The Impact of Migration and Acculturation on Latino Children and Families: Implications for Child Welfare Practice

Alan J. Dettlaff, PhD, LMSW, and Joan R. Rycraft, PhD

Dr. Dettlaff is an assistant professor at the Jane Addams College of Social Work, University of Illinois at Chicago. He is the evaluator of a federal grant from the Administration for Children and Families' Children's Bureau that is providing training to child welfare staff on effective practice with Latino children and families. His practice background is in public child welfare as a practitioner and supervisor specializing in investigations and sexual abuse.

Dr. Rycraft is associate dean, an associate professor, director of the PhD program, and a faculty associate of the University of Texas at Arlington School of Social Work - Judith Granger Birmingham Center for Child Welfare, as well as a faculty associate of the School of Social Work's Center for Research, Evaluation and Technology. She teaches courses in child and youth policy, advanced administration, and research methods and evaluation in the baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral programs. Dr. Rycraft's social work practice spans 20 years of public child welfare services in California as an investigator, supervisor, and administrator.

The growth of the Latino immigrant population in the United States requires that child welfare agencies examine and adapt their practices to ensure that they respond to the specific issues experienced by recent immigrants. Of particular concern to child welfare agencies are immigrants who are coming from a background of poverty in their country of origin, as children in those families are often considered at increased risk of maltreatment due to the stress associated with migration and acculturation. Culturally competent practice requires a thorough understanding of the impact that migration and acculturation has had on each family, and how those experiences may affect service delivery. This article addresses the issues experienced by Latino immigrant children and families and provides recommendations for effective practice that consider the effects of migration and acculturation on the family. It also addresses implications for policy, practice, research, and social work education.

Background

Latinos, particularly those who have recently migrated from other countries, represent the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States. Census data indicate that the Latino population, consisting of persons from Mexico, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Central America, South America, and other Latin countries, has increased by 61% since 1990, with Latinos accounting for 12.5% of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Recent data from the 2004 American Community Survey estimate that the Latino population has increased to 40.5 million, accounting for 14.2% of the population and representing an increase of 15% since 2000

(U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). While the majority of Latinos live in the South and West, the Latino population has quadrupled over the past 10 years in southeastern states, including Georgia, Tennessee, and North Carolina (Marotta & Garcia, 2003).

Latino immigrants who are foreign born account for over 46% of Latinos living in the United States (Larsen, 2004). In addition, the number of undocumented residents continues to rise each year. Data indicate that 8.4 million undocumented residents from Mexico and other Latin American countries were residing in the United States as of March 2004, of which 1.7 million were children under the age of 18 (Passell, 2005). Since the 1990s, the largest growth of undocumented immigrants has occurred in states with previously small numbers of Latino immigrants—Arizona and North Carolina are now among the states with the largest populations of undocumented immigrants (Passell, 2005).

Families coming from a background of poverty in their country of origin experience additional stress, as they also struggle to meet their own basic needs.

Latino immigrants are primarily young, have little formal education, and speak little English (Roosa, Morgan-Lopez, Cree, & Specter, 2002). Once in the United States, they experience lower educational outcomes, earn less income, and are more likely to live in poverty than those born in the United States or immigrants from non-Latin countries (Larsen, 2004). Further, those who have recently immigrated to the United States face a multitude of challenges resulting from migration and adaptation to a new country with differing customs and expectations. Fear, stress, loss, isolation, and uncertainty about the future are factors often experienced by Latino immigrants as a result of migration. Additionally, pressures resulting from acculturation often lead to a variety of strains and difficulties on the family system (Partida, 1996). Further compounding those difficulties is the possibility of pre-existing psychological concerns that may worsen as a result of the migration experience (Leon & Dziegielewski, 1999).

While all immigrant families may experience stress resulting from migration and acculturation, families coming from a background of poverty in their country of origin experience additional stress, as they also struggle to meet their own basic needs. Such families are of particular relevance to the child welfare system, as children in poor immigrant families are often considered at increased risk for maltreatment due to the stress and pressure experienced by the family system (Korbin & Spilsbury, 1999; Roer-Strier, 2001). As a result, in order to provide effective and culturally competent services, social workers in the child welfare system must understand the effects of migration and the resulting pressure and stress associated with acculturation. Given the rapid growth of the Latino immigrant population, child welfare agencies and staff must understand and respond to the needs of this population in order to achieve positive outcomes of safety, permanence, and well-being. This necessitates not only an

understanding of the immigrant population, but an examination of current child welfare practices to ensure that those practices respond to the specific issues experienced by recent immigrants.

