study had more knowledge compared to men. The women gave more abundant information regarding what social workers did. Most of the time, the social workers roles were related to welfare and/or Child Protective Services.

An example of good knowledge of social services is the one that the 44 year Mexican widow had. She elaborated very well regarding several social services.

The next category that emerged from the open codes was: Experiences (see Figure 2). After reviewing the data collected and reflecting on the journals, it became evident that the respondents had varied experiences when
obtaining social services. The dimension that emerged was a continuum between negative and positive experiences.

Several respondents had negative experiences when accessing social services. The 44 year old widow mentioned that Black and Caucasian workers sometimes treated her with disdain. She felt that she was being treated as a second-rate citizen. She experienced this when she was applying for welfare and food stamps. However, it was not clear whether she confused clerks with social workers.

Figure 2. Category: Experience
Another respondent (30 year old Mexican single female) affirmed that she had many negative experiences at the offices where she received social services. She stated that one of the receptionists treated her with condescension especially because the respondent was not able to communicate in English. The respondent felt that many receptionists and secretaries did not want to talk to her in Spanish even though they could. The participant felt embarrassed in several instances and found herself not knowing what to do or how to ask for help. The fact that immigrants encounter barriers when trying to utilize services in mainstream society has been stated clearly in the literature consulted for this study. One of the biggest barriers immigrants face in accessing social services is related to language.

One example of positive experiences is the one provided by the 19 year old Mexican male who had had been in the USA 18 years. He said, “I went to the WIC office. The experience was pleasant.” Most of the interviewees affirmed that their experiences at B.F.C.S. had been good.

The third core category that emerged was: Attitudes (see figure 3).
During the course of the interviews, it became clear that the experiences that respondents had when accessing social services were connected with the attitudes they developed toward social services and social workers. Like experiences, the attitudes' dimension ranged from negative to positive.

In general, the respondents who had bad experiences also had negative attitudes toward social service agencies. However, this relationship was not clear cut when it came to attitudes toward social workers. Some of the respondents had good attitudes toward social workers.
who were not related to the agencies in which the respondents had bad experiences.

Some examples of negative attitudes toward social workers were provided by the single 48 year old Mexican female who had been in the United States for 20 years. She felt that social workers were uncaring about assisting others. In her experience, social workers were more interested in taking away services than assisting clients in obtaining them. She felt that social workers seemed to care more about helping the system move along than helping clients obtain services.

There were plenty of comments made by the participants regarding positive attitudes toward social workers. Some positive comments about social workers were: “they are nice people,” “they have been nice to me,” and “they seem caring.”

Axial Coding

Axial coding allowed the researchers to link the categories of knowledge/experience, and knowledge/attitude. At the same time, the researchers were able to make statements about the relationships between the categories’ dimensions.
First, the dimension of knowledge was linked to immigrants' experiences when accessing social services. The knowledge varied from limited to abundant. The experiences varied from negative to positive. The combination of dimensions may be charted in the following way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abundant Knowledge</th>
<th>Limited Knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Experience</td>
<td>Negative Experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. Knowledge/Experience Combination

After linking the dimensions the following combinations were obtained: Limited knowledge/negative experiences (The respondent would have limited knowledge about social services and negative experiences when accessing such services). Some of the interviewees had only a few ideas regarding social services and had experienced negative circumstances when accessing the
services. However, in the study, this case appeared only in a few occasions.

Limited knowledge/positive experiences (The respondent would have limited knowledge about social services/workers yet positive experiences when accessing the services). This case was present most often. All the respondents had at least a limited knowledge of social services because they were receiving services at B.F.C.S. Several respondents stated that their only experience receiving social services was related to B.F.C.S. In general, they had a good experience at the agency.

Abundant knowledge/negative experiences (The interviewee would have abundant knowledge about social services/workers yet had negative experiences when accessing the services). This case was also present in several instances. Some of the interviewees stated that they had accessed many services but some of their experiences had been awful. Some of the respondents felt discriminated against because they did not speak English; others felt that the social workers were acting as if the services were theirs to grant or withhold.

