

Latino Immigrant Youth Living in a Nontraditional Migration City: A Social-Ecological Examination of the Complexities of Stress and Resilience

Urban Education

1–28

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DOI: 10.1177/0042085914549360

uex.sagepub.com



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Abstract

Latino immigrant children represent the fastest-growing population in the United States and families are frequently residing outside of the traditional migration destinations. These cities lack the infrastructure and resources to provide culturally relevant services and bilingual education that supports these youth. Following a social-ecological approach that attends to the multiple contextual and cultural factors that influence individuals, this study identifies the risk and protective factors experienced by Latino immigrant youth living within a nontraditional destination area. Youth described relationship, immigration, academic, language, and familial stressors as significant risk factors. Protective factors included family networks, peer relationships, and school supports.

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Keywords

Latino youth, immigrants, stress, coping, resilience, urban schools, social ecological

Latino children represent the fastest-growing percentage of the youth population in the United States. In 2012, the population of foreign-born Latinos reached 18 million and more than 1 million Latino immigrant children were enrolled in schools (Pew Hispanic Center, 2014). Whereas the U.S. Latino population has typically been concentrated in large urban areas and border states, recent Latino growth has spread to areas of the country that had not previously been destination areas for immigrants (Lichter & Johnson, 2006). Much of the research on Latino immigrants has focused on the significant adversity Latino immigrants face, including acculturative stress, income disparities, lack of access to health care and other services, segregation, and discrimination. In these neighborhoods and in similar cities, there is a lack of infrastructure and resources in place to support the needs of this new and growing community. With limited bilingual resources in the schools and communities, nontraditional migration areas will fail to provide culturally competent services.

In response to the stressors and adversity this population faces, there is cause to create contextually and culturally relevant infrastructure and resources that will support the needs of the changing demographics in these cities. Social-ecological approaches to research recognize the multiple environmental and cultural contexts that combine to affect individuals (Bronfenbrenner, 2009). Within this approach, youth must adapt to multiple ecologies, including cultural factors such as immigration and acculturation that affect development (Gonzales, Germán, & Fabrett, 2012). Rather than viewing negative outcomes as the fault of the individual, this approach considers the risks, strengths, and resources of these overlapping influences on individual experience.

To our knowledge, no studies to date examine the effects of this complex social environment on stress and resilience in Latino immigrant youth. The purpose of this study was to broaden the scope of social-ecological approaches to resilience by addressing three major gaps in the literature: (a) examining the experiences of first-generation Latino immigrant youth, (b) exploring the contextual experiences of these youth living in nontraditional migration cities, and (c) attending to their strengths, protective factors, and adaptive strategies. Increased understanding of risk and protective factors within this at-risk population is essential in building structural resources and supports that will promote positive outcomes in this population, including health and academic success.

The Complex Experiences of Latino Immigrant Youth

Adversity and Stress Experiences of First-Generation Latino Immigrant Youth

It is important to note that the experiences of Latino immigrant youth are not homogeneous, as this population is represented by diverse immigration statuses, countries of origin, reasons for immigration, timing, and ethnicities (Gonzales et al., 2012). Still, we focus here on the population of foreign-born Latino youth residing in a nontraditional urban migration area to capture some of the contextual and cultural factors that affect their risk and protective factors within this unique environment. We hope that future work will be well suited to consider the heterogeneity within this population as an additional cultural layer that adds complexity to our social-ecological understanding of resilience.

Though there is significant extant literature examining the stress experiences of Latino youth, still underdeveloped is research attending to those of recently immigrated Latino children. Stress levels among urban minority youth are important to examine due to the adverse effects of stress on academic (e.g., Crean, 2004), psychological (e.g., Vera et al., 2011), and health (e.g., White & Farrell, 2006) outcomes. In terms of educational barriers, acculturative stress may contribute to or compound achievement differences among Latino youth (Roche & Kuperminc, 2012). Previous research has demonstrated that immigrants experience a significant amount of stress following migration, including the combined anxiety, depression, marginalization, confusion, and psychosomatic symptoms that occur as individuals try to negotiate cultural differences in a new cultural environment (Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987).