The migration experience

While circumstances leading to migration vary among families, most families choose to migrate because the financial or political situation in their own country has left them with no other options (Partida, 1996). For families living in poverty in their country of origin, the decision to migrate to the United States is often based on financial necessity. It involves the search for greater wages and increased job opportunities in order to improve their own living conditions. Typically, the father of a young family will migrate alone in search of work, with the intent of returning once he has saved enough money to improve his family's circumstances. This may result in multiple trips, which become increasingly dangerous and risky. When an entire family migrates, it generally occurs in stages. First the father establishes employment and housing, then his wife and children join him. The children often migrate separately, as the family's economic condition grows more stable.

This migratory experience denotes a significant life crisis to the family system. The initial act of entering the country can be dangerous—many migrants experience violence, robbery, and sexual assault (Solis, 2003). Children are often separated from parents and other siblings for extended periods while placed with family or kin in the country of origin (Partida, 1996). Once in the new country, families continue to experience stress resulting from the language barrier, unfamiliar customs, loss of routine, and continuing threats of violence or discovery (Hancock, 2005; Solis, 2003). The stress associated with this initial transition period may result in depression or anxiety, and individuals who experience significant trauma during migration may develop symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (Smart & Smart, 1995).

Following the initial crisis of migration, families continue to experience significant challenges as they struggle to learn the language and navigate confusing and unfamiliar systems. Many of these challenges are tangible (e.g., finding employment, shopping, paying bills, and contending with school and medical systems), and they can result in significant anxiety and stress, as individuals discover that their abilities and coping skills can no longer meet the demands of the new environment (Vega, 1992). Without their previously established support systems, individuals facing these challenges may suffer severe psychological problems, including depression, anxiety, and alcoholism (Leon & Dziegielewski, 1999). Undocumented migrants experience additional stress from living with the ongoing fear of discovery and deportation. They may have difficulty obtaining employment and are vulnerable to exploitation by employers who may use their undocumented status as leverage to pay below-market wages or to refuse payment once the work is completed (Smart & Smart, 1995).

Acculturative stress

The process of psychological acculturation refers to the internal process of change experienced by all immigrants upon exposure to a new culture (Padilla & Perez, 2003). Early theoretical literature on acculturation suggested that the process of acculturation occurs when individuals from one culture are continuously exposed to a different culture, with this exposure resulting in changes to the original cultural patterns of the group. These changes result as individuals seek ways to adapt to the new culture in order to reduce conflict (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). Later theorists further developed this model by exploring the psychological processes involved in acculturation, describing acculturation as a process involving not only behavioral change, but changes to value systems, norms, and material traits. How individuals accommodate is described as being a function of the value systems, roles, personality styles, and developmental processes of the individual (Social Science Research Council, 1954; Teske & Nelson, 1974). These later conceptualizations were important to the understanding of acculturation, since the inclusion of value systems, roles, and personality factors suggests that the process of acculturation may differ among cultural groups as a result of cultural differences. Current literature suggests that acculturation is a complex process that is dependent on a multitude of individual and cultural factors, including ethnicity, gender, age, religious beliefs, family structure, language, and personality (Padilla & Perez, 2003). Thus, the process of acculturation and the extent to which acculturation occurs may differ among immigrants as a result of the cultural background and value systems of the group.

Similarly, the psychological stress and resulting problems associated with acculturation manifest themselves differently as a result of the cultural background of the group (Leon & Dziegielewski, 1999). The psychological stress associated with the migration experience among all immigrants is supported in the body of literature on migration and acculturation (Leon & Dziegielewski, 1999; Levy-Warren, 1987; Padilla & Perez, 2003; Smart & Smart, 1995). However, the literature suggests that acculturation is more difficult for those immigrants who are more distinct from the host culture in factors such as ethnicity, religion, and language (Padilla & Perez, 2003). When significant differences exist between the country of origin and the host culture, the process of acculturation becomes more challenging as a result of the cultural negotiation that must occur. Immigrants involved in changing cultural contexts must cope with the societal standards and traditions of the new culture, while making decisions about the level to which they will integrate into the host culture. For immigrants of differing religious and cultural backgrounds, this often involves giving up previously valued cultural traditions or feeling pressured to accept certain changes to their traditions. When language differences exist, the stress associated with acculturation is further compounded, as immigrants struggle to understand and learn the new language while also attempting to understand the culture.

Additionally, immigrants who are more distinct from the host culture in ethnicity, religion, and language are more likely to experience social discrimination and prejudice as a result of the factors that identify them as different from the majority (Padilla & Perez, 2003; Smart & Smart, 1995). Accented speech, unfamiliar customs, and differences in skin color are all factors that identify immigrants as outsiders to those in the dominant culture. These immigrants may experience additional psychological stress, as members of the host culture may question their motives and limit their opportunity for involvement in the host culture (Padilla & Perez, 2003). When this occurs, some immigrants feel forced to undergo certain changes, rather than choosing the level to which they acculturate, which further contributes to stress.