Some of the negative experiences were linked to the respondents' inability to speak English. This language
barrier made them feel inadequate and helpless at the social service agencies.

Abundant knowledge/positive experiences (The respondent would have good knowledge of social services/workers and had positive experiences when in contact with them). This relationship would be the ideal one. However, the respondents that had accessed many social services had a mix of good and bad experiences. The researchers noted that the more a respondent had used social services, the more diverse the type of experiences they had.

Second, the dimension of knowledge may be linked to attitudes as charted below.
The knowledge varied from limited to abundant. The attitudes varied from negative to positive. The analysis for the quadrants for this combination would resemble pretty much the one done for the knowledge/experiences. Therefore, the complete analysis will not be elaborated here. It is important to remember that none of the respondents could be categorized as having no knowledge of social services because they all were participating in at least a program at B.F.C.S.

The combinations of knowledge and attitudes may vary in a large spectrum. The researchers noted that the respondents who had entered the country recently had limited knowledge compared to those who had been in the
country for a longer period of time. For example, the 44 year old widow (she had been in the country 24 years and was a naturalized citizen) knew much about social services. In contrast, some of the single male respondents who had been in the country for a shorter period of time, indicated that they had not needed social services and that they were focused on working to survive in this society. Their knowledge about social services was limited especially regarding services for children.

Selective Coding

According to Morris (2006), "selective coding is the process of integrating and refining the categories and their dimensions to develop theory" (p. 116). In this study, the researchers wrote journals after each interview. The journals provided a chance to reflect on the meaning of the data that was being collected. The journal analysis coupled with the open and axial coding allowed the researchers to identify the core categories of knowledge, experience, and attitude. Each of these categories had dimensions.

The first core category identified was knowledge. From the collection of data it became evident that the
immigrants had varied knowledge about social services and social workers. While some immigrants could barely state what social services meant, others elaborated on many services they had used. The researchers also noted that the women participating in the study had more knowledge than the men. This knowledge was more evident when the women talked about prenatal and perinatal care or services for young children (e.g. WIC). Most of the women stated that they had used social services for their children and themselves on several occasions. A cultural component may partly explain this phenomenon. Hispanic women are more dedicated to the rearing of children compared to their male counterparts. This daily occupation forces the majority of women to be conscious of their family’s needs; therefore, they know more about social services than men. In contrast, many men spend their time working outside the home and are simply unaware of such needs.

The knowledge the respondents had about social services also determined how aware they were of the social services the general immigrant population needed. The respondents that had used the most social services had more ideas of what social services immigrants were
lacking. Those who had seldom used services could not elaborate on what the broad immigrant population might be lacking in regards to social services. The same relationship was observed regarding the ideas the respondents had about changes needed in the delivery of social services to immigrants. Those who had rarely used the services could not elaborate much about what needed to be changed; the ones who had used more services, had more ideas about changes needed and how these changes should occur. It would be interesting to develop a study in which women’s and men’s responses could be compared regarding the variations in knowledge they have about social services.

During the interviews, it became evident that some of the respondents had little or unclear knowledge about who social workers were or what they did. In some occasions, the interviewees identified social workers with clerks at the social services offices (e.g. welfare, Social Security). This points out the need that the general population needs to know about social workers’ roles. Several respondents lumped social workers into a Child Protective Services category. Many respondents identified social workers as "those who go into houses
and help abused children." This type of response may be partly linked to high profile cases' media coverage in which the abuse and removal of children is exposed.

A good finding of the study was that several respondents also identified therapists and counselors as social workers. These responses might be related to the respondents' participation in at least one program at B.F.C.S. The women's group was being run by two MSW Interns. The men participating in the Alcohol/Drug Program had social workers involved in some parts of the program (e.g. individual counseling). The interviewees were conscious of the professional titles of those helping them in their program(s).

