



Latino Adolescent
Migration, Health,
and Adaptation

<http://www.cpc.unc.edu/projects/lamha>



What New Immigrant Teens Say About Their Lives:

Preliminary Findings from the Latino Adolescent Migration, Health, and Adaptation Project

Mimi V. Chapman, MSW, Ph.D. and Krista M. Perreira, Ph.D.

Paula Gildner, MPH, Project Manager

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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What is the Latino Adolescent Migration, Health, and Adaptation Project (LAMHA)?

- Methods
 - mixed-method, descriptive study
 - mental health status & needs of immigrant youth & their families
- Participants
 - statewide sample of 250 Latino immigrant youth & primary caretakers
- Survey instrument
 - mental health symptoms
 - family functioning
 - community and school variables
- Service use patterns
 - approximately half the sample
 - Adapted from the CASA (Burns, et al.)
- Two qualitative studies
 - parents' beliefs about mental health problems
 - youth's migration experiences



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What Did We Ask?

- Factual Areas
 - age at entry
 - length of time in the U.S.
 - family structure
 - separation during migration
 - parent & child employment
 - school participation.
- Mental Health Measures – Youth and Parents
 - Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach)
 - Youth Self-Report (Achenbach)
 - Trauma Symptom Checklist for Children (Briere)
 - Children's Depression Inventory (Kovacs)
 - MASC (anxiety) (March)
 - CESD (parent depression)
 - Trauma (parent)
- Motivations for immigration
- Acculturation Measures for Youth and Parents (Tropp et al.)
- Family Functioning: Familism (Vega), FACES (Olsen)
- Youth Reported Delinquency
- Views of School (SSP, Bowen & Richman)

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Who is Included?

- 12 – 18 year olds and a primary caregiver
- Had to have been born out of the U.S. in a Latin-American Country.
- We sampled urban and rural counties with high growth in the Latino population.
- We asked school systems to give us the names and contact information of students who identified as Hispanic or Latino.
- Recruited by phone.



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What Do We Know About New Latino Immigrants?

(Bowen, Rose & Bowen 2005)

- 66% of immigrants from Mexico come from mixed citizen status families.
 - 64% from Central America
 - 55% from the Dominican Republic
- Most Children in Latino immigrant families live with Two Parents
 - Mexico 85%
 - Central America 79%
 - Dominican Republic 63%
- 48% of immigrants from Mexico owned their own homes
 - 42% Central America
 - 25% Dominican Republic



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Who are our Participants?

- Mothers answered the survey 79%
- Boys interviewed 51%
- Girls interviewed 49%
- Average age 15 years
- Immigrated from Mexico 71 %
- Living with two biological parents 59%
- Were working full- or part-time 73%
- Other represented countries include:
 - Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, El Salvador, Venezuela



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Immigration

- Age of Arrival
 - Between birth and five years 20%
 - Between six and ten years of age 30%
 - Eleven years old or above 41%
- Average Age at Arrival 9 years
- Average length of separation from one or both parents 2.5 years



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Summit Purposes

- To share information
- To stimulate discussion which may result in program and policy changes
- To help us understand what our findings reflect in the real world
- To learn what questions you might have that our data might speak to



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What Adolescents Say: The Migration Journey

- Who made the decision to move to the U.S.?
 - *either mother or father 67%*
- How involved were you in the decision?
 - *49 % at least somewhat involved*
 - *36% not very involved or not involved at all*



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First Reactions to the Decision

- I was 14 and my mom told me that we had to come here because my daddy was already here and we had to come because I had to get a better life, to learn English and that stuff. And, I didn't like that. I was really mad at first because you know I was in middle school and my friends and everybody was there. When I was in middle school I thought I was going to graduate with all my friends and that stuff. And then my mom just told me that she wanted me to come here with her. It was hard because I didn't want to. I said, "NO, I am not going over there!"



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First Reactions: Separation

- well, I remember when she left we were in school, so we came back and...[stops talking, begins to cry]...it's sad [chokes up], you go to school one day and come back and your mom's not there [still crying]. I think that story is very similar to other kids. You know, their parents try to minimize, I don't know, the crying and all this stuff, but...so they try to leave whenever their kids are not at home or something...I mean, in my case, I mean, it wasn't that bad, I had my grandparents, my aunts and uncles, but I mean, it's still bad whenever you come home and you think...[chokes up]...um no, not really. Not with us. She had talked about it with my grandparents and with my other family, my aunts and uncles, but they hadn't talked to us at all about that.
- I have to say, things did get better when my mom moved over here. I mean, there was more income. Like I said, I mean, I couldn't say we were treated badly, we were with family. We were very close to my grandparents and everything. So I couldn't really say life changed for the worse, I mean it's something that, I mean, you miss you parents, your mom, but it's not, since you're living with relatives, that you've spent most of your life with, it minimizes that...but as far as, like the quality of life did improve greatly.