The transition to minority status combined with anti-Latino-immigrant sentiment in the United States results in feelings of social stigmatization.

Acculturative stress of Latino children and families

Given those issues, several authors suggest that the psychological stress of acculturation experienced by Latinos is different from that of other immigrant populations (Fontes, 2002; Hancock, 2005; Smart & Smart, 1995). Differences in culture, language, and religious traditions are issues experienced by many Latino families upon migration. Unfamiliar customs and traditions, combined with the language barrier, serve as significant sources of stress for immigrant families as they attempt to navigate confusing and unfamiliar systems. Often, unfamiliarity with the language serves as a significant barrier to accessing resources for the family. Additionally, the process of moving from ethnic majority in their country of origin to a minority in the United States can be disorienting for many Latino immigrants (Espin, 1987). While many poor immigrants have experienced discrimination in their country of origin due to their social class or socioeconomic status, the experience of overt discrimination for the first time as a result of their ethnicity can add further stress to this difficult transition.

The transition to minority status combined with the anti-Latino-immigrant sentiment that exists in the United States often results in feelings of social stigmatization for Latino children and families. Research indicates that Latino immigrants are aware of the negative connotations associated with their group and believe that non-Latinos hold negative views of them (Casas, Ponterotto, & Sweeney, 1987). This awareness can lead to feelings of powerless and low self-esteem, as immigrants realize that judgments are made against them based on assumptions about their ethnicity, rather than being judged on their abilities. This awareness contributes to the stress associated with acculturation and it influences the ways in which Latino immigrants respond to the majority culture.

The strong cultural values of collectiveness, mutual aid, and family ties also make the

migration process for Latino immigrants particularly difficult, as families are separated and close personal relationships are left behind. This loss of social support is considered by some authors to be one of the most significant aspects contributing to acculturative stress among Latino immigrants (Leon & Dziegielewski, 1999; Smart & Smart, 1995). As immigrants struggle to meet the challenges inherent with migration and are faced for the first time with issues of discrimination and stigmatization, they are confronted with the reality that they no longer have the supportive relationships that existed in their home country. And the stress associated with migration and acculturation is likely to prevent the establishment of new supportive systems (Canino & Canino, 1982). As individuals lose their sense of belonging and the support that came from their previous relationships, they are likely to feel isolated and overwhelmed, which further contributes to the risk of depression and anxiety. Some immigrants begin to experience feelings of guilt and regret over their decision to migrate because of the relationships that were left behind.

For undocumented immigrants, the ongoing fear of discovery and deportation adds a constant source of additional stress that is not experienced by documented immigrants of either European or Latin American descent (Smart & Smart, 1995). This fear can develop into a sense of caution and mistrust that was previously not prevalent in interpersonal relationships. The resulting reluctance to access needed social services further compounds the issue.

Effects of migration and acculturation on the Latino family

The effects of migration and acculturative stress, which are well-documented in the literature, include anxiety, depression, alcoholism, drug use, and juvenile delinquency. Primary among those effects, and particularly relevant for children and families in the child welfare system, are the resulting family problems experienced by Latino immigrants following migration. Families of Latino immigrants tend to foster close, loving relationships with their children and expect their children to consider the family as the central source of support and loyalty (Hancock, 2005; Zayas & Solari, 1994). Children are expected to obey their parents, respect their elders, and conform to established rules. Tensions may occur as children experience conflict between those parental expectations and the values of the majority culture, which emphasize autonomy and independence (Falicov, 1998; Fontes, 2002). These value differences can form the basis for significant tension between Latino parents who adhere to traditional values and their children, who are rapidly exposed to the social norms of the majority culture through school and television. Research indicates that increased parenting stress and low confidence in parenting skills are common among Latino immigrant parents (Simoni, 1993). Children often acculturate faster than their parents, resulting in parents who feel they are no longer able to control their children and preserve the closeness of the parent-child relationship they had previously established.

In addition to the tensions that arise between parents and children, the effects of migration and acculturative stress often result in significant stressors on marital relationships. The experience of migration, with its cultural and financial pressures, frequently produces changes to previously established gender roles and expectations (Coltrane, Parke, & Adams, 1994; Partida, 1996). Financial needs often necessitate women entering the workforce, which may require men to accept additional responsibilities for child care and housework (Coltrane et al., 1994). This situation may cause stress to both parties, as women may feel they can no longer fulfill their responsibilities of raising their children and maintaining the household, while men may feel a sense of inadequacy in that they are no longer able to provide for their families' needs. This situation is compounded when men struggle with unemployment (Falicov, 1998). As a result, immigrant couples are at increased risk for relationship conflict and domestic violence (Cunradi, Caetano, & Schafer, 2002). Aldaronda, Kaufman, and Jasinski (2002) found that physical violence is often the method used by Mexican immigrant men as a means of conflict resolution, while the outside employment of wives and the unemployment of their husbands are both significantly associated with domestic violence among Latino immigrant couples (Cunradi et al., 2002). Additionally, because undocumented men can be deported upon arrest, many cases of domestic violence go unreported, as women are afraid of the resulting effects on the family (Aldaronda et al., 2002; Lown & Vega, 2003).

