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Perspectives of Resilience and Recidivism Among Hispanic Male Adolescents

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Abstract

In recent years the United States has witnessed a vast increase in migration of Hispanics into the country. Projections from the U.S. Census Bureau (2008) indicate over the next several decades there will be an unprecedented increase in the Latino population. Due to large influxes in prominent geographical locations, many immigrant cultural beliefs have been preserved, as well as many poor problem-solving abilities. The negative choices made by male Hispanic adolescents have resulted in an increase in incarcerations and aftercare program placements.

The intent of this study was to gain insights regarding the perceptions of Hispanic adolescents who have demonstrated recidivist behavioral patterns. A gap is evident in the existing research exploring the affective, social, and educational factors that may contribute to resiliency, particularly among Hispanic adolescents (Sickmund, Sladyky, Kang, & Puzzanchera, 2008). While data on aftercare program models indicate some effectiveness based on long and short term recidivism rates among program participants, Rodriguez concluded that further studies are needed to research how "gender, race, ethnicity, and culture affect restorative justice procedures and outcomes" (Rodriquez, 2007, p. 374).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the barriers that urban, male Hispanic adolescents face and the interventions that may contribute to their behaviors. Participants ($N = 10$) were purposefully selected (Creswell, 2009) based on the following criteria: 1) Latino males between 18 and 23; 2) U.S. residents for no less than five years; 3) history of recidivist behaviors leading to incarceration; and 4) demonstration of a minimal pattern of two years of resilient behavior. The researcher employed a self-generated demographic questionnaire, a semi-structured interview protocol, and a group moderator's guide in order to obtain data (Gall et al., 2007). Interviewing of participants continued until data saturation was achieved. Topics, patterns, and themes were analyzed using the long table approach (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

A significant finding from this study is the influence of fear, which can transform itself into positive and negative influences. Findings were reported in a narrative summary (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Information obtained can be shared with educational leaders, program directors, and other stakeholders in order to help construct individual plans that would aid in the redirection of Hispanic adolescents' choices and lives.

Purpose of the Study

The intent of this study was to gain insights regarding the perceptions of Hispanic adolescents who have demonstrated recidivist behavioral patterns. A gap is evident in the existing research exploring the affective, social, and educational factors that may contribute to resiliency, particularly among Hispanic adolescents (Sickmund, Sladyky, Kang, & Puzzanchera, 2008). While data on aftercare program models indicate some effectiveness based on long and short term recidivism rates among program participants, Rodriguez concluded that further studies are needed to research how "gender, race, ethnicity, and culture affect restorative justice procedures and outcomes" (Rodriquez, 2007, p. 374).

Furthermore; the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the barriers that urban, male Hispanic adolescents face and the interventions that may contribute to their resilient or recidivist behaviors through the following major research question: How do previously incarcerated Hispanic male adolescents perceive/describe the attitudes and behaviors that contribute to their recidivism and/or resiliency?

Theoretical Framework

The *Juvenile Offenders and Victims*, *2006 National Report* indicated that the rate of juvenile violent crime arrests had consistently decreased from 86,492 in 2001 to 78,532 in 2006 (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). However, during this same period of overall decline in juvenile violence, the incarceration of Hispanic adolescents increased from 12,698 in 2001 to 13,739 in 2006 (Sickmund et al., 2008). It was estimated that there would be a 58% increase in the incarcerated Hispanic population within the United States by 2020 Juvenile Offenders and Victims: National Report, 2006). Latino Studies (2008) also stated that Latinos are a growing population in the United States prison system, comprising 19.2% of its population. Social economics, single

parent homes, minimal education, and peer pressure are some of the factors that may lead youths to search for acceptance in gang memberships which also may lead to incarceration (Juvenile Offenders and Victims: National Report, 2006). Due to these alarming statistics, it is imperative to explore perceptions of the Hispanic adolescent population in regards to the factors leading up to their incarceration, as well as the behaviors and strategies they have developed contributing to either recidivist or resilient behaviors post their initial incidents of imprisonment.