A second core category was identified: experiences when accessing social services. The experiences varied from negative to positive. Several of the interviewees said that they had bad experiences when they were trying to access social services. Some respondents said that social workers showed a bad attitude before approving the services for them (However, it is not clear whether this attitude came from a professional social worker or from a clerk). Some typical responses indicated that the social worker treated the applicant as if the service was going
to be provided by the social worker him/herself and not the social service agency. Some of the interviewees could sense the coldness and uncaring attitude exhibited by the social worker(s).

On other occasions, the bad treatment did not come from a social worker but from an allied professional (e.g. nurse’s aides). One of the respondents said that she was embarrassed and treated badly when a nurse’s aide questioned the respondent’s use of the Medi-Cal services at the hospital.

However, the respondents’ general experience was positive. Most of the respondents expressed gratitude to “the system” for allowing them to take advantage of the free or low cost services. Many of the women interviewed said that the general attitude felt at B.F.C.S. was of care and respect. The men participating in the drug treatment program also felt respected and appreciated as human beings. The negative experiences the participants had were related to previous services they had tried to access in several other agencies (e.g. Medi-Cal, welfare, Social Security offices).

Some of the negative experiences were related to the impossibility to access social services because the
respondents were here illegally. These findings correspond with this study’s reviewed literature. Some of the respondents affirmed that they needed dental and medical services badly. They were in pain because they could not afford basic dental and medical services.

From a systemic point of view, these immigrants had a hard time navigating through difficulties. Many of the respondents said that they were trying to become successful in this society. They were trying to lead their children into becoming successful and productive citizens. However, the interviewees were having a difficult time trying to survive in the societal system simply because they had no legal documents.

One surprising finding in the study was to learn that some immigrants had no great need for social services (most single-male interviewees stated this). Some of the participants in the substance abuse group said that they were here to work and they needed no services. This type of response is only logical because the respondents that gave this type of answer appeared healthy and young. In addition, some of these participants had no children and, most likely, they had
not tried to access social services by the time of the study.

The third core category identified was attitudes. These attitudes were greatly influenced by the experiences the respondents had when trying to access social services. The attitudes varied from negative to positive. Negative attitudes were expressed toward social service agencies because the respondents felt that the agencies' personnel had treated them with an uncaring/unsupportive attitude.

As found in the literature, language barriers may be one of the main obstacles that immigrants experience when trying to access social services. For example, one respondent was not well treated when requesting services because the social worker did not speak Spanish. The social worker failed to inform the respondent about the program's requirements in order to keep the services from being terminated. For this particular respondent, this negative experience made him leery of governmental social services in general.

However, most of the respondents had a good attitude toward social workers and social service agencies. When asked about their attitude toward social workers and
social service agencies, some common answers were: “my experience was pleasant,” “I see that the people here care about me,” and “I feel respected and well treated.”

The theory that has emerged from this study points out that the core categories knowledge, experience, and attitudes form the basic paradigm that shapes the perceptions that immigrants have about social workers and social service agencies. These core categories are interrelated and form a continuum that is shaped by the immigrants’ daily lives. The knowledge, experiences, and attitudes are not static but are dynamic and ever evolving. The impact of time is evident when considering that the respondents who had been here the longest had the most knowledge of social services.

Immigrants have a unique experience in this country because they strive to assimilate in a society that may shift unexpectedly. In recent years, the immigrant experience had been made more difficult partially due to the 9/11 attacks. Anti-immigrant sentiments seem to be rising making the immigrants’ lives even more difficult.

As a corollary of the analysis, Figure 6 illustrates the relationship between the core categories experience and attitude; the figure also depicts the relationship
between the core categories knowledge, experiences, and attitudes and the immigrant perceptions about social workers and social service agencies.

Figure 6. Relationships between the Core Categories and the Immigrants’ Perceptions of Social Workers and Social Service Agencies

The immigrants’ perceptions about social service agencies and social workers are multi-determined by at least three elements: knowledge, experiences, and attitudes. How much an immigrant knows about social services influences his/her perception of them. However, this relationship cannot be construed as causal but
influential because knowledge per se does not determine whether the perception will be negative or positive. However, experiences do have a direct impact on the perceptions. In this case, negative experiences would produce negative perceptions. On the other hand, positive experiences would determine positive attitudes toward social workers and social service agencies. The same can be said about the attitudes' role in the creation and sustaining of the perceptions. Negative attitudes produce negative perceptions; positive attitudes generate positive perceptions.

