

Violence Issues in Rochester, New York's Latino Youth 2010-10

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Introduction

There are forty-six million Latinos residing in the U.S. The Latino population is expected to nearly triple from 46.7 million to 132.8 million during the 2008-2050 period; nearly 1 in 3 U.S. residents will be Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). In Rochester Latinos make up 12.8% of the population and there is not much information about them (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Rochester has a high level of violence. The homicide rate is 25 per 100,000 while the nation as a whole is 6-8 per 100,000. Adolescence is generally when behavioral problems appear or increase (Children Trends Data Bank, 2008). 49 percent of Latino children in the City of Rochester live in poverty (Nuestra Salud, 2008). A greater percent of Latino children live in low-income neighborhoods, where they are exposed to violence. Latinos are now the largest minority group in the United States, and it is important to address the issues of violence from their perspective.

Aim of Project

The focus of this research is to better understand violence issues in the Latino community through literature review, analysis of demographic data from different zip codes in Rochester, New York, and interviews with community leaders in local Latino neighborhoods. I plan to gather background information on the Latino community in Rochester, New York. While the Rochester Latino population is predominantly Puerto Rican and Puerto Ricans are not considered immigrants they do share similar obstacles as immigrants when they re-locate to Rochester. I would like to research language barriers, poverty, and different customs and cultural traditions with this population.

Background

Across New York State, many Latinos reside in high-risk neighborhoods characterized by high crime rates, gang activity, gun violence, and selling of illegal drugs. Such neighborhoods are common in urban areas marked by physical and social isolation, as well as poverty. They are often associated with struggling social institutions, stunted local labor markets, failing schools, and distressed families (Vigil, 2002). In the state of New York 16.3 percent of the population is Latino, 20.25 % are under 18 years of age, Latinos make up 14.5 % of the labor force and 20.5 % of Latinos are unemployed (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Rochester has one of the highest crime rates in New York State and 14621 is one of Rochester's top three violent zip codes; which is where a high number of Rochester Latinos live.

Research has shown that poverty increases children's risk for numerous problems, including disproportionate exposure to risk factors, such as environmental toxins, trauma and abuse, and violent crime, which may impair brain development and hinder social and emotional development (Child Trends Data Bank, 2008). Almost one half (49%) of Latino children in the City of Rochester live in poverty (Nuestra Salud, 2008). Further, the proportion of the under 18 population that is Latino in the city of Rochester more than doubled between 1980 and 2006 from 9% to 21%. Approximately 4% of Latino households are individuals 65 or older living alone, compared to 11% of White/non-Latino households (Nuestra Salud, 2008). This shows how relatively young the Latino population is. The Latino drop-out rate for 16-19 year olds living in the city of Rochester is twice as high as that for White/non-Latinos (Nuestra Salud, 2008). Education has been linked to economic status and only 50 % of Latino students are graduating high school. Ninety-five percent of Latinos in Rochester are from the Caribbean. And of those from the

Caribbean, 70% are from Puerto Rico, 20% are from Dominican Republic, the rest are mostly Cuban. Outside of the city the Latino population is mostly comprised of Mexican and Central American immigrants, but few are coming into the city.

Literature Review

There are two main theoretical perspectives on this subject, which contradict each other, the social disorganization theory and community resource perspective. According to social disorganization theory, an immigrant isn't inherently criminal, but argues immigrant concentration indirectly increases violence by contributing to poverty, population heterogeneity, and residential mobility (Feldmeyer, 2009). These contributions destabilize communities and inhibit community cohesion, communication, and social control (Feldmeyer, 2009). This means that immigrant concentration creates neighborhoods with their traditional values and norms and at the same time creating language barriers and strong cultural barriers that make it difficult for institutions like the law enforcement to develop a connection with the community. Criminological theories suggest that even if immigrants are not prone to crime they may be pulled into violence as they are exposed to multiple disadvantages and criminal opportunities in their communities (Feldmeyer, 2009).

Some studies have shown that immigration indirectly decreases violence by providing protective community resources and strengthening social institutions and social capital networks (Feldmeyer, 2009). This means that immigrants create support systems amongst themselves and indirectly decrease violence. The community resource perspective argues immigration increases community stability, resources and strengthens social unity among Latino populations. Latinos do this by having strong ties and social

bonds based on their shared heritage, language, and cultural background of residents. Additionally, kinship ties and support-networks are strengthened even more due to frequent “chain migration,” in which new immigrants move to communities near family members and friends who can provide social support and assistance with childcare, employment, finances, and housing (Healey, 2006; Martinez, 2004, Portes and Rumbaut, 2006). Sociological research has shown immigrants do not commit many crimes and have a stabilizing, violence reducing effects on Latino populations. Some reasons offered are that immigrants don’t enter the United States with criminal motives and since entering the United States is a difficult process they tend to be self-motivated, dedicated people (Gonzalez, 2000). These theories discuss the effects of population heterogeneity and each interprets the information with either negative or positive effects.