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First Reactions to the U.S.

- I thought the food (*laughing*) was very different. I didn't like any of it. Nothing. I first tried it and I didn't like it. I thought that it might be like the food in Mexico. I figured the people from my country might bring me my type of food. I thought we might be given tortillas or something like that, but they brought us a hamburger for each person...I really didn't like it. (*We both laughed.*)
- From the moment I left I thought it was going to be fun. And then I got here and I said, "What? What is this?" This was all new to me. It's weird 'cause people were talking in a language I didn't understand, and every time I didn't understand that. I knew, I thought they were talking about me, but they were not talking about me, you know?... 'cause I felt very weird because I couldn't communicate with them. Like if I needed to go to the bathroom how could I say to the teacher --AND I couldn't just walk out of the classroom. ...it was very difficult for me to adjust like this.



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What Adolescents Say: Reasons for Migration.

- Why did the family come?
 - *Better Job* 47%
 - *Family Reunification* 22%
- Life Event that Precipitated the Move?
 - 14% - *job loss*
- Were you concerned for your safety?
 - *Yes* = 52%
 - *Robbed* = 4%
 - *Attacked* = 2%
 - *Injured* = 13%
 - *Became Sick* = 14%
- 60% describe the move/journey as somewhat or very stressful



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My Family Came Because:

- My family had concerns around work. Sometimes my dad had work and sometimes he didn't or sometimes he couldn't work. If the work was finished then he didn't have other work. It is very, very difficult to be there without work—difficult, difficult. (*really emphasizing these words*)...In the town it wasn't like here where you could find a factory to work at. There was no industry and no office work or businesses there. There were mostly just houses there. The only type of work was in planting, agricultural.
- There wasn't much money. We kept having hard times with money and stuff like that. Like we needed coats and there wasn't any money for any...They decided that that was enough. They knew that it was never going to change so they came here...That means if you don't study you don't have that much money so you are going to have to take care of your money. You'll have to be worrying about where it is going to be short or worrying you 'can't go to this place', 'you can't meet this people' 'cause you don't have that money, but if you study you have your money. You don't have to worry about--I mean you just say, "I just have to pay my bills." You know. But you still have your own money to have fun. So they want us not to be working our whole lives like they did. They want us to enjoy our lives.



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And Now...

- Moving to the U.S. was the best thing for my family.
 - Yes=79%
- Moving to the U.S. was the best thing for me.
 - Yes=77%
- I would like to return to live in my native country one day.
 - Yes=70%
- Life in the U.S. is much easier than life in my native country.
 - Yes=61%
- I am happier in the U.S. than I would be in my native country.
 - 38% yes
 - 36% no



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What Adolescents Say: Current Life

- What language is spoken at home?
 - *Mostly/Exclusively Spanish = 75%*
- What language is spoken with friends?
 - *Mostly/Exclusively Spanish = 28%*
- Worked for pay in the last 12 months?
 - *Yes = 21%*
- Summer & School Year?
 - *Yes = 14%*
- Grades on Last Report Card
 - *C's or above = 77%*
 - *Mostly A's = 42%*
- What level of education do you want to achieve?
 - *91% high school +*
 - *66% college or higher*
- What level of education do you think you will achieve?
 - *87% high school +*
 - *49% college or higher*



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What Adolescents Say: School

- School Satisfaction
 - Range = 0-7
 - Average Score LAMHA = 5.6
- Teacher Support
 - Range = 0-11
 - Average Score LAMHA = 9.1
- School Safety
 - Range = 0-18
 - Average Score LAMHA = 6.1
- Social Support
 - Range = 0-8
 - Average Score LAMHA = 5.5



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School in the U.S.

- Double in the studies and double in the quality of education. Here it is very different. It is more advanced here. The education is better. The attention given by the teachers is better here. Better instruction. It is better here. I don't have any better words to use than that to express this enough.
- And then the teacher began to teach us words, the numbers, all the basic stuff. And after that year I think they give you a test of "oral language". If you are in level 1—that's where you begin—and then at the end of the year we got right up to level 5. And at the end of that year in that class I remember that we proved that we were at level 5, and level 5 means that you are ready for regular school. I was impressed that we advanced so quickly. So in one year in the 6th grade I went to the regular school just like all the others.



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New At School

- And believe it or not I was the first Hispanic to go to that school...and, it's hard. I remember the first thing I learned how to say is "I don't speak English." It was hard, I mean you would go, the bus would pick you up in the morning, and there wouldn't be other Hispanics so you would just sit there. Get to school, go to whichever class you had to go, the teachers would show you which way to go...And I remember I used to go to the library and they wouldn't let me get library books!! No, 'cause, I guess cause I don't have a card or something, I don't know, but I mean, I remember I couldn't check out books. It's hard...The transition is hard. I remember one time I told my mom "why did you even bring us over here?" and she'll probably tell you the same thing. But I did say "why? I don't like this." But you learn to adjust...