The dynamic interaction between experiences and attitudes shape the immigrants' perceptions. This interaction is based on the reality of the immigrants' daily lives. Therefore, one may conclude that the immigrants' perceptions of social workers and social service agencies are malleable and ever changing.

This assumption allows for interventions by social service agencies and social workers in order to change the negative perceptions into positive ones. The extent of the interventions should start at the micro level and reach to the macro level.
Implications for Micro and Macro Practice

At the micro level, social workers and other staff working for social service agencies should not allow their own personal feelings to prevent them from providing service to immigrants. Sensitivity training that focuses on possible biases the worker may bring into the work place should be included in all new employee orientation so that the employees may assist immigrants without allowing their personal feelings to cloud their performance. Agencies are better able to service the immigrant clients by becoming aware of the concerns the immigrants have.

At the macro level, by understanding how immigrants view social services, agencies and social workers can implement polices that will encourage immigrants to apply for the social services that they are entitled to receive. Polices that may persuade immigrants to apply for services include aggressively disseminating information regarding needed services in the areas where immigrants live. Literature covering all social services that illegal and legal immigrants are entitled to should be circulated within immigrant communities and in their
language. This suggestion was made by some of the participants in the study.

Also, the implementation of an anonymous customer service hot line may help agencies monitor the type of service the workers are providing to their clients. The hotline needs to be anonymous because some immigrants may fear disclosing their identity and face legal consequences due to their illegal status. With the data gathered, changes can be made accordingly by the agencies.

Social workers can educate immigrants on services that are available, so that they are aware of services that they may apply for, not just the services they are seeking. Also, agencies can inform immigrants of the different roles the social workers play. This will allow immigrants to understand that the social workers' role is not limited to taking their children from their homes, thus removing a negative stigma.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of the study include the limited number of participants in the research project. The limited number of respondents prevented the researchers from
obtaining more representative information of the Hispanic immigrant population.

The study did not have an equal number of females and males. The majority of the participants were male and therefore the view has been mostly from a male’s perspective. In addition, women appear to have a deeper knowledge of social services compared to men. It is advisable that future studies should include a comparison between women’s and men’s responses.

Another factor that limited the study was the participants themselves. The facts were not gathered from the general community but rather from people who were receiving services from B.F.C.S. Most of the respondents were receiving mandated services. This may have yielded skewed responses that do not correspond with the general Hispanic immigrant population.

In the study there were some occasions in which the participants were tired after working long hours. For example, in the first interview, the respondent was tired and could not think clearly about what social services were. This person stated that he had worked for 10 hours that day. After working, he rode his bicycle to the agency. He was just too tired to yield rich information
during the interview. If the study would had been conducted in a more controlled setting (e.g. residential treatment facility) there would have been more uniform responses because none of the respondents would have to travel before the interview.

The definition of social worker was not given to the respondents before the beginning of the interviews. The researchers wanted to explore the general idea the interviewees had about social workers. This was beneficial because the nature of the study was exploratory and the respondents were not given definitions of social workers or social services. However, since the concept of a social worker or social service is broad, the respondents had a hard time focusing their responses. In some occasions, social workers were confused with other professionals (e.g. clerks). The lack of a concept or definition of social services and social workers permitted the study to be too broad in a sense. Future studies should narrow the scope of the responses by offering a brief definition of social services and/or social workers.
Summary

The researchers identified open codes, the open codes' core categories and dimensions, and the relationships between them. The researchers described the relationships between the core categories and the immigrants' perceptions about social service agencies and social workers. Implications for micro and macro practice were discussed along with the study's limitations.
CHAPTER FIVE
TERMINATION AND FOLLOW UP

Introduction

The researchers presented the study's results to the agency's personnel. During and after the meeting, the researchers responded to questions that arose from the material being explained. Special importance was placed on the study's practical implications at the micro and macro levels.