Methodology

Research Design

The sensitive nature of this topic required the use of a qualitative, phenomenological, narrative analysis research design. It was pertinent to gather the perceptions of participants through the use of semi-structured interviews and through a focus group (Creswell, 2009; Gall et al., 2007). This approach allowed the researcher to study the lives of individuals by asking the participants to provide personal life stories. The study also included member checking, a review of the findings by participants (Patton, 2002; Gall et al., 2007). Furthermore, it allowed the researcher to explore, collect, and analyze data in the attempt to gain a deeper understanding from the perceptions of the factors and strategies pertaining to the positive and negative behaviors that are exhibited by many male Hispanic adolescents.

Sample

Participants for this study were purposefully selected (Patton, 2002; Creswell (2009). The researcher previously knew most of the participants in this study. Additional participants were the associates of the known participants, which constituted snowball sampling (Gall et al., 2007). The researcher created a demographic profile of the participants in the study by developing and administrating a self generated demographic questionnaire. The data collected from the

demographic questionnaire helped to classify participants into demographic sub-groups. Participants were selected based on two criteria. First, participants had to be Hispanic adolescents who demonstrated recidivism (re-incarcerated or high-risk) behaviors within two years of their first incarceration during their teenage years. Second, participants had to have demonstrated resilient behaviors after their first incarceration for two years after their first incarceration. The data obtained were collected from a purposeful sampling of $N = 10$ participants representative of struggling male Hispanic adolescents. Data analysis of the interview transcriptions were coded and cross-case analyzed according to themes and patterns that emerged utilizing the long-table approach, and credibility was established via member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1995; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002).

Instrumentation

The researcher employed two instruments in order to obtain data. First, the researcher developed a self-generated demographic questionnaire. The survey questions were utilized as part of the criteria for selecting participants and creating a demographic profile of them. To establish content validity of the questions, a head of guidance and a social worker volunteered to review the questionnaire. In the second stage of this study, the researcher constructed a semi-structured interview protocol consisting of questions and probes. The researcher also developed a group moderator's guide. The interview questions were designed to lead and build on the previous question. The questions included: ice-breakers, which allowed participants to feel more at ease with the interviewer and the interview process; demographic questions, followed by specific substantive questions and probes to illicit responses with regards to resilient and recidivist behaviors, factors, and influences.

Once the questions had been examined for content validity, the interview and focus group questions were piloted with similar Hispanic adolescents who have shown resilient/recidivist behaviors and who had some encounter with law enforcement. The pilot participants had the opportunity to provide feedback regarding their recommendations and interpretations of the questions (Gall et al., 2007).

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data, guiding the conversation through a list of 10 sequential questions and probes that drove the interviews and engaged the participants towards a deeper critical thinking stage (Billups, 2008; Gall et al., 2007). In addition key informant interviews were also be utilized and conducted until saturation was achieved, as it allowed the interviewer to collect data from individuals who obtain pertinent information or perceptions that would not otherwise be accessible to the researcher (Gall et al., 2007, p. 243). An interview protocol was utilized in the attempt to answer the research question. The purpose of personal interviews was to obtain rich, descriptive data that would be complex, subjective; and allow for in-depth detail about the participant's perspective (Gall et al., 2007; Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Yin, 2009).

Focus Group Interview

Gall et al. (2007), Morgan and Krueger (1998), Rubin and Rubin (2005), and Yin (2009) described focus group research as a means whereby a group of participants are brought together for a directed conversation. These participants were selected because these individuals obtain vital information to the study. The researcher engaged the participants ($N = 5$) in a focus group setting. The researcher utilized a moderator's guide, which consisted of questions and prompts that will lead to a more authentic response that aided in answering the research question. Focus

groups served several functions as a qualitative data collection method; the focus group was utilized as a method of exploratory, emergent, and supplemental data. Through the use of a focus group the researcher gathered additional information that may not have come to light in the personal interviews but encouraged by the synergy of the focus group (Gall et al., 2007).

