



Information Packet:

Latino Youth and the Foster Care System

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May 2015

Summary

Between 2000 and 2010, Latinos accounted for over half the growth of the total population in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). In 2010 people of Hispanic or Latino descent constituted 16% of the United States population, which is equivalent to about 50.5 people. This number is a significant increase from previous years. It is clear that the growth of the Latino population has been exponential, and will continue to be so. Unfortunately, along with this population growth comes the potential of more Latino children to be represented in the child welfare system. According to the annual report distributed by the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), 22% of the children in the foster care system in July 2014 were of Hispanic or Latino decent. In addition, research suggests that Latino children are typically younger than non-Latino children when they are referred to the child welfare system, which can be “concerning given that infants and young children are less likely to be reunified with their families” (Casey Latino Leadership Group, n.d.).

Despite this significant increase in the Latino/Hispanic population, there is still limited information that allows professionals to gain a better understanding of the Latino community and the factors that influence their involvement in the child welfare system. As Rivera-Rodriguez (2011) states in her work regarding engaging Latino families and the importance of culturally competent practice in child welfare, “The belief that culture makes no difference and that traditional intervention approaches are universally applicable to all families demonstrates a cultural blindness that will undermine the effectiveness of child welfare policies and programs” (p.9). In other words, she is underlining the importance of acknowledging the differences between Latino families, specifically, and other racial/ethnic communities. Furthermore, there is a need to acknowledge the importance of creating more services and programs specific to children and youth in the Latino communities.

A study was completed in 2008 involving youth receiving foster care services provided by the Casey Family Programs. The programs were throughout five different states, and the research required interviews to be completed with eligible participants. The study sought to explore two topics associated with ethnic identity – (1) youth perceptions about their own identity, and (2) attitudes about ethnic identity development specific to the experience of foster care (Roller White, et. al., 2008). Researchers postulated that “assisting youth in foster care with

developing their ethnic identity” could be a way to improve the youths’ outcomes in the foster care system (Roller White, et. al., 2008, p. 498). Of the 188 participants in the study, 22% were of Hispanic or Latino origin, 41.4% were Black, 32.3% were white, and 4.2% identified as “Other.” Through the interviews, it was revealed that Blacks and Hispanics had a stronger sense of their identities than whites, and were also more interested in furthering their education about their ethnic background. In addition, 51% of the students stated that having a foster parent of the same race was important to them, yet Hispanics were placed with a caregiver of the same ethnicity at a lower rate than their white counterparts (p. 504). These results can have a negative impact considering that “research in the general population has shown that a stronger sense of ethnic identity is related to better outcomes and may be a protective factor” (Roller White, et. al., 2008, p. 498).

It is no surprise that there is still a lot of work to be done in relation to improving the outcomes for Latino youth in the foster care system. However, this information packet was created with the intent to provide resources and information for professionals and practitioners seeking to gain more information or even a better understanding of what is available regarding Latino youth in the foster care system.

Fact Sheet: General Statistics

(The following statistics were compiled from websites listed in the section titled “Bibliography”)

- According to the 2010 U.S. Census, there were 50.5 million people (16%) of Hispanic or Latino descent living in the United States. That number increased from only 13% of the population, or 35.3 million people, in the year 2000. These numbers are expected to continue to increase exponentially as Latinos are widely stated to be the fastest growing ethnic group in the U.S. (*U.S. Census, 2010*).
- Of this total number of Latinos living in the U.S., about 1 million (24%) are children of Hispanic or Latino origin under the age of 18 living in New York. 22% (n=316,062) of this population of Latino children were youth between 12 and 17 years of age. (*The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014*).
- As of July 2014, there were 402, 378 children in total in foster care. 22% of the children in foster care are of Hispanic or Latino descent. Similarly, 21% of the children that entered foster care in 2014 were Hispanic; 20% of the children that exited the foster care system in the same here were Hispanic; 23% of the children waiting to be adopted were Hispanic or Latino, and 21% were involved with a public agency. These numbers have remained fairly constant over the past five years. (*AFCARS Report #21*).
- In 2013, there were 22, 975 children in foster care in New York – 14% of them were Latino. In comparison, there were roughly 3.5 million Hispanic children living in Texas in 2012. The following year, 29,625 children were documented to be in foster care, yet an astounding 43% of the children in foster care during 2013 identified as Hispanic or Latino. (*The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014*).
- According to research obtained by the Casey Latino Leadership Group, “Latino children are more likely to be placed in out-of-home care more quickly and for longer periods of time than their White non-Latino counterparts
- Latino children are overrepresented in the child welfare system. However, the numbers calculated are not true to form because immigrant status is not necessarily taken into account (*Casey Latino Leadership Group*).
- While nearly forty percent (37.4%) of Latino children live in a foster care setting with relatives, which is the highest percentage of all racial/ethnic groups, still about 62% of the children of Latino descent serviced by child welfare agencies are placed in out-of-home care. (*Casey Latino Leadership Group*).
- In a study done that measured the development of ethnic identity amongst adolescents in foster care within various Casey Family Programs, results indicated that Latino youth had a stronger sense of identity than their White counterparts, and were also more eager to learn about their own ethnic background (Roller White, et. al, 2008). This suggests the importance of the importance of ethnicity and culture among Latino children and youth.