Differences between U.S.-born and foreign-born Latino youth have been examined in family income (Dettlaff & Johnson, 2011), acculturation (Rogers-Sirin, Ryce, & Sirin, 2014), discrimination (Córdova & Cervantes, 2010), educational outcomes and motivations (Perreira, Fuligni, & Potochnick, 2010), health outcomes and treatment (Derose, Escarce, & Lurie, 2007), and mental health experiences including maltreatment (Dettlaff & Johnson, 2011). Foreign-born Latino children under 18 are likely to face life stressors based on income, with 41% of Latino immigrant children living in poverty and a similar 42.4% living without health insurance (Pew Hispanic Center, 2014). In addition, acculturative stress may increase in nontraditional destination areas due to additional discrimination and social exclusion, language barriers, and social isolation (Harari, Davis, & Heisler, 2008).

In school, first-generation Latino youth are often likely to have different experiences than U.S.-born Latino children. Foreign-born Latino youth report more experiences with discrimination, higher levels of concern regarding discrimination, and poor treatment based on ethnicity. Feelings of isolation, exclusion, and marginalization in school can lead to mistrust and suspicion between the students and faculty (Córdova & Cervantes, 2010). Importantly, despite the more frequent experiences with stress, anxiety, and negative treatment related to ethnic discrimination, or perhaps because of it, foreign-born Latino youth report higher levels of motivation and perseverance in addition to a greater perceived importance of education (Perreira et al., 2010). In this vein, we examined experiences of stress within the context of resilience; examining the significant resources and protective factors that can be used to create supportive programs and policy.

Complexities of Immigration to a Nontraditional Migration City

The cultural and community contexts that Latinos and recent Latino immigrants experience in nontraditional migration cities are often different from the cultural and community contexts in popular gateway cities. Latinos in nontraditional locations are likely to experience high rates of segregation, income disparities, and discrimination (Lichter & Johnson, 2006). In addition, Latinos often face social isolation and social exclusion (Engstrom, 2006) and are likely to experience institutional barriers in part due to the lack of infrastructure designed to serve Latino populations in nontraditional migration cities (Waters & Jiménez, 2005; Zúñiga & Hernández-León, 2005). New immigrants in these cities may arrive to find a lack of low-income or affordable housing, strained health care facilities and lack of access to care, and schools unprepared to meet the needs of nonnative English speakers (Waters & Jiménez, 2005). Bilingual services and resources may be few and far between, as schools, social service agencies, health care providers, and other professional agencies are only beginning to develop the infrastructure to meet this new and rapidly growing need (Waters & Jiménez, 2005).

Resilience in a Social-Ecological Framework

A review of the existing literature on Latino immigrant youth experiences reveals the extreme adversity that these children and adolescents face in the United States. This literature largely ignores the youth who are achieving and developing well despite exposure to significant stress and difficulties (Reyes & Elias, 2011). Some youth are able to successfully overcome adversity and demonstrate positive adjustment and resilience. Resilience is a process of

successful adaptation and development in the presence of adversity (Garmezy, 1991; Luthar & Zigler, 1991; Rutter, 2012). Successful adaptation is culturally dependent, but generally includes internal factors (e.g., psychological and physical health and well-being) as well as external factors (e.g., environmental adjustment). Risk factors—such as poverty, discrimination, and educational stress—interact with protective factors—such as effective parenting, positive peer relationships, access to resources, and emotional regulation—to predict resilience in youth (Masten, 2004).

Particularly compelling is the idea that both global and context-specific protective factors contribute to resilience. Ungar (2008) determined global factors that support resilience across geographic locations, which include culture (e.g., religious affiliation, self-betterment, gender roles), community (e.g., safety, perceived social equity, access to resources and education), relationships (e.g., social competence, role models, parenting), and individual traits (e.g., self-efficacy, optimism, empathy, assertiveness). Still, individual resilience can only be understood when also giving attention to community- and context-specific protective factors. Importantly, research on resilience and social ecologies suggests that resilience is not necessarily a trait of the individual, but rather results from the risk and protective factors present in a specific environment (Ungar, 2008). As such, it is essential that research on adverse factors, protective factors, and resilience takes into account that complex social environment in which an individual lives. For the youth in the present study, living within a nontraditional migration city likely affects the types and degrees of stressors experienced as well as the protective support networks that contribute to resilience.

Purpose

To better understand the process of resilience among Latino immigrant youth, it is essential to explore the contextual and cultural factors at play in a nontraditional migration city. In the current study, we explore definitions and perceptions of stress and resilience among Latino immigrant youth attending an urban middle school in a nontraditional destination city. Building from a social-ecological resilience framework, the current study sought to give voice not only to the challenges but also to the notable strengths of these students and their school environment. Because there is little research on the stress, resilience, and academic experiences of first-generation Latino youth in general, but particularly those living outside of traditional immigrant destinations, this research fills a gap in the extant literature and suggests important implications for urban school environments with Latino students. Our specific research questions were as follows:

Research Question 1: How do first-generation Latino youth define and experience stress?