Through the use of a focus group the researcher obtained broader data than revealed using in individual interviews. Individual interviews, on the other hand, allowed for details and concerns that may be avoided by respondents in focus group sessions. While non-controversial facts were revealed by both methods, more information about sensitive topics was obtained via individual interviews than through the focus group (Gall et al., 2007; Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Data Collection

Prior to any data being collected the researcher assured that all required approvals were met from Johnson and Wales University, and the participants' rights were protected. Participants were instructed prior to any data collection that they were expected to keep the study's contents confidential.

Trochim (2006) confirmed that, when participants are asked to respond to the set of self-administered questions and the researcher is available to define terms and respond to other questions, it contributes to a better response. Due to this rationale, the researcher administered the demographic questionnaire in a face-to-face manner. As mentioned earlier the participants (N = 10) answered this preliminary basic background questionnaire that was utilized as part of the criteria selecting of participants and supplemental information. The questionnaire was composed of an introduction to the study and an explanation of the purpose of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was made up of eight demographic questions. The duration to complete this self-administered demographical questionnaire did not take any longer than 20 minutes.

According to Patton (2002), participants are interviewed because it allows the researcher to collect data on the participants' perspectives. Rubin and Rubin (2005); and Yin (2009), mentioned several types of interviews and indicated that the interviewing process is an important source in collecting information from participants. The selected participants that moved on to the next stage of this study were involved in the interview process stage. The data collected at this stage were from an interview protocol and the focus group moderator's guide which each consisted of a list of 13 sequential questions and probes that were audio/video taped, analyzed, and transcribed.

Data Analysis

The researcher gained a better understanding of the data through in-depth analysis of themes and essence meanings. Furthermore, the researcher was able to extract and interpret the more significant meanings of data by analyzing the data in stages, from coding to patterning to interpretation (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). The transcribed responses to the open ended questions were coded through the use of the long table approach (Patton, 2002). The data collected from the interviews, focus group, verbal and non-verbal behaviors were coded and analyzed in an attempt to determine themes, patterns, and factors associated with recidivist and resilient behavior. Analyzing the findings from the questionnaire interviews and focus group through member checking and peer debriefing (review by inquiry participants) allowed the researcher to verify the creditability, confirmability, and the trustworthiness of the findings, which was reported in a narrative summary fashion (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln, & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). The rationale for the report was to contribute knowledge and recommendations at multiple levels such as families, schools districts, and youth programs (Patton, 2002).

Results

Participants were guided through semi-structured personal interviews and focus group sessions. The purpose of this study was to explore and obtain the factors, indicators, strategies, and barriers that may have contributed to either resilient or recidivist behaviors in post-incarcerated male, Hispanic adolescents with respect to their unique situation. The key findings that emerged from this study that can influence an individual positively or negatively were as follows:

1. **Education:**

The better educated an individual is the likelihood of resiliency increases and negative behavior can be diminished.

P6 stated:

> For as long as I can remember I have always had problems staying in my seat, staying focused on anything too long or doing the same thing for a long period of time. Even though I still have that problem. I'm lucky that my job has me always moving and doing different things. I am not just sitting down. I feel like I have to always be moving or doing something.

P2 mentioned:

> I remember moving…like 3 or 4 times having and had to go to a different school …and every time made it more difficult because I did not know what to expect from the teacher and trying to fit in made it difficult for me because I did not know how long I was going to be in that school before my family had to move again.

P2 reported:

> When I was in middle school there was a lot going on in my life with my family, so that took a lot of my time; I guess I was always angry so I didn't care for following school rules. These rules and what they were trying to teach me were not doing nothing for me outside of school where I had to survive…you get me… so you wanted me to focus on school and have self –control when I was dealing with bigger shit outside of school man F*** those rules and what they were trying to teach me".

The majority of the participants started hanging out more and becoming gang members or chilling with their peoples increased their negative behaviors such as being defiant, drinking, using drugs, losing interest in school, and gang banging. P1, reported, "while in middle school, I started noticing what the older guys were doing and what they had, so I started hanging out and doing the same things which lead to smoking, drinking, selling until I just stop going to school".