Important concepts regarding Latino Youth and the Foster Care System

Using Rivera-Rodriguez's (2011) and Garcia (2009) as a foundation, available below is a list of important concepts that social workers and other professionals should know when working with Latino children, youth, and families in the child welfare system.

Diversity within Latino/Hispanic Communities

Often times, there is a misrepresentation of what it means to be a Latino(a). Although individuals within the Latino and Hispanic communities share similar values, as Rivera-Rodriguez (2011) so eloquently puts, "they are diverse in terms of race, national origin, language, educational background, socio-economic factors, lifestyles, experiences, and citizenship status, among others" (p. 1). Being culturally competent, in addition to being aware of and acknowledging these differences is essential to working with Latinos because it validates their individualism within the broader society.

The terms "Latino" and "Hispanic" are often used interchangeably, but neither term is necessarily used to describe one's race. Latinos are individuals who live in the United States, but have origins in Latin American countries such as Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Cuba, and El Salvador, to name a few. It is possible that Latinos speak Spanish as a native or second **language**, but that may not necessarily be true. Rodriguez-Rivera (2011) explains, "the language spoken at home may vary depending on each family's country origin and linguistic region" – some Latinos may even speak an indigenous language or dialect (p. 3).

Religious beliefs also play a significant factor in terms of diversity throughout the Latino community. Just like the broader society, Latinos may identify as a Christian, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, or Jehovah's Witness; practice *Santeria* or *Espiritismo*; or not identify with any religion or spiritual belief at all (Rivera-Rodriguez, 2011, p. 3).

Importance of the Physical Environment and Migration History

As both Rivera-Rodriguez (2011) and Garcia (2009) discuss, **citizenship/ immigration status**, migration history, and experiences in relation to place and physical environment can differ amongst Latinos. The differences between first and third generation Latinos is significant and can affect the work that one may do with them. Garcia (2009) describes the "need for practitioners to assess migration history...to unpack how Latino youth and families define and personally identify with the 'physical environment' in response to migrating, (re)claiming land, and acculturating into U.S. Society" (p. 1243). In other words, it is important to allow individuals to share their own narrative in relation to how they define and identify with their environment, if that is a part of their story.

Latino Culture and Beliefs

When working with members of the Latino community, it is important to have an understanding of the concepts that lay as their foundation. Garcia (2009) gives a brief overview and description of some of these aspects of the Latino culture (p. 1243):

- *Familismo/ Familia* – the importance of loyalty to one's family, solidarity, cohesion

- *Machismo* – the idea that the family is male-dominated, the men are the providers and protectors
- *Marianismo* – women are expected to be submissive, pure, and maternal figure to care for the children

Although these cultural beliefs are common amongst the Latino community, it is possible that neither of them is pertinent while working with Latino Youth, especially if they have been in the foster care system and apart from other of a similar race/ethnicity. Nonetheless, it is important for social workers and other practitioners to have an awareness of these core concepts and ideas when working with Latino Youth because they can play a significant role in the work that is to be done with each child.

Best Practice Tips & Model Programs

(Below is an unbiased list of practice tips and model programs throughout the country)

***Culturally Competent Practice with Latino Families**

Developed by: Tammy Rice-Rodriguez, LCSW, ACSW and David Boyle, LCSW, PhD

http://dfcs.dhr.georgia.gov/sites/dfcs.dhs.georgia.gov/files/imported/DHR-DFCS/DHR_DFCS-Edu/Files/Latino%20Module%201%20participant%20guide%204-25-07.pdf

This training packet and information was developed for the Georgia Division of Family and Children's Services to allow practitioners to have a better understanding of what it means to be culturally competent, to gain more knowledge of terms and overall information on the Latino population they serve, and to obtain a compiled list of resources that would help them in achieving best practice methods.