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Relationships with Teachers

- They are really nice. They work--like I am really bad at math, but my teachers are helping me right now. So I'm making A's on my test because he's helping me after school, during lunch, or before school..
- They pay a lot more attention to you here than they do over there. I guess it's because of the size of the classrooms, it's smaller like thirty students compared to there you might have fifty students, because you did have the grades separated but there were still a lot of kids in each grade. Here it's more on a, not really on a one to one, but here if you have a question you have a lot more time to ask, you can stay after school or whatever. The teachers are more interested in you, in how you're doing here than they are over there, really...If something is wrong they'll be like "is everything okay?" if you need to stay after school, or they'll give you extra material or something...



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What Adolescents Say: Life in the U.S.

- Racial discrimination limits economic opportunity in the U.S.
Yes = 56%
- The American way of life weakens the family.
Yes = 39%
- There is much conflict between different racial & ethnic groups in the U.S.
Yes=58%
- There is no better country to live in than the United States.
Yes = 51%
- Americans generally feel superior to foreigners.
Yes = 65%



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What Adolescents Say: Experiences with Discrimination

- I have been discriminated against in the U.S. Yes = 41%
- By:
 - *Teacher/administrator* 13%
 - *Kids at school* 31%
 - *Someone at Work* 2%
 - *Someone at a doctor's office* 0%
 - *Police officer* 3%
 - *Someone at a store* 11%
 - *Someone else* 3%



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Experiences with Discrimination

- That they think that because they are in their country they can discriminate you or do whatever they want with you. Sometimes they call you “Wetback,” but sometimes they don’t know what you have been through. They don’t know why you are here. They don’t know what were the problems that make you come here. (*Her eyes began to water here. She was starting to tear up literally*)...They don’t even think about the situation that you are in. They don’t think of how the person that they discriminate [against] feels. They just say, “Oh these Mexicans! They just come to take our jobs and our money. And to work here and to be here without papers without being legal.”



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Experiences with Discrimination

- Yeah, it was horrible. And people were just racist, and the bad thing about it was that the Hispanic kids were racist! The kids who were born there in Texas [*means second generation Hispanic immigrants*] were like “why are you here!?! Lalalalala.” I remember, they were teaching me English, the kids, they were being all nice to me and stuff, and they were teaching me English. And they taught me to say like “I’m crapping in my pants” or something like that. And I said it to the teacher and I got in trouble, everybody was like laughing, you know?



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Discrimination Changes My World View

- It has changed me, 'cause if I was in Mexico there would more Hispanic people, and I would not see the world as it was [really is]---racist. They looked at you just from being a Catholic--just any kind of---if you are in a religion--they look at you differently--"No she's not Christian. Oh she's not Buddhist." From Mexico, I mean, you are just friends with a person. You don't care what religion they are. You are just friends with them.
- ...if you are in your own country you belong there. You're not a stranger. So everything is familiar to you in your house. But if you go to someone's else house and live there they're always going to criticize at you 'cause you're not like them. You are different than they are. So that has changed me to see what people are really like. And you can see through them without even knowing them 'cause they look at you differently just 'cause you are a different color and different belief.



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Discrimination & Behavior

- And then here ...I just let it all go, basically. I got into some bad stuff, got into some trouble, 'cause I don't know. I know that it did and that it (*racism*) affected me. You know? ...I wasn't myself, when I was doing the bad stuff I wasn't myself, I was somebody else, I was wanting to be somebody else, I was trying to, I don't know, I was trying to fit into a mold of some sort of society, you know? I didn't know why I wanted, when I wanted it. I just took things and I don't know, it all exploded.And it was me and my middle brother that were the most getting into bad stuff and stuff. We got into some gang violence, me and my middle brother. We got into some drug problems, you know. But thankfully our parents helped us out with that...And I told my mom [about the discrimination]...and she told me "some people are like this and like that, but you gotta understand, you gotta forgive." That was they key word, forgive. And our parents always put that on us, you have to forgive, even if they smack you on one cheek, turn the other...It's like, you be the better person, don't lower yourself to their standard. That was the main point that they always said. Don't lower yourself, you know. You have to be beyond that.



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What I Miss About Mexico: Community

- Just because you live in a house. Here you live in an apartment and maybe the neighbor just got here, and maybe he's a criminal you don't know. In Mexico you know the people because they have lived there for 2, 3 years. So that's why. Maybe if I lived in a house here maybe it would change. Maybe then I would know the people next door.
- Because here they won't let me hang out much with my friends by myself or go by myself somewhere. And sometimes they say that if we were in Mexico they would let me hang out with my friends and go to clubs. Because they think in here that there is a lot of drug abuse and anything could happen to me. But I don't know why they feel more secure in Mexico about me than here.