Research Question 2: What resources, coping strategies, and other protective factors support these youth in dealing with stress?

Research Question 3: In what ways does the school environment contribute to experiences of both stress and resilience?

Method

Positionalities

Our research team has an established 4-year academic–community partnership with the urban middle school highlighted in the present study. This relationship emerged in response to an expressed need for a collaborative, participatory partnership among university faculty and students, school administrators, and Latino families and youth. Each author is currently involved in research focused on the experience of Latino youth and families living in our nontraditional destination city.

Participants

Through purposeful sampling (e.g., Forman, Creswell, Damschroder, Kowalski, & Krein, 2008), the school was selected as a site for research due to an ongoing academic–community partnership as well as the significant population of first-generation Latino immigrant students. Forty-two students met the study criteria, which included Latino students in the fourth through eighth grades who were born in another country and were capable of speaking with the researcher in English. The first author met with all invited students during school hours to introduce herself and explain the purpose of the study. Due to concerns with immigration status and written documentation, parents were asked to indicate consent by marking an “X” on the information form and writing the student’s first name only. Youth participants were asked to verbally assent to the project. Of the 42 eligible, 9 students were consented to participate in the study. Participants ranged in age from 8 to 14 and differed in time spent in the United States. Of the 9 participants, 6 emigrated from Mexico while 1 participant each emigrated from Honduras, Guatemala, and Venezuela. See Table 1 for more details.

Setting

Students all attend a dual language (Spanish-English) immersion magnet school in Cincinnati, Ohio. To attend the Kindergarten-eighth grade school

Table 1. Participant Demographics.

Pseudonym	Grade	Country of origin	Time in the United States	Sex
Adriana	4	Mexico	4 years	Female
Cristian	4	Mexico	5 years	Male
Maria	5	Mexico	3 years	Female
Mateo	5	Mexico	5 years	Male
Flor	6	Guatemala	9 months	Female
Alegra	7	Mexico	^a	Female
Alex	7	Mexico	5 years	Male
Jairo	7	Mexico	7 years	Male
Jesus	8	Honduras	^a	Male

^aParticipant did not self-report time of residency in the United States.

presented in this project, families had to live within the school district and submit an application. During the 2011-2012 school year, the student enrollment reached nearly 500, with 92.8% classified as economically disadvantaged. In addition, 58.7% identified as Black, 36.4% as Hispanic, and 2.9% as multiracial (Ohio Department of Education [ODE], 2012). As it is a magnet school, students come from various neighborhoods across Cincinnati to attend. Cincinnati, like other nontraditional destination areas, has experienced a tremendous growth in the Latino immigrant population (Vaughn & Jacquez, 2012). While the U.S. Census Bureau (2012) estimates that the Latino population in the Greater Cincinnati area is approximately 30,000, the Latino Chamber of Commerce estimates the true population (including undocumented individuals) to be closer to 70,000 (Zandvakili, Passty, von Hofe, & Mueller, 2010). Latino communities in Greater Cincinnati tend to be geographically dispersed by neighborhood, affecting the ability to communicate and share resources.

Measures and Procedures

In-depth semistructured interviews were conducted with Latino immigrant students who provided written assent and whose parents gave consent for participation. All of the interviews were conducted primarily in English, although Spanish was occasionally used to clarify meaning. The first author conducted the interviews at the middle school, during school hours. The interview began with a variation of the same broad statement, "Tell me about

your favorite subject in school” (see Table 2 for complete interview guide). Additional probing questions were asked to elicit more complete responses from participants.

Data Analysis

Due to the lack of extant literature on Latino immigrant youth experiences with stress, coping, and resilience, particularly in nontraditional destination cities, we approached this project with a modified grounded theory framework to allow for the voices of the students to emerge in the data. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Using a grounded theory approach to inductive coding, the transcripts were reviewed line by line and codes assigned as they became apparent (Bradley, Curry, & Devers, 2007). Lines and sections of the text were highlighted or marked to help demonstrate and develop broad conceptual categories. These categories emerged from salient themes rather than preconceived categories or models (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Such an approach allowed the words of the participants to become the priority, rather than fitting their responses to a theory. Following the grounded theory approach, multiple readings were conducted to extract the main themes, phrases, stories, and meanings of the responses as they related to stress and coping strategies. Through constant comparison, the code structure evolved inductively reflecting “the ground” or the actual lived experiences of the participants. As categories, themes, and linkages were explicated, unifying themes were identified and condensed into a manageable number of broad categories (Bradley et al., 2007).