Communicating Findings to Study Site and Study Participants

After concluding the analysis of the data, the researchers went to B.F.C.S. and presented the study's results to the agency's personnel in a staff meeting. About 15 staff were present during the presentation. The researchers utilized PowerPoint slides to report the study. During and after the meeting, the researchers responded to questions that arose from the material being explained. In general, the staff were very interested in the practical application of the study's findings. The researchers were able to expand on their experiences while conducting the interviews at the agency. The
personnel attending the meeting were thankful to the researchers for bringing the presentation to the agency.

The researchers were not able to communicate the findings of the study with the respondents. However, at the time of the interviews, the researchers gave information to the interviewees on how to access the study results through the California State University San Bernardino's website.

Ongoing Relationship with Study Participants

Due to the nature of the study, the researchers did not maintain any contact with the respondents. Even if the researchers tried to get in contact with the respondents, it would have been difficult because most of the participants were no longer receiving services at the agency.

Summary

After the conclusion of the study, the researchers made a short presentation of the results at B.F.C.S. There was no further contact with the study participants.
APPENDIX A

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT
Structured Interview

Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Number</th>
<th>Number Assigned to each interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>1= Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2= Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>1= Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2= Steady Relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3= Married for the first time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4= Remarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5= Divorced/separated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6= Widowed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Completed</td>
<td>1= Primary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2= Some Secondary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3= Completed Secondary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4= Trade training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5= University (undergraduate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6= University (graduate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of Origin</td>
<td>Name of Country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td># of years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of years in the U.S.A.</td>
<td># of years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What kind of social services do you think you have available? ¿Qué clase de servicios sociales piensa Ud. que tiene disponibles?

What kind of social services have you accessed successfully? ¿Qué clase de servicios sociales ha Ud. usado?

When you accessed those services how were you treated in those agencies? ¿Cuando Ud. usó esos servicios, cómo fue tratado?
What social services do you need the most? ¿Qué servicios sociales Ud. necesita más?

_____________________________________________________________________________________

What are your feelings toward social workers? ¿Qué sentimientos tiene acerca de los trabajadores sociales?

_____________________________________________________________________________________

Why do you feel this way? ¿Por qué se siente de esa forma?

_____________________________________________________________________________________

If you are here illegally, how are you affected? ¿Si está aquí ilegalmente, cómo le afecta?

_____________________________________________________________________________________

If you are here illegally, how is your family affected? ¿Si está aquí ilegalmente, cómo le afecta esto a su familia?

_____________________________________________________________________________________

Do you know what social workers do? ¿Sabe cual es el trabajo de los trabajadores sociales?

Please explain: ________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

What do you think needs to be improved in the social services provided to immigrants? ¿Qué piensa usted que se necesita mejorar en los servicios sociales proveidos a los inmigrantes?

_____________________________________________________________________________________

Is there anything you would like to add? ¿Hay algo que quisiera agregar?

_____________________________________________________________________________________

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INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to investigate your knowledge and feelings about social services. This study is being conducted by Javier Panameno and Carlos Morales under the supervision of Dr Teresa Morris, Professor of Social Work Department. This study has been approved by the Department of Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino.

In this interview you will be asked to respond to several questions. The interview should take about 15 to 30 minutes to complete. All of your responses will be held in the strictest of confidence by the researchers. Your name will not be reported with your responses. All data will be reported in group form only. Bilingual Family Counseling Service will not know whether you participated or the responses you expressed to us.

Your participation in this study is totally voluntary. You are free not to answer any questions and withdraw at any time during this study without penalty. When you have completed the interview, you will receive a debriefing statement describing the study in more detail. In order to ensure to validity of the study, we ask that you not discuss this study with other participants. We don’t foresee any risks for you while completing this interview.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please fell free to contact Dr. Teresa Morris at (909) 537 5561.

By placing a check mark in the box below, I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and that I understand, the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate. I also acknowledge that I am at least 18 YEARS OF AGE.