Some issues of violence in the Latino community seem to be different than in other races, and there appears to be a big difference in violence rates in each generation which can be for different reasons. Most commonly adolescence is when behavioral problems develop or increase and how the youth interacts in school seems to be a relevant issue. Latinos are less likely to attend school after high school in comparison to white and black students. Since education is important for economic stability, investigating the environment Latino students face in school is critical. Studies have shown immigrant children are more likely than US born students to drop out of high school and immigrant children’s perception of achievement and attainment is different from US born students. Rates of violence in schools for Latinos has been reported to be on two ends of the spectrum, they can range from least likely to most likely to experience school violence. The studies found first generation students are the most fearful of being

victimized as well as receive disciplinary sanctions but the least likely to be victimized or receive disciplinary sanctions and third generation students are the least fearful but the most likely of both being victimized and receive disciplinary sanction. Second generation student victimization and perpetrator rates fell in between first and third generation victimization and perpetrator rates. It seems the more students are assimilated the less fearful they become and the more likely they are to experience or exhibit violence towards a fellow student. This is just one factor in violence issues in this population.

One study found that Latino violence was 10% lower than whites and the gap was primarily explained by the marital status of the parents, immigrant generation, and dimensions of neighborhood social context (Gonzalez, 2000). The fact that most parents were married was important as well as what generation they were (first, second, or third generation) and the dynamics of the residents in the neighborhood they lived in.

Generations who are newer to the United States have a tendency to be less violent, the reasons for this could be numerous, such as from fear of going out of the home or they are not yet assimilated. The odds of violence in a neighborhood of 40% immigrants were found to be four fifths lower than people living in non-immigrant neighborhoods. The lower rate of violence among Latinos compared to whites were explained by a combination of the marital status of the parents, living in a neighborhood with high concentration of immigrants, and their individual immigration status (Feldmeyer, 2009). This showed that Latinos experience lower rates of violence even though they are generally poorer.

It has been found that adaptive family functioning like family cohesion and positive communication, and parental involvement, is positively related to a coherent

sense of identity and negatively related to behavioral problems (Adams, 2001; Jones, 1988). In other words, the more an adolescent has a health relationship with their family the more coherent sense of identity they have and the less behavioral problems they experience. Latinos are a growing ethnicity and tend to be young; they also tend to have elevated rates of problem behavior and this may be due to the fact that Latino immigrant adolescents and their parents often experience intergenerational-intercultural conflicts as adolescents Americanize and parents continue to adhere to Latino cultural values and practices (Sampson, 2005). There is evidence that suggest adolescents with less coherent sense of identities may be prone to behavioral problems and it has been hypothesized that identity confusion contributes to adolescents' proneness to aggression, delinquency, and other forms of deviant behavior (Pantin, 2003). Family dynamic is one important factor in the lives of Latino adolescents.

Regardless of what the research has shown, public opinion links immigration to higher rates of violence, as 70% of Americans believe immigration has substantial crime-generating effects (Horowitz, 2001; NYT 2006; Martinez and Lee, 2000). This fear that recent immigration increases violence in communities has brought on structural barriers that inhibit immigrant assimilation and upward mobility (Jones, 1994). Native-born residents limit education and employment opportunities for immigrants as well as restrict immigration and immigration rights. These barriers negatively affect the immigrants who are trying to become economically stable and/or trying to assimilate to the American culture. Immigrant concentration contributes to Latino violence by increasing population heterogeneity but at the same time reduces violence by strengthening Latino social institutions and supportive networks. The indirect effects of immigrant concentration

counteract each other, suggesting immigration is not part of the violence generating process for Latinos.

Results

I interviewed the following people; Father Tracy, priest at St. Michael's church, James Sutton, director of the office of Community Medicine and Physician's Assistant at Clinton Health Center, and Tony Perez, Deputy Chief of operations in the New York State division of Police Department. Coming from different areas of expertise the interviewed community leaders had various opinions on violence in the Rochester Latino population.