***Fostering Together**

www.fosteringtogether.org | 1-(866)-958-KIDS

Fostering Together is an organization based in the state of Washington in partnership with Olive Crest. As part of the organization, there are three agencies that specialize in foster care specific for the Hispanic community: Children's Administration, Friends of Youth, and Lutheran's Refugee and Immigrant Children Program.

***Knowing Who You Are**

Created by: Casey Family Programs

<http://www.casey.org/knowning/>

This three-part curriculum was created for social workers & other professionals in the child welfare system to allow for a better understanding and preparation to support "healthy development of their constituent's racial and ethnic identity." This curriculum includes a video with interviews and discussions, an E-learning free online course that provides tools and skills one could use in their practice, and an "In-person learning" portion that encourages individuals to participate in a two-day event that allows them to use skills learned through the curriculum.

***Latin American Youth Center (LAYC)**

1419 Columbia Rd. NW, Washington, DC. 20009 | (202) 319-2225

President & CEO: Lori Kaplan

Established in 1968, LAYC is focused on encouraging youth and helping them transition to adulthood and achieve success through numerous programs and services. Although LAYC began only working with Latino youth, they have expanded to become culturally inclusive.

***Latino Child Welfare Research & Practice Model**

Developed by: Antonio Garcia

Journal: Children and Youth Services Review 31 (2009)

Due to the lack of research and practice frameworks that focus on the reasons why the Latino population enters and remains in the child welfare system, Garcia created the Latino Child Welfare Research and Practice Model as a guide for practitioners and researchers to gain more insight when working with the Latino population and seeking new interventions. Garcia's model is a five-part model that takes into consideration the Physical, Individual/Social, Institutional/Structural, Socio-political and Subjective factors.

***Latino Family Institute**

1501 W Cameron Ave. #240, West Covina, CA 91790 | (626) 472-0123

Board of Directors: Michael Perez, LCSW, Maria Burwell, and Carlos Ruvalcaba

The Latino Family Institute (LFI) is an agency focused on advancing the social welfare conditions that Latino families face and assisting them by providing programs focused on adoption, foster care, kinship care, and family support.

Websites & Resources

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

<http://www.aecf.org/>

This foundation is dedicated to strengthening families and creating a better future for children who are at risk of numerous negative life outcomes. They focus on the children, their families, and the communities as a whole. The annual KIDS COUNT Data Book that provides information on child well-being across the country can be found via this website.

California Child Welfare Indicators Project: *Latino Practice Advisory Committee*

http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare/lpac/

As part of the California Department of Social Services, the Latino Practice Advisory Committee created this website as a resource for information on child welfare agencies, promising practice models, legislation and policies, and data specific to Latino children and families in California.

Casey Family Programs

<http://www.casey.org/partnerships/>

This program partners with a vast number of other organizations throughout the country in order to create partnerships to improve the nation's child welfare systems. Information on their partnerships, the work that is being done, and other resources are available via the link above.

Child Welfare Information Gateway

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/>

Information and statistics based on various topics related to the Child Welfare System, such as adoption, foster care and other forms of out-of-home care could be found in the link above.

The Committee for Hispanic Children and Families, Inc. (CHCF)

<http://chcfinc.org/>

CHCF is a not-for-profit agency located in New York whose purpose is to “strengthen the voice of the Latino community” by providing various youth development, educational and policy programs to their community members. Information about their numerous programs and services, as well as other important resources concerning Latino youth and the Latino community are available on their website.

Good Shepherd Services (GSS)

<http://www.goodshepherds.org/>

GSS offers various programs and services, including out-of-home care and community-based programs, for children and families throughout New York City.

Kinship Center

<http://www.kinshipcenter.org/>

With programs throughout California, the Kinship Center provides an plethora of family-centered support services to assist in strengthening family ties by providing adoption, foster care, kinship care, wraparound, mental health, and educational services.

U.S. Census Bureau

<http://www.census.gov/>

This website provides countless information, facts, and figures in relation to the United States population and the U.S. Census that has been completed over the past few decades.

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

Administration for Children & Families - Children's Bureau

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb>

As part of the Administration for Children and Families, the Children's Bureau provides information and statistics related to the nation's children and families. The annual report for the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) can be located on this site.

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