

# Community Participatory Research in Latino Communities

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## Introduction

Community development and youth violence research is challenging in any community. Problems frequently arise and must be addressed in ways that not only recognize and meet the community's needs, but also maintain scientific integrity. Issues and challenges are particularly salient in ethnic minority communities and become even more acute in immigrant populations. One of the most exacting aspects of the work at ACE-UCR is in working with Latino communities. Strategic planning, coordination of services, and research are affected by challenges unique to the Latino immigrant community. Issues such as fear of being identified, illiteracy, acculturation, transiency, victimization, public attitude, and political climate contribute to possible barriers in working with Latino immigrant communities. In addition, IRB requirements and ethical concerns of research often create a climate of disenfranchisement among Latino immigrants.

The literature on prevention/intervention research in Latino communities indicates a number of cultural factors that are common in community-based studies (Biglan & Metzler, 1999; Castro et al, 2004; Kumpher et al, 2002; Turner, 2000; Uttal, 2006). Some commonly addressed issues are language; cultural relevancy; acculturation and assimilation; diversity of culture and language dialect within communities; family orientation of communities; and community participation.

In addition to these inherent factors that come with conducting research in Latino communities, unique and often more complex issues often arise. One Midwestern program for certifying Spanish speaking child care providers encountered a number of problems in the course of program implementation (Uttal, 2006). For instance, Latino participants had difficulty understanding certification requirements such as background checks and home inspections; Latino women did not understand why it was necessary to be certified to care for children, something they do on a daily basis; many participants did not have legal immigration status or social security/tax ID numbers; public attitude was not favorable toward establishment of in home child care where homes were already considered to be overcrowded; and, participants were in great need of support and advice on general life issues such as employment, housing, schooling, use of public transportation and the like. Although the program was ultimately successful, adjustments to program content and additional staff and workshops needed to meet unexpected needs, resulted in costs to the sponsoring agency in terms of both time and finances.

The purpose of this presentation is to highlight and discuss specific challenges and barriers encountered by ACE-UCR within three Latino and Latino immigrant communities in two Southern California counties – Riverside zip code 92505 and the city of Perris in Riverside County and Santa Ana zip code 92701 in Orange county. As shown in Figure 1, Perris and Santa Ana zip code 92701 have Latino populations greater than 50 percent and in Riverside zip code 92505, though only 38 percent, the Latino population is the largest concentration of Latinos in the city. All three communities have a population of youth under 18 greater than 33 percent (Figure 1).

## ACE-UCR Communities: Two Case Studies in Southern California

### Case Study 1: Riverside County

#### Riverside Zip Code 92505

**Goal:** Youth Violence Prevention Red Team established to address and reduce risk factors for youth violence.

**Progress:** Pilot youth and family resource center in Arlanza area.

#### **Challenges:**

- Illiteracy – evaluation survey hampered by illiteracy of residents
- Changes in city organization, policy, and management – new City Manager
- Code enforcement – housing officers on site, threatens positive image of resource center

#### City of Perris

**Goal:** Youth Violence Prevention Red Team established to address and reduce risk factors for youth violence.

**Progress:** Target area located; community asset survey; strategic plan drafted & presented to City Council.

#### **Challenges:**

- County Supervisor – backed out of lead role on Red Team due to budget cuts
- No agency takes lead on Red Team
- Attrition of Red Team members
- Initially, no support from City officials – claimed interest, but didn't participate
- Chamber of commerce – unwilling to prioritize needs of Latino residents and high risk factors in the community

### Case Study 2: Santa Ana (Orange County)

#### Santa Ana Zip Code 92701

**Long term Goal:** Latino Health Access Green Team to develop strategies for interventions that address and reduce risk factors for youth violence.

**Current Goal:** Effectiveness trial of Families and Schools Together (FAST) intervention.

**Progress:** FAST on target for completion in December 2007

#### **Challenges:**

- Recruitment – federal immigration reform, raids, and scam artists cause families to be fearful of participating
- Scheduling – parents often hold multiple jobs, making scheduling difficult; fathers often cannot participate at all
- Attrition – families are moving out of the area, making follow-up interventions difficult
- Neighborhood violence – violence in the community has hampered data collection and interfered with FAST sessions (note: violence is an artifact of poverty and is not an inherent characteristic of Latino culture)
- Immigration reform – increased INS raids on businesses impacts recruitment and attrition
- Parent empowerment – parents find resistance of schools to requests for programs and services as they become more knowledgeable and more involved
- Increased costs – family groups are larger than expected because families bring extended family members and friends to the sessions; added cost for food, materials, and staff have been necessary

## Discussion

Issues and challenges increase in numbers and complexity when research is conducted in Latino immigrant communities. Language barriers, cultural relevancy, assimilation and other common issues are being regularly addressed in prevention and intervention research design and program implementation (Biglan & Metzler, 1999; Castro et al, 2004; Kumpher et al, 2002; National Alliance for Hispanic Health, 2001 as cited in Castro et al, 2004; Turner, 2000; Uttal, 2006). Additional problems are being encountered in the midst of intervention and program implementation and we are "learning as we go" so to speak, as is evident from the Latino Family Child Care Program (Uttal, 2006) and ACE-UCR Case Studies 1 and 2.

ACE-UCR interventions in Riverside, Perris and Santa Ana, though similar in terms of goals, differ greatly in strategies, as well as levels of success and progress. These differences may be due to characteristics of the various leadership factions within each community. For example, the involvement of the Riverside Mayor and other city officials was an integral part of the Red Team's success in drafting a strategic plan in six months and beginning the development of the Arlanza Youth and Family Resource center in less than one year. In contrast, in the absence of a similar driving force from city or county leaders, the Perris Red Team struggled for more than three years to produce a plan. In addition, the Perris Red Team is up against a powerful business community that is more interested in building houses for moderately well-to-do families than with reducing youth crime and building healthy families in the Latino community. Unlike Riverside or Perris, Santa Ana is lead by a large Latino social-service agency, approaching issues from health to violence through grass-roots level interventions. Santa Ana also appears to have more challenges than the other two communities. However, this may be due to the nature of the intervention (a controlled scientific study) and the demographics of the community (92% Latino and 75% youth under 18) rather than any qualitative differences in the problems seen in all three communities.

Few publications focus specifically on problems faced in Latino community research. For future success in community participatory research in Latino and Latino immigrant communities, prevention and intervention scientists must begin to report more on problems and solutions encountered in this field.

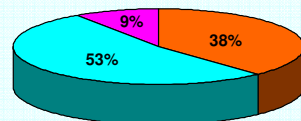
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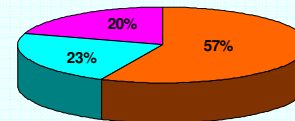
Figure 1.

### ACE-UCR COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS

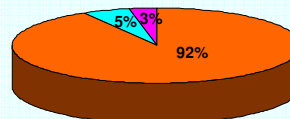
Riverside Zip Code 92503  
Total Population: 71,714  
Youth under 18: 23,791(33%)



City of Perris  
Total Population: 36,189  
Youth under 18: 14,332(40%)



Santa Ana Zip Code 92701  
Total Population 61,363  
Youth under 18: 46,203(75%)



#### Legend

- Latino
- White
- Other