Results and Discussion

Definitions of Stress

Participating students were asked to define the word “stress.” Several characteristics emerged from these descriptions. Mateo stated early in his interview that stress “feels like you don’t know what to do. I feel like, what is this, I don’t know what I’m doing.” Several participants described stress as something that makes them feel tired or exhausted, as if they cannot continue any longer. Cristian described stress as “when you’re tired of something and you don’t want to do it again.” He later talked about stress in relation to his homework, relating the following description: “Sometimes you get mixed up, sometimes you get stressed and feel like you can’t do it no more. You feel like you’re not gonna make it. And it takes a lot of time to do the work.”

Table 2. Interview Guide.

Ethnicity

1. Tell me where you were born.
2. What language(s) do you speak at home and school?
3. Do you like to speak in one language more than the other? Which one?
4. Did you speak English before you came to the United States?
 - a. What has it been like trying to learn it?
 - b. What are some things you like about learning English?
 - c. What are some things you don't like?

Immigration

1. Can you tell me anything you know about how your family came to the United States?
 - a. Do you know why your family came to live here? Does anyone ever talk about why they wanted to move?
2. Tell me what it was like to live in _____.
 - a. What was it like to leave?
 - b. Do you have family that still lives there?
3. Are you glad that you live where you do?
4. Do other people ask you about where your family is from?
 - a. What do Americans think about people from _____?

School

1. Tell me about your favorite subject in school.
2. Tell me about anything that is hard for you at school.
3. Do you worry about how you will do in school?
4. Is doing well in school important to your family?
5. Do you feel good about school?

Relationships

1. Tell me about the people who live with you.
 - a. How do your family members get along?
 - b. What happens when they disagree about something?
 - c. What activities do you and your family do together?
2. Tell me about your best friend.
3. Are most of your friends from the same country as you?

Coping (General)

1. Tell me about some things that make you feel worried.
 - a. What do you do when you feel worried?
 - b. How do you feel after you do that?
2. What makes you feel better when you are sad? When you are angry?
3. Is there someone you go to if you need help?
4. How many adults do you know that you could talk to if you need help?
5. Have you ever had a problem at school?
 - a. How did you try to fix that problem?
 - b. How did you feel after you did that?

Coping (Acculturation)

1. What types of things have been hard about living in the United States?
 - a. What helps you deal with this problem?
 2. How do you feel about having moved to the United States?
 - a. What are some of the good things about having moved to the United States? Bad things?
 - b. What do you do to feel better about those things?
-

Other students described stress as pressure from an outside source such as family members, peers, teachers, or the school environment. Jesus, an eighth-grade Venezuelan student, defined stress as

when somebody pushes you around too much to do really good but you don't want to be pushed around. Everyone tells you, "Do it, do good, do good," and you're like, "Ugh, quit pushing me around, I know what to do."

Several of the students in this study identified stress with feelings of anxiety, worry, and sadness. One student described his upcoming move to another city as a source of stress; he was worried about missing Cincinnati and not wanting to leave. Maria defined stress as a general feeling of worry. Jairo argued that stress is "when you're pretty frustrated and you need some time to relax."

Adversity and Stress Experiences

Five categories of adversity and stress experiences were derived from the qualitative analysis: stress stemming from (a) peer relationships, (b) immigration, (c) academics, (d) language, and (e) family.

Peer relationship stress. All of the participants reported significant peer-related stress, including difficulties forming relationships and experiences with teasing, bullying, and interpersonal aggression. A majority of the participants discussed the prevalence of teasing and name-calling among peers at school. The students talked about being called names like "slowpoke," triggering feelings of sadness, frustration, and isolation. Mateo reported,

This boy. Like today, he was calling me names. He was messing with me. Then I started getting sad. He said, "What are you doing here? Get out of here." I didn't cry but I started getting sad.

The students also reported feeling worried or anxious about what peers were saying about them behind their back. Maria recounted a story in which her close friends ignored her unexpectedly. Maria shared, "They didn't talk to me at all and they talked behind me about stuff. You know you get the feeling when someone is sneaking and talking about you."