While hanging out, participants stated that they began looking up to the neighborhood "street pharmacist" (e.g., drug dealers).

P5 stated:

> For me this lifestyle almost came naturally…my family were all involved in hustling. My uncle was the bichote (e.g., top drug dealers) in a pueblo in Puerto Rico. So I picked up a lot just by watching him and his workers, and I slowly worked my way up the ranks after dropping out in the eighth grade.

These participants were enticed by the glamour, the "bling-bling", fancy clothing, cars, money, girls and the so call having the same respect drug dealers have.

P7 reported, "I dropped out of school in the ninth grade and hung out with some OG's (slang Original Gangster) who showed me how to make it and survive the streets".

P1 said:

> I fell in love with the lifestyle because what it offered me. I did not think of anything or anyone I just wanted to be able to buy things, do what I wanted to do and the girls… [laugh] I thought I was the shit...but it came back and I paid the prize.

P3 stated:

> I always did well in school and some people looked at me funny when I got locked up because I took the time to read and do my thing. I did the time...I didn't let time do me…you know. When I got home…I decided to go back to school. I am now taking classes at a college level on technology… I feel good that I am doing something to better myself with the encouragement of my girl and my family. I am proud of myself… and I feel good, but I have to always be on point and make sure that my past doesn't catch up with me…..

P 8 said:

> It is not easy changing the way I use to look at life and how I am looking at it now…. I had purity much whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted it, but going back to school… wanting to do better and changing my life is one of the best things I did…but let me tell you something… how can I put it for you… I don't think just any one can make that change because it takes a lot out of you…it is like starting over" I don't think too many people can or want to make that change without worrying what may happen to them for turning their backs.

2. Environmental/social factors:

These factors are associated with the living arrangement of individual decisions, their finances and employment, their relationships with family members, socially outside the family, and their personal relationships with their significant other.

The financial/employment data collected also indicate that half of the participants' claimed to have employment, and the other half did not have and/or cannot find legal employment. Moreover, the common theme among the participants P1, P2, P4, P7, and P10 described their situation in terms such as "*terrible*", "*bad*", and "*tuff*".

P1 described his financial status as "terrible".

> I tried looking for work after getting out of prison and participated in their release program that supposes to help when I got out, but when I went to the job finding program, I sat and waited for about 2-3hrs. When they called me I gave them my information and they told me that they will look for me, but that I should call them back in a few days. When I called back they never had anything for me. I was going by and calling every few days for several months and nothing…. so I stop calling. I have been out for a little over two years. I have found several temp jobs, but it seems that when I try going for a regular job and in the interview they find out that I was locked up; their attitude changes and I don't get the job. You know….put one and one together… It is like they want me to go back and do wrong.

P7 stated:

> At times things are so tuff and my situation is so bad that I just say F*** it and I am forced to make bad decisions just to get by in life… I don't want to continue doing these things, but I have to eat and live and I don't know anything else. This is what I know.

Participants were asked to describe their current living arrangements, P1, P2, P4, P6, P7, and P10 reported that they are all living with parent/s. P3 and P8 live on their own or with a roommate. P5 and P9 stated that they are in between places. Participants also describe their relationship with family members for the most part "OK" or "Good". P6 reported, "I have a good relationship with my family and if it wasn't for them, I properly be doing more time for making stupid choices or dead".

Social Relationships

Participants were asked to share some of the choices and actions they have made in their life. Participants were also asked to share a story about the actions, decisions, and high-risk behaviors they have made that led to their incarceration. Overwhelmingly, participants reported that putting in work for their people, selling drugs, fighting, and alcohol and drug use were the major reasons for their incarceration. Several of the participants confirmed that, although they had

been hanging out and involved in many negative behaviors, they learned the drug dealing trade by watching and learning from their fathers or a family member.

P3 said:

> My father was the one that taught me how to cut, weight, pack, sell and spot custies (e.g., addicts). I remember the first time I got caught. I was riding my bike near the projects and I got off my bike, next thing I knew somebody grabbed my book-bag were I had my stash (e.g., drugs) so I turned around and swang… I connected, but it was a cop…when I looked and saw it was a cop I said to myself what the F**** and I guess I lost it and just kept hitting him, but more cops came they grabbed me and that's where it all started.