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What I Miss: Community

- You don't have to have a car to go anywhere. You know. Everything was close by. It was a little (making a small gesture) town. If you go there, you go to the movies, and there's a whole million of stuff you can do. But here you have to get your own car 'cause to go to the mall it's not that easy as it is in Mexico 'cause in Mexico you can walk about a mile and you get there.
- I say it is the friendships and how people supported each other—all the connections that you had with your neighbors and families. They even supported you with finances, everything. The entire village, almost everyone, supported each other. There was one man, I can't remember for sure, but he had a problem with his foot, and he needed a wheelchair. So the entire village had a competition, a soccer match, and we all raised money to get him a chair. (He smiled very proudly here.) We had a fundraiser for him. We really supported him. The neighbors there really took care of each other.



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What Adolescents Say: Health

- How is your health?
 - 57% *very good or excellent*
- Routine physical in the last year?
 - 47% *yes*
- Received counseling in the last year?
 - 5% *yes*
- Asthma?
 - 5.3%
- Overweight?
 - 14%
- Vomit after Eating?
 - 5%



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What Adolescents Say: Health and Health Behaviors

- Smoked Cigarettes
 - *No = 96%*
- Alcohol
 - *Yes = 29%*
- Marijuana
 - *Yes = 3%*
- Harder drugs
 - *Never = 93%*
- Inhalants
 - *Never = 92%*
- Pregnancy
 - *Never = 90%*



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What Adolescents Say: Problematic Feelings & Behaviors

- Sadness (last 2 weeks)
 - *Many Times* = 7%
- Felt like killing myself (last 2 weeks)
 - Yes = 9%
- I think about killing myself
 - *Sometimes/Often* = 7.4 %
- Running Away
 - Yes = 5%
- Stealing
 - Yes = 6%
- Selling Drugs
 - *Never* = 98%



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Advice for Other Adolescents

- Don't get freaked out by the change, you know. Don't get freaked out by the rules. If you want it to affect you, it will affect you. Learn to be yourself, but also learn to help others, don't be selfish [*I feel that this young man is referring to his analysis of the Hispanic kids that treated him so badly when he arrived—telling new kids to be generous and mindful rather than letting their feelings drive their behavior, to be generous with new immigrants, etc*]. Don't be selfish with your feelings, with your thoughts, just don't be selfish at all. And the golden rule, do unto others as you would like them to do unto you, and the whole karma essence. Basically that's it. Be good.



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Advice to Other Adolescents

- I mean, there is really no good advice. You just gotta keep in mind that if they [your parents] did it, it's to try to better your way of life, not just theirs. 'cause, and I mean, you know that sooner or later they're gonna go get you or get somebody to bring you over, 'cause life, I mean, it's hard living over there. I mean, if you go to school you can only go to a certain grade level because they don't have like, like they have here, like the free education through twelfth grade, I mean you gotta buy books, sorta like if you were in a university. You gotta buy your books, you gotta pay a tuition and all that stuff, and that's expensive. So basically you just gotta, pull it up [suck it up, deal with it].



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Advice to Other Adolescents & Parents

- And in school, when I was in the 11th grade, I graduated taking AP Calculus...it was just me and another Hispanic girl, and all the other Hispanics were like “why? You can’t continue studying, why would you do it?” and I was like “if there’s ever a chance for me to go [to college], I’ll have that behind me.” ...I also took a college level course... My Grade Point Average was like 3.97 or something and I just think that helps you out. If you have the opportunity to go to college, to a community college even or whatever, you know you have that behind you and it’ll help you better yourself. And so I think the advice would be, go to school, don’t quit, don’t hang out with the wrong crowd. And I guess that’d be about it. And for the parents, just watch your kids. ‘cause there are a lot more things that they could do here that you wouldn’t even...you know, in Mexico you didn’t hear, I didn’t hear nothin’ about no kid smokin’ marijuana or usin’ no kind of drugs. But here there are so many bad influences, peer pressure and stuff like that. So I would say watch your kids, ask ‘em where they’re goin’, stuff like that.



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Discussion Points

- Parents are making the decision to immigrate.
- Kids may have knowledge of but no little or no in-put into the decision to migrate.
- Reflects what we hear about why people come – economics/better life for children.



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Further Discussion

- In hindsight, mixed feelings on the experience.
- Little difference between “what is best for me” and “what is best for my family.”



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Further Discussion

- Kids see that schools are trying.
- Discrimination comes mainly from other kids – not from teachers.
- Discrimination may have a big impact on behavior.



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Who Are These Youth?

- They have high aspirations.
- They are working in hard in school.
- They are worried about what it is realistic for them – yet generally optimistic.
- They do not appear to be engaging in risk behaviors in large numbers.
- The more we invest in them, the better off they, and we, will be!