> Children often acculturate faster than their parents, resulting in parents who feel they can no longer control their children and preserve the closeness they had previously established.

Although the potential exists for conflict and stress within the family resulting from the migration and acculturation process, that process may also be a significant source of strength and resilience for Latino immigrant families. Many Latino families place considerable emphasis on strength in the midst of crisis and have a strong sense of personal pride and dignity (Glicken & Garza, 2004). When the challenges are surmounted, the family may draw considerable strength and pride from their accomplishments. Latino parents may be particularly proud of their ability to meet the basic needs of their children in the midst of ongoing struggles related to the acculturation process.

Implications for child welfare practice with Latino immigrant families

Similar to the influence of culture, the process of acculturation and the resulting acculturative stress lasts throughout the lifespan and must be considered by social workers (Padilla & Perez, 2003; Smart & Smart, 1995). As a result, social workers in the child welfare system must examine and adapt their practice in order to meet the needs of this population and provide culturally responsive interventions that result in positive change. Culturally competent practice with Latino

immigrants requires more than just a general understanding of Latino culture and improved accessibility of services. In order for effective change to result, social workers must understand the impact that migration and acculturation has had on the family and how it has contributed to the actions that led to their involvement in the child welfare system. Social workers must also understand how these experiences will impact relationship development with the family and the family's response to proposed interventions. These experiences must be considered at every stage of service.

Engagement

In child welfare practice with any population, the initial contacts with a family are critical, as they set the groundwork for the remainder of the helping process. When working with Latino immigrant families, the initial contacts are especially crucial to the establishment of a positive and productive helping relationship. Latino immigrant families are likely to be very confused and distrustful of governmental systems in the United States. So close attention must be paid to relationship development in initial meetings with the family. In the initial interactions, professional style is very important—research indicates that differences in professional style may impact the level of communication and responsiveness to interventions among Latino clients (Erzinger, 1991; Flaskerud, 1986). Interactions should be conducted in a warm, professional manner that demonstrates respect and concern for the family and the situation (Erzinger, 1991; Fontes, 2002).

When working with Latino immigrant families, it is very important for the family to develop a level of trust with the social worker, upon which all further interventions will be based. Social workers should be prepared to spend a longer period of time in initial meetings with the family in order to develop this trust. Glicken and Garza (2004) suggest that social workers should use an indirect style of gathering information when working with immigrants in order to allow the client to maintain control over the situation and have time to assess the worker's intentions. Zayas (1992) suggests that social workers are more likely to establish trust with immigrant families by gathering information with a "sensitive curiosity" about their experiences. Rather than asking specific questions, information should be gathered through a conversational approach, with the family deciding when and what information will be shared about the events that led to child welfare involvement.

Social workers must understand the impact of migration and acculturation on the family and how it contributed to their involvement in the child welfare system.

Throughout the engagement process, it is important to understand how the effects of stigmatization may impact relationship development. Goffman (1963) suggests that individuals who feel stigmatized as a result of their attributes or identity are likely to be selective about the information they reveal

about themselves, in an attempt to control the perceptions that others have of them. Similarly, stigmatized individuals are likely to be uncertain of the intentions of others in the majority culture, and they are likely to be reserved and to hold back until they feel they can make an accurate assessment of others' motives. And, even when help is offered to them, individuals who feel stigmatized are likely to be wary of accepting help until the motivations for offering the help are better understood (Major & Crocker, 1993). When working with Latino immigrant families, it is important that the social worker understand these initial reservations and not perceive them as resistance. The social worker must spend significant time developing the relationship and establishing trust in order to develop a partnership that will result in positive change.

An atmosphere of reciprocity is necessary to establish the level of trust required for active involvement in the helping process.

Another issue to consider is the need to engage the family through a process of mutual sharing and inclusion. When working with Latino immigrant families, an atmosphere of reciprocity is necessary to establish the level of trust required for active involvement in the helping process (Leon & Dziegielewski, 1999; Quinones-Mayo & Dempsey, 2005). Social workers should expect to answer questions about their own family and events in their lives as part of developing the relationship. It is also common for Latino clients to offer small gifts of food, religious articles, or mementos from their home country in appreciation of the services being provided (Quinones-Mayo & Dempsey, 2005). This aspect of engagement may be particularly difficult for social workers who have been trained to maintain rigid boundaries with clients; however, it is a necessary element of the engagement process with Latino families.