Sutton has noticed some differences among the Latinos in Rochester, people in the inner city are very "what can you do for me? The government owes me," on the other hand migrant workers on the outside of the city are focused only on work and on getting paid, they don't ask for more. Migrant workers say they don't need medical attention when they do need it. He has also noticed a percentage of Cubans are migrating in refugee status, who come over for more political reasons than economic reasons, they are harder workers. The Dominicans as well are coming over for similar reasons and are hard workers as well. Immigrants who migrate because of political reasons seem to have stronger work ethics.

Each interviewed community leader has worked closely with the Rochester Latino population and has had experience with the violence in the community. In Sutton's experience as a physician's assistant he has noticed that violence has no age limit, he has seen it start as early as 5 years old. According to him, children see violence at home but don't really have express it until they start pre-school or kindergarten. He has also noticed that once people reach their 40s they feel they are either suppose to be dead or in jail and

that they tend to lead a more routine life with less violence. The third generation that is born into this neighborhood all they know is this violent lifestyle. They believe the world they live in is the real one and the one outsiders are trying to convince them about is fake; to them the outsiders are delusional. Father Tracy said “there is not one quick solution to the violence problem in this community but it all comes down to poverty”.

In the opinion of the interviewees violence has several different causes. Perez asserted there is a disproportional amount of poverty in these the Rochester Latino neighborhoods and that relates to high school dropout rates. The adolescents who aren't attending school don't have anything to do so they join gangs and end up not having a good education which limits job opportunities. Perez also stated “the problem with violence is the high risk lifestyle they lead; which is being out on the street where they can get in trouble. The likelihood of being shot at increases as after each time. Violence also ties to poverty, when people don't have much to lose they take more risks.” Through his work with the community he has noticed education level is an issue when it comes to violence. The higher education level someone has achieved the less violent they are and the less connected to violence they are. In Sutton's opinion residents are frustrated and they solve every problem with violence he says “they have no restraint when having interactions.” Residents feel trapped and frustrated and feel they don't have to follow the rules; since the rules don't apply to them, their actions have no consequences.” Father Tracy describes the factors that promote violence are lack of education, high unemployment, and a bad health care system.

The Latino population in Rochester has several problems related to violence, according to the interviewed community leaders. In Sutton's opinion the biggest problem

is depression which is the end result of all the other problems. Fifty-three percent of Clinton Health Center's patients are depressed. He stated the "white elephant in the room" is the mental health care issue. For all the Latino residents in Rochester there are only two bilingual mental health representatives. He also stated another problem is that the Latino youth lack proper role models. There is small percentage of Latinos who manage to get a decent life, this community has difficulty keeping the ones that do well, and they move to the suburbs and leave this neighborhood behind.

Perez declared language barrier is a problem because it causes communication problems and problems with getting resources. He said "there is a reluctance to form relationships with the law enforcement sometimes because of fear of law enforcement developed from experiences in their home country, or fear because of their immigration status. It's important to have someone there that speaks their own language." Father Tracy also stated the Latino population in Rochester faces linguistic barriers when they are trying to find and attain resources. Those barriers have caused health problems including diabetes, and AIDS. There are even "linguistic and cultural gaps between the generations that are here." Parental involvement is important in the success of children in school but "language becomes a barrier; studies have shown that Latino parents do want to be involved but don't know how." According to him the biggest problems are poverty and unemployment, they leave easy access for selling drugs. Father Tracy conducts 6-7 funerals a year from homicides; attributing violence to drug, turf, and on occasion family issues. He relates all the issues to poverty, "it ties down to the fact that they see selling drugs as more profitable. There aren't enough good paying jobs."

As Father Tracy stated, there is no one solution to violence in the Latino community. Perez declared the important thing is to help change lifestyles and create activities that keep them busy. That's why they have re-entry programs to help provide training and housing to help them not go back to the high risk lifestyles. Programs that keep them busy and out of the streets are beneficial. Father Tracy has seen an improvement in the community in recent history, the small minority of Latinos who finish school and go on to college come back to and help out the community (which include 2nd and 3rd generations.) He also stated better police community relations and organizing neighborhoods are important to diminish violence.

The interviewed Rochester community leaders had varied opinions about the resources that are necessary in the Latino community. The resources the community really needs, according to Sutton, is a mental health center, better political leadership "there hasn't been a politician that has taken control of this area and owned it," and better community leadership where residents take charge of their own community. Perez stated the resources the Latino community needs the most are education, mentors, afterschool programs, and parent counseling," anything that keeps them busy." In Father Tracy's opinion, the resources needed in Rochester are education, jobs, and health care.

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