Stress and Adjustment Among First-Generation Latino College Students in the College Assistance Migrant Program

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Introduction
In general, college students experience these types of stressors in transitioning to college: Interpersonal, intrapersonal, academic, and environmental. In addition to these stressors, Latino college students are typically the first in their family to attend college, and are often the children of immigrant parents. These students will most likely come from economically disadvantaged families, and lack academic assistance in their homes. English is often their second language.

College graduation rates for academically prepared Latinos earning a Bachelor’s degree, over a six-year period, is 57%. This is significantly lower than that of similarly prepared White college students, who graduate at a rate of 81% (Fry, 2004).

In response to these challenges, various programs have been developed to help Latino college students transition to and succeed in college. Examples of these programs are Faculty mentoring programs (FMPs), the Puente Project, and the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP). This study examines the stress and adjustment among first-generation Latino college students participating in the WSU CAMP program.

Literature Review
Latino migrant students experience constant moving, economic hardships, limited English proficiency, and differences in cultural values between the school system and their own. These students experience additional stressors as they adjust to college.

First-generation Latino college students experience additional stressors, including acculturative stress, intergenerational conflict, discrimination, financial difficulty, and negative perception of the university environment.

Students showing a high level of adjustment will be those who have: A positive perception of the university environment, feel they fit with the university environment, and achieve good grades.

For Latino college students, the following have been identified as determinants of college success: social support, stress, identification with the college community, and acculturation.

Research Question:
Which stressors, for freshman Latino students in CAMP, are associated with the most adjustment difficulties and lower GPAs?

Method
Participants in this study were part of Washington State University’s CAMP cohort during the 2010-2011 school year, and were given the survey at the end of their first year at the university. 72 students were contacted for participation and 37 completed the survey. All participants in this study self-identified as Latino. Most of the participants were 19 years of age, and born in the United States. The majority part were born in the U.S., and about two-thirds were the first in their family to attend college.

96-item instrument was created using the six following measures:
- Inventory of College Students’ Recent Life Experiences (ICSRLE; Kohn, LaFreniere, & Gurevich, 1990)
- Adolescent Discrimination Distress Index (ADDI; Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000)
- University Environment Scale (UES: Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996)
- Cultural Congruity Scale (CCS: Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996)
- Intergenerational Conflict Scale (Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987)
- Financial Stress Factor (Starrin, Aslund, & Nilsson, 2009)

Findings
Participants reported high levels of academic stress, high levels of values conflict with parents, low levels of financial stress, and low levels of ethnic discrimination.

Discussion
The results indicate the CAMP program at WSU is successful in supporting its participants’ transition into their first year of college. Collecting data from the parents and more students could help the study’s results become stronger and more significant. The findings also point to specific ways that the program can be improved to meet the needs of their students. One example is for the program to extend their contact with the parents of the students so that they better understand what their role is as their child goes through their freshman year. Another would be to help their students manage their time by further emphasizing the importance of prioritizing their activities and achieving good grades.

References