Assessment

The role of the assessment is to understand the underlying causes contributing to the problem of abuse or neglect in the family. Accurate assessment of Latino immigrants requires that social workers clearly assess the cultural background of families and how their culture influences their thoughts and behaviors. Culture shapes the way families view their problems, accept responsibility, and respond to interventions. These factors must be understood by social workers prior to any discussion concerning possible interventions. In order for interventions to be effective, they must consider the cultural influences inherent in the family and how those influences may affect service delivery.

When conducting the assessment, it is important to recognize that immigrant populations are the least acculturated, and therefore among the most difficult to assess (Fontes, 2002). Leon and Dziegielewski (1999) argue that the majority of social workers hold beliefs and values that reflect those of the majority culture. When working with unfamiliar cultures, social workers are likely to

make assessments by filtering information through their own cultural lens, resulting in inaccurate assessments of the family dynamics and underlying causes of the problem. In order to provide effective services, social workers must be aware of the probable influence of their own cultural values and biases when making assessments of immigrant populations (Leon & Dziegielewski, 1999; Quinones-Mayo & Dempsey, 2005). Considerable time should be spent attempting to understand the dynamics of the problem through the cultural lens of the immigrant family.

In addition to understanding the influence of culture, accurate assessment requires an understanding of the migration and acculturation experience of the immigrant family. The acculturative stress experienced by Latino immigrants tends to be pervasive and intense (Smart & Smart, 1995). As a result, this process should include a thorough assessment of stress and depression as possible contributing factors to the current situation. Other potential contributing factors include isolation, low self-esteem, anxiety, and identity confusion (Garcia, 2001). Social workers should also assess for additional problems resulting from the migration and acculturation experience, including domestic violence, alcoholism, and intergenerational problems, each of which may contribute to abuse and neglect. Assessment should also involve an identification and understanding of the social supports established in the community, which may be used as resources in service delivery.

Considerable time should be spent attempting to understand the dynamics of the problem through the cultural lens of the immigrant family.

Of particular importance to social workers in the child welfare system is the assessment of the family's child-rearing practices and the circumstances leading to child welfare involvement. Understanding the influence of culture is critical to addressing issues of child maltreatment. Research indicates that both child-rearing practices and ideologies are influenced by and vary across cultures (Bornstein, 1991; Korbin & Spilsbury, 1999; Roer-Strier, 2001). Shor (1999) cites the lack of understanding of the influence of culture on parenting as the primary barrier to accurate assessment and effective intervention in cases of child maltreatment among immigrant families. While extreme physical harm is considered abusive in all cultures, physical discipline is viewed as an appropriate form of punishment in many Latino cultures by parents who care about the welfare of their children (Buriel, Mercado, & Chavez, 1991; Fontes, 2002). Parents who engage in harsh physical discipline may require services, but it is important for social workers to understand the role of culture in these practices when assessing parents' motivation and risk of future abuse. Accurate assessment of risk is of particular importance in families who are experiencing changing cultural contexts as a result of migration, due to the many increased risks resulting from

acculturative stress. The influence of culture and the effects of migration must be considered in planning service delivery to ensure that services adequately address the underlying causes of the problem.

Adequate assessment must also involve a thorough exploration of internal and external strengths and resources. When working with Latino immigrant families, social workers should thoroughly explore the challenges the family has experienced as a result of their migration experience and the strengths and coping mechanisms that have been used to address those challenges. Significant acknowledgment should be given for past successes, particularly those related to the parents' ability to support and raise their children in the midst of ongoing challenges. Strengths and resources identified during this phase should be considered throughout the process of planning for intervention.

Issues of acculturative stress and the associated anxiety experienced by immigrant families must be addressed first in order to produce effective change.

Intervention

Interventions that result in positive change should come directly from the assessment and an understanding of the underlying causes contributing to the abuse or neglect in the home. However, it is important to remember during this stage of service that the family's experiences with migration and acculturation will continue to affect service delivery. In a general sense, families who experience greater amounts of acculturative stress will be less likely to have the energy to engage in the development of new skills or resources that are necessary for addressing child maltreatment (Smart & Smart, 1995). It is also less likely that these families will be able to draw on existing strengths and coping abilities to address the problem effectively. As a result, issues of acculturative stress and the associated anxiety experienced by immigrant families must be addressed first in order to produce effective change.