The participants were asked to share how they see their social relationships. Less than half of the participants stated that they keep to themselves, and majority stated that for the most part they feel comfortable socially. P1 noted, "I really don't feel comfortable around groups of people". P4 stated "I mean its ok, but I do get fidgety or anxious around a lot of people so I keep to myself most of the times". P7 said that, "the time I did changed me. It made me somewhat anti-social for the most part. I keep to myself and a selected few".

3. **Untreated or undiagnosed educational, emotional, behavioral, or mental health factors:**

These factors also influence or impact the resiliency or recidivist behavior and decisions an individual displays. Participants were asked if they were ever evaluated for any difficulty experienced in school or while incarcerated, (e.g., academic, behavioral, language, or any other reasons). Although many of the participants displayed a lack of self-control, the ability to stay focused, and constant fighting, all except for one of the participants stated that they were never assessed or evaluated for their behaviors and actions in school or during their stay in a correctional facility. P1 said, "every time I got into a fight in school or while I was locked up all I use to here was oh you think you're a tuff guy, troublemaker and shit like that". P7 mentioned, "I feel that my behaviors and actions going untreated or addressed other than being labeled, suspended, or being removed from schools got worst and I feel that school and the people in

charge of the jails did not care enough to take the time to truly find out what was wrong with me". Participants were asked to describe "recidivist" behaviors, actions, or choices a person makes that contribute to their likelihood of returning to jail. Participants reveal that it was due to four themes listed in no particular order: (1) the lack of education; (2) environmental/social factors; (3) untreated or undiagnosed emotional, behavioral, or mental health factors; and (4) the limited aid obtained while incarcerated or through after care programs. Participants also stated that the constant pressure, stress, and anxiety of trying to survive the concrete jungle also known as the ghetto or el barrio in Spanish, living up to the hype of street credit, having to deal with the repercussion of their past criminal life, the lack of money, inability to obtain legal employment, the lack of a good education/high school diploma, the unlawful guidance from family, friends, or comrades, and having to be a provider with no real means or still displaying behaviors such as being hyper, acting on impulse, and the lack of self control or focus are factors that contribute to "recidivist" behaviors.

4. The limited aid obtained while incarcerated or through After Care Programs:

Programs can also influence or impact an individual's decisions making skills. Although a couple of the participants earned their GED while incarcerated, half of the participants felt that they did not receive aid, help, or support that would address their needs. P1 said, "I was never asked if I needed help for my weed addiction or help for some of the crazy shit that went through my head". P2 stated, "I know they had some programs, but no one ever asked me how I felt or why I was angry all the time or fighting. They just took away my privileges". P5 said that, "man those mother fuckers don't care about us. They really didn't do anything to help me. They just don't want people to doing the wrong things in front of them. P5 stated, "I do remember taking a class a couple of weeks before leaving jail they did try to get me ready for when I leave.

They gave me information on where to go to get help with finding a job". Although the correction facilities may have offered the GED program and some additional programs, the participants' perception was that they were obligated to attend the GED program in the Training School, but participants felt that they were not obligated to participate within class. Some participants also stated that they were not clearly informed on some of the programs being offered nor did the participants feel that most correctional care-givers cared.

5. **The influence of fear:**

In addition to the four previous mentioned themes, a fifth theme arose. The influence of fear theme was something that was reported discreetly and unconsciously by all of the participants. As described by the participants, who can be viewed by some as good, down to earth caring loving individuals or if you are a foe, or mainstream America looking at them from the outside, these participants may be seen or thought of as thugs. However, the influence of fear that was described by participants and extracted from the data was described as positive and negative influence of fear. Through the data collection and data analysis stage, participants as separate terms described these fears. When referring to positive influence of fear, participants stated in one form or another, that they feared staying in same place they were and not trying to move forward to newer and better things that life may have to offer. Participant P3 stated, "I fear failing and continue hurting my mother and sister who have always been there for me and I fear having to returning to my old life style". The positive fear was compared to the personal drive that thrust and drives an individual to move forward regardless their prior live experiences. Whereas the negative influence of fear came across as a fear that keeps an individual from moving forward, keeping an individual somewhat frozen in place and time or in a stage of self-

imprisonment because the individual fears the unknown and has excepted the cards life has dealt and except learn-helplessness.