Please place a mark here: □         Today’s date: ________________
INFORMED CONSENT (TRANSLATION INTO SPANISH)

CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO

El estudio en el cual Ud. está siendo solicitado a participar está designado para investigar su conocimiento y sentimientos acerca de servicios sociales. Este estudio está siendo conducido por Javier Panameno y Carlos Morales bajo la supervisión de la Dra. Teresa Morris, Profesora del Departamento de Trabajo Social. Este estudio ha sido aprobado por Subcomité del Departamento de Trabajo Social del Consejo Institucional de Revisión de la Universidad del Estado de California, San Bernardino. En esta entrevista a Ud. se le pedirá que responda a varias preguntas. La entrevista debe tomar entre 15 a 30 minutos para completar. Todas sus respuestas se tendrán en la confidencia más estricta. Su nombre no va a ser reportado con sus respuestas. Todos los datos serán reportados sólo en forma grupal. Bilingual Family Counseling Service no va a saber si Ud. participó o las respuestas que Ud. nos expresó. Su participación en este estudio es totalmente voluntaria. Ud. es libre de no contestar preguntas y dejar de participar en cualquier momento durante este estudio sin penalidad alguna. Cuando Ud. haya completado la entrevista, Ud. va a recibir una explicación describiendo el estudio en más detalle. A fin de asegurar la validez del estudio, nosotros le pedimos que no hable del estudio con otros participantes. Nosotros no preveemos ningún riesgo para Ud. mientras completa esta entrevista.

Si Ud. tiene algunas preguntas o inquietudes acerca de este estudio, por favor síntase libre de contactar a la Dra. Teresa Morris al teléfono (909) 537 5561.

Al poner una marca en el cuadro de abajo, Yo reconozco que he sido informado de, y entiendo la naturaleza y propósito de este estudio, y doy libremente consentimiento de participar. También reconozco que por lo menos tengo 18 AÑOS DE EDAD.

Ponga una marca aquí □ Fecha de hoy: _____________

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APPENDIX C

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT
Study of Immigrants' Knowledge of Social Services

The interview you have just completed was designed to investigate your knowledge and feelings about social services. In this study your knowledge and attitudes about social services and social workers were surveyed. Your responses will be used to understand what immigrants know about social services and what feelings they have toward social workers. With the knowledge gained, we hope to gain a deeper understanding of how immigrants' view social services.

Thank you for your participation and for not discussing the contents of this interview with other participants. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Javier Panameno, Carlos Morales, or Dr. Teresa Morris at 909 537 5561.
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT TRANSLATION INTO SPANISH

Estudio del Conocimiento de los Inmigrantes de los Servicios Sociales

La entrevista que Ud. acaba de completar fue designada para investigar su conocimiento y sentimientos acerca de los servicios sociales. En este estudio su conocimiento y actitudes acerca de servicios sociales y trabajadores sociales fueron encuestados. Sus respuestas van a ser usadas para entender lo que inmigrantes saben acerca de servicios sociales y que sentimientos ellos tienen hacia trabajadores sociales. Con el conocimiento adquirido, nosotros esperamos obtener un entendimiento más profundo de cómo los inmigrantes ven los servicios sociales.

Gracias por su participación y por no hablar del contenido de esta entrevista con otros participantes. Si Ud. tiene preguntas acerca del estudio, por favor síntase libre de contactar a Javier Panameno, Carlos Morales, o la Dra. Teresa Morris al número 909 537 5561.
REFERENCES


This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout. However, for each phase of the project, certain authors took primary responsibility. These responsibilities were assigned in the manner listed below.

1. Data Collection:
   Team Effort: Javier Panameno & Carlos Morales

2. Data Entry and Analysis:
   Team Effort: Javier Panameno & Carlos Morales

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:
   a. Introduction and Literature
      Team Effort: Javier Martín Panameno & Carlos Morales
   
   b. Methods
      Team Effort: Javier Martín Panameno & Carlos Morales
   
   c. Results
      Team Effort: Javier Martín Panameno & Carlos Morales
   
   d. Discussion
      Team Effort: Javier Martín Panameno & Carlos Morales