Literature on intervention with Latino immigrant families stresses the importance of interventions that increase social support and reduce isolation (Denner, Kirby, Coyle, & Brindis, 2003; Fontes, 2002; Hancock, 2005). Social support has been shown to reduce stress and provide the protective factors that are necessary to minimize the negative effects of the migration and acculturation experience (Denner et al., 2003). The use of community resources by immigrant families, including English classes, vocational education, and parenting aides, has been shown to reduce family conflict and strengthen resiliency (McCubbin, Futrell, Thompson, & Thompson, 1995; Valdes, 1996). Mutual support groups have been shown to be effective in helping Latino immigrant families adjust to their new environments, thus reducing stress (Canino & Canino, 1982; Leon, Mazur, Montalvo, & Rodriguez, 1984). Psychoeducational groups may be more effective than individual therapy with this population, due to the establishment of supportive relationships and the ability to learn from others who have experienced similar issues (Leon et al., 1984; Simoni, 1993).

Once the stress level in the family is reduced, interventions can be developed that address the issues of child maltreatment. Services should be driven by the particular needs and preferences of the family, with the family involved as key stakeholders in the process. This level of involvement emphasizes the family's role in the solution to their problems and helps to ensure that services are sensitive to their culture and values. When possible, services should be based in the community, so children can remain connected to their environment and cultural norms, and informal support systems should be involved in facilitating service delivery. These informal supports can be used for child care, transportation, and general emotional support. Throughout the process, the social worker should demonstrate an understanding of the importance of the family's culture by ensuring that services are consistent with the family's values and norms. Through this understanding, the worker demonstrates respect and commitment to the family, thus improving the family's willingness to participate in services.

Termination

When working with Latino immigrants, social workers should discuss termination early in the relationship. By the time of termination, families often will have come to value and appreciate the support and attention given to them by their caseworker, making the process of termination difficult for many clients. Children and family members are likely to have grown to regard the caseworker as a trusted source of guidance and support that has helped them through a difficult time. As a result, social workers should be sensitive to the needs of families during this time by reassuring them of the success they have achieved and by inviting them to contact the worker for further assistance if a problem arises.

Future directions for child welfare with Latino immigrant families

The increasing numbers and specific needs of Latino immigrant families call for an expanded approach and delivery of child welfare services. This need is evident in issues of policy, practice, research, and social work education.

Implications for policy

As immigration laws become more punitive, families who arrive illegally and undocumented are at higher risk of deportation and increased levels of stress. When these families come to the attention of the child welfare agency, there is often a "don't ask, don't tell" approach to their immigrant status. This can result in confusion for both the worker and the family regarding the possibility of contacting immigration authorities. Child welfare agencies need to develop clear policies on how workers are to deal with immigrant families who have entered the United States illegally. That information also needs to be shared with the Latino community to assure families that involvement with child welfare does not always result in deportation. A clear policy will

allow child welfare workers to assist families and establish the level of trust necessary for effective intervention.

Additionally, all social workers need to become informed of the existing and proposed legislation regarding the immigration of individuals and families from Mexico and other Latin countries. From self-appointed vigilante groups and the erection of fences to prevent illegal border crossings, to increased immigration and border patrol personnel at established entry ports, the message that immigrants are unwelcome in the United States is becoming increasingly clear. Regardless of political position, social workers should advocate for the rights of individuals and humane treatment of immigrants entering the country by both legal and illegal means.

Implications for practice

Effective practice with Latino families requires culturally competent and well-trained child welfare staff. This includes a staff that is representative of the Latino immigrant population as well as staff members who are bilingual. In addition to requiring cultural competency training for all staff members, efforts must be made to provide them with the opportunity to become proficient in the Spanish language. The need for communication between child welfare staff and Latino children and families is crucial for successful outcomes. Child welfare agencies also must approach the Latino community and engage in a series of activities to build a collaboration that will address the needs of Latino immigrant families. Without community supports, the immigrant families will not prosper. A culturally competent, bilingual staff connected to the Latino community is necessary to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of children of immigrant families.

Implications for research

Immigrant families have been the subject of several research endeavors; however, within the field of child welfare, there has been a dearth of inquiry. As this population escalates across the country, the number of Latino immigrant children entering the child welfare system will also increase. Practices need to be evaluated for both efficacy and efficiency, and best practices must be disseminated for replication. An understanding of the impact that investigations, out-of-home care, family-based services, court experiences, and community involvement have on Latino immigrant families must be determined. While the avenues for research are numerous, state and federal funding is needed to advance the knowledge and skills in working with Latino immigrant families.

Implications for social work education

Opportunities abound for schools of social work to take the lead in initiatives to prepare bachelor's and master's level social workers to assist Latino immigrant families. Updates and enhancements of curricula are a necessity, and seminars on global issues and immigration would provide background information for an understanding of the stresses and challenges faced by Latino immigrant families. Schools that have Title IV-E funding for training child welfare staff are especially well-positioned to

provide leadership in educational offerings that prepare students for practice with Latino immigrant families. In addition to addressing the curriculum, schools of social work could collaborate with their language departments or continuing education divisions to provide Spanish language classes suitable for social work practitioners. A partnership between the school of social work, child welfare agency, Spanish language department, and the university continuing education division could provide an avenue for building a bilingual staff in child welfare.