P5 stated:

> Life sucked when I was growing up, and when I was locked up they really did not care what I did as long as it was braking the jail rule and when I got back home, I did what I had to do… you know….I don't know anything else and don't know what else to do. My life is messed up already why try doing something different now… you know?

This theme and factors were not constructed or compiled in any particular order of importance; however, these theme and factors are some of the major reasons why these participants maintain resilient or revert to recidivist behaviors that are carried out by many Hispanic male adolescents.

Conclusions

In the attempt to reduce recidivism, providing juveniles with diverse educational programs will assist in creating a bond between youth and their community (OJJDP, 2010). Education is a very important foundation for living a productive life. The researcher became interested in this topic after a lifetime of experiencing Hispanic male adolescents making inappropriate and negative choices early in their lives. Therefore, it was imperative to investigate the reasons why many Hispanic males make life-altering choices so young.

Recommendations for Further Study

It is evident based on the scarce or limited amount of literature and the data collected from the participants that there is a need for additional research on the barriers male Hispanic adolescents face and strategies that may contribute to either resilient or recidivist behaviors. Furthermore, additional study is needed on how previously incarcerated Hispanic male adolescents perceive/describe the attitudes and behaviors that contribute to their recidivism and/or resiliency. Although the findings from this study contribute additional information to the literature, it has only scratches the surface on how the participants perceive/describe their journey to and from

recidivism. It is evident that there is a need to continue assessing how educational facilities, the legal system, after care programs, and the communities at large operate and communicate among themselves in the attempt to reduce recidivism.

Appendix A

Definition of Terms

Adicción- Spanish for addiction

Adolescent- For the purpose of this study refers to ages 18 through 23

Aight- Slang for everything is OK

Barrio- Spanish for neighborhood

Bichote, Spanish slang for top drug dealer

Bling-Bling, Slang for money, jewelry etc.

Bueno- Spanish slang for "well you know"

Caking- slang for making money

CO's- abbreviation for correctional Officers

Community-Based Services (CBSs) - "Court supervision activities included probation (face-to-face or telephone meeting with probation officer), community-intensive supervision programs, court orders, (e.g., victim awareness), and drug court".

Crack-head- slang for rock cocaine addict

Custies- slang for addicts

Facility- to-Community Transition- When adolescents complete a program, and are released from the juvenile court systems to reenter their communities

Flipping- slang for doubling my money

Hispanic Adolescents- Pertaining to participants from Spanish origins that were affected by their actions and choices in becoming resilient individuals or demonstrating recidivism

Intensive Aftercare Programs (IAPs) - A program designed to promote relationship between adolescents and service provider in hope of reducing recidivism and successful reentering into their communities.

Kite- a letter sent from inmate to inmate

OG's- slang Original Gangster

Peoples – refers to the individuals that belong to a group or a gang.

Post-released Court Supervision- These are services received by adolescent participants after they are released from the court system (aftercare)

Putting in work- describes a multiple of unlawful criminal behaviors done by gang members.

Recidivism- Return to a former pattern of criminal behavior which may include but not limited to high-risk behaviors, criminal activities, or re-incarceration.

Resiliency- The ability for an individuals or groups of individuals to triumph over tremendously harsh conditions or overcoming the odds to achieve better than expected outcomes.

Sack- slang for scrotum

Slipping- slang for not paying attention to your surrounding and the people around you.

Stash- slang for reserve of drugs or money

Street pharmacist, slang for drug dealer

Stacking- slang for making and saving money

Tu Sabes- Spanish for "you know"

Viejita- Spanish slang for mother

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