Schools of social work must also connect more closely with the Latino community to develop field placement opportunities for students interested in working with Latino immigrant families. The hands-on experience of a field placement under the supervision of a community-based social work supervisor could establish an excellent base for the student to develop both knowledge and skills needed to work with this population. Additionally, the child welfare agency and school of social work need to collaborate on the recruitment of Latino social work students interested in working in child welfare. Schools of social work can play an integral role in increasing the numbers of Latino social workers through targeted recruitment, supportive services for Latino students, and relationship development with agencies serving Latino immigrant children and families.

Conclusion

Latino immigrant families, whether documented or undocumented, face severe challenges upon entering the United States. The loss of their community and other social supports make them vulnerable to stress, depression, and a host of other complications in establishing a safe and permanent home where their children's well-being can be assured. Social workers working with these families must be sensitive to the families' culture and must adapt their practice approaches to the needs of each family. Culturally competent practice requires a thorough understanding of the impact that migration and acculturation have had on each family, and how their experiences have contributed to their involvement in the child welfare system. That impact must be understood at every level of practice in order to provide effective interventions that result in positive outcomes of safety, permanence, and well-being. In addition, the social service community must become active in addressing the needs of this population through policy advocacy, development of effective interventions, evaluation of practice and further research, and collaboration with the Latino community to provide the supports and services needed by Latino immigrant families.

Social workers must be sensitive to the families' culture and must adapt their practice approaches to the needs of each family

References

Aldarondo, E., Kaufman, G. K., & Jasinski, J. (2002). A risk marker analysis of wife assault in Latino families. *Violence Against Women*, 8, 429-454.

Bornstein, M. H. (1991). Approaches to parenting in culture. In M. H. Bornstein (Ed.), *Cultural approaches to parenting* (pp. 3-19). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Buriel, R., Mercado, R., & Chavez, J. M. (1991). Mexican-American disciplinary practices and attitudes toward child maltreatment: A comparison of foreign and native-born mothers. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences,* 13(1), 78-94.

Canino, G., & Canino, I. A. (1982). Culturally syntonic family therapy for migrant Puerto Ricans. *Hospital and Community Psychiatry*, 33(4), 299-303.

Casas, J. M., Ponterotto, J. G., & Sweeney, M. (1987). Stereotyping the stereotyper: A Mexican-American perspective. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology,* 18, 45-57.

Coltrane, S., Parke, R. D., & Adams, M. (2004). Complexity of father involvement in low-income Mexican American families. *Family Relations,* 53, 179-189.

Cunradi, C. B., Caetano, R., & Schafer, J. (2002). Socioeconomic predictors of intimate partner violence among white, black, and Hispanic couples in the United States. *Journal of Family Violence,* 17, 377-389.

Denner, J., Kirby, D., Coyle, K., & Brindis, C. (2003). The protective role of social capital and cultural norms in Latino communities: A study of adolescent births. In M. Aguire-Molina & C. W. Molina (Eds.), *Latina health in the United States: A public health reader* (pp. 373-390). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Erzinger, S. (1991). Communication between Spanish-speaking patients and their doctors in medical encounters. *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry*, 15, 91-110.

Espin, O. M. (1987). Psychological impact of migration on Latinas. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 11, 489-503.

Falicov, C. J. (1998). *Latino families in therapy: A guide to multicultural practice.* New York: Guilford Press.

Flaskerud, J. H. (1986). The effects of culture-compatible intervention on the utilization of mental health services by minority clients. *Community Mental Health Journal,* 22, 127-141.

Fontes, L. A. (2002). Child discipline and physical abuse in immigrant Latino families: Reducing violence and misunderstandings. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 80, 31-40.

Garcia, E. C. (2001). Parenting in Mexican American families. In N. Boyd Webb (Ed.), *Culturally diverse parent-child and family relationships: A guide for social workers and other practitioners* (pp. 157-180). New York: Columbia University Press.

Glicken, M. D., & Garza, M. A. (2004). Utilizing the strengths perspective with the culturally traditional Latino client in crisis. In M. D. Glicken (Ed.), *Using the strengths perspective in social work practice* (pp. 105-116). Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.

Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Hancock, T. U. (2005). Cultural competence in the assessment of poor Mexican families in the rural southeastern United States. *Child Welfare*, 84(5), 689-711.

Korbin, J., & Spilsbury, J. (1999). Cultural competence and child neglect. In H. Dubowitz (Ed.), *Neglected children* (pp. 69-88). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Larsen, L. J. (2004). The foreign-born population in the United States: 2003. *Current Population Reports*, P20-551. Washington, DC: United States Census Bureau.

Leon, A. M., & Dziegielewski, S. F. (1999). The psychological impact of migration: Practice considerations in working with Hispanic women. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 13(1), 69-82.

Leon, A. M., Mazur, R., Montalvo, E., & Rodriguez, M. (1984). Self-help support groups for Hispanic mothers. *Child Welfare*, 63, 261-268.

Levy-Warren, M. H. (1987). Moving to a new culture: Cultural identity, loss, and mourning. In J. Bloom-Feshback & S. Bloom-Feshback & Associates (Eds.), *The psychology of separation and loss: Perspectives on development, life-transitions, and clinical practice* (pp. 300-315). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lown, A. E., & Vega, W. A. (2003). Prevalence and predictors of physical partner abuse among Mexican American women. In M. Aguire-Molina & C. W. Molina (Eds.), *Latina health in the United States: A public health reader* (pp. 572-584). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Major, B., & Crocker, J. (1993). Social stigma: The affective consequences of attributional ambiguity. In D. M. Mackie & D. L. Hamilton (Eds.), *Affect, cognition, and stereotyping: Interactive processes in intergroup perception* (pp. 345-370). San Diego: Academic Press.

Marotta, S., & Garcia, J. (2003). Latinos in the United States in 2000. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 25, 13-34.

McCubbin, H. I., Futrell, J. A., Thompson, E. A., & Thompson, A. I. (1995). Resilient families in an ethnic and cultural context. In H. I. McCubbin, E. A. Thompson, A. I. Thompson, & J. A. Futrell (Eds.), *The dynamics of resilient families: Vol. 2. Resiliency in ethnic minority African American families* (pp. 329-351). Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin.

Padilla, A. M., & Perez, W. (2003). Acculturation, social identity, and social cognition: A new perspective. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 25(1), 35-55.

Partida, J. (1996). The effects of immigration on children in the Mexican-American community. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 13(3), 241-254.

Passel, J. S. (2005). *Estimates of the size and characteristics of the undocumented population*. Washington DC: Pew Hispanic Center.

Quinones-Mayo, Y., & Dempsey, P. (2005). Finding the bicultural balance: Immigrant Latino mothers raising "American" adolescents. *Child Welfare*, 84(5), 649-667.

Redfield, R., Linton, R., & Herskovits, M. J. (1936). Memorandum for the study of acculturation. *American Anthropologist*, 38, 149-152.

Roer-Strier, D. (2001). Reducing risk for children in changing cultural contexts: Recommendations for intervention and training. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 25, 231-248.

Roosa, M. W., Morgan-Lopez, A. A., Cree, W. K., & Specter, M. M. (2002). Ethnic culture, poverty, and context: Influences on Latino families and children. In J. M. Contreras, K. A. Kerns, & A. M. Neal-Barnett (Eds.), *Latino children and families in the United States: Current research and future directions* (pp. 27-44). Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

Shor, R. (1999). Inappropriate child rearing practices as perceived by Jewish immigrant parents from the former Soviet Union. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 23(5), 487-499.

Simoni, J. M. (1993). Latina mothers' help seeking at a school-based mutual support group. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 21, 188-199.

Smart, J. F., & Smart, D. W. (1995). Acculturative stress of Hispanics: Loss and challenge. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 73, 390-396.

Social Science Research Council. (1954). Acculturation: An exploratory formulation. *American Anthropologist*, 56, 973-1000.

Solis, J. (2003). Re-thinking illegality as a violence against, not by Mexican immigrants, children, and youth. *Journal of Social Issues*, 59, 15-31.

Teske, R. H., & Nelson, B. H. (1974). Acculturation and assimilation: A clarification. *American Ethnologist*, 17, 218-235.

Valdes, G. (1996). *Con respecto: Bridging the gap between culturally diverse families and schools: An ethnographic portrait.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Vega, W. A. (1992). Theoretical and pragmatic implications of cultural diversity for community research. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 20, 375-391.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2000). *Census 2000 Summary File* 1: 2000. Retrieved February 26, 2006, from http://factfinder.census.gov

U.S. Census Bureau. (2004). *2004 American Community Survey*. Retrieved February 26, 2006, from http://factfinder.census.gov

Zayas, L. H. (1992). Childrearing, social stress, and child abuse: Clinical considerations with Hispanic families. *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless*, 1, 291-309.

Zayas, L. H., & Solari, F. (1994). Early childhood socialization in Hispanic families: Context, culture, and practice implications. *Professional Psychology: Practice and Research*, 25(3), 200-206.