Interpersonal aggression, including repeated teasing and verbal threats, often culminates in bullying and verbal aggression. Children may face frequent threats, verbal abuse, and harassment that significantly alter their behavior and emotional functioning both in and out of the school

environment (Buhs, 2005). Nakamoto and Schwartz (2011) demonstrated the relationship between peer victimization and poor academic achievement among urban Latino youth, finding that victimization was associated with lower grade point averages and poor school engagement. The researchers argued that psychological distress in addition to active peer-avoidance behaviors may contribute to poorer educational outcomes among urban Latino youth (Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2011).

Adriana told a story about classmates who had repeatedly threatened to attack her on school grounds. Adriana shared,

And those two wanted to hit me, I don't know why. They was telling me to go to the restroom so they could hit me . . . Three girls in my class told my friend and my friend told me not to go to the restroom because the ones who wanted to hit me wanted to hit me in the restroom. So I didn't go and I went home and told my mom.

Many of the students reported incidents of interpersonal aggression and violence. Jairo discussed how verbal disagreements can escalate into fights. He explained,

No. I mean sometimes I got in fights with other people because they were talking about me, but that was like . . . we got over it. They started as talking fights but got into physical fights if they didn't leave me alone.

Cristian made a similar argument, noting that violence is one of the most difficult characteristics of his school. This third-grade student commented that the fighting in the school makes him feel scared and "bad," "like bad that people are gonna hurt me."

The most salient source of stress in this study was peer relationship stress, with all of the students detailing difficult interactions with friends and classmates. The experiences ranged from mild teasing and name-calling to bullying and physical aggression. Though this is not an experience unique to this population, it is important to consider as an additional contextual factor that complicates the experiences of foreign-born Latino youth. Negative peer relationships, on top of additional contextual stressors, may contribute to health- and school-related consequences. Specifically, peer victimization and aggression have been associated with anxiety, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, sleep problems, pain, and poor academic achievement (Basch, 2011).

Immigration stress. Research suggests that stress results from the fear, loss, uncertainty, confusion, and isolation associated with immigration (Dettlaff &

Johnson, 2011). Latino immigrants face extreme pressures while adapting to a new environment, following changes in environment, language, customs, and support systems (Hancock, 2005). For foreign-born Latino youth, the pressures are compounded by peer relationships (Buchanan & Smokowski, 2011), adapting to school (Roche & Kuperminc, 2012), and having to act as a cultural broker for their parents (Weisskirch & Alva, 2002).

The students related stories involving two main sources of immigration stress—life before immigration and feelings of loss after migrating to the United States. Out of the nine participants, five had at least one parent who was living and working in the United States prior to the child immigrating. Mateo, a fifth-grade student who emigrated from Mexico years after his mother was already living in the United States, talked about how his mother's life was extremely difficult while she was working in the United States. He recounted, "My mom left me when I was 2. She had to come here because she had problems. She owed money." Many of the students were living with their grandparents in their country of origin before moving to the United States to be reunited with one or more of their parents. Jesus shared that his father had moved to Ohio to have a good job and send money back to his family in Honduras.

A second source of immigration stress highlighted by the students is the loss that is experienced when leaving a culture, environment, and family support network that is safe and familiar. All nine of the participants talked about missing their family and friends that were still in their home country. Flor had lived in the United States for less than a year at the time of the interview. She repeated the phrase "I am sad for Guatemala" throughout the interview, emphasizing her sense of loss and isolation after immigration. When asked about where she lived in Guatemala, Flor responded, "It's a small town. I miss my family and my friends and my school and my teachers and my grandma and my grandpa. And my parrot and my cat."

The other students spoke of similar types of loss, including pets, family members, and friends. The majority of the students maintained contact with one or two family members in their home country, but did not know when, if ever, they would see these important figures again. Ko and Perreira (2010) examined Latino youths' perspectives on immigration and found that the youth identified two separate phases of loss. Most of the children had first faced the psychological distress of separating from their parents when a mother or father traveled to the United States to find employment and begin earning money for the family. The second stage of loss occurs as these children are then separated from their extended family in their home country when finally reunited with their parents in the United States. This repeated loss may contribute to psychological distress and feelings of loss for extended family members and friends in the home country.

Academic stress. Many of the academic stressors identified by the youth in this study are common among adolescents and may be more representative of schooling and development in general, than stress factors specific to foreign-born Latinos. Still, these factors are important to consider for the complexity they add to the ecologies impacting this population. All nine participants discussed the difficulties associated with academic achievement and success, particularly in a foreign environment. The children identified three major sources of stress within the academic arena: comprehension, homework demands, and family pressure.

In terms of comprehension, many students described difficulties understanding coursework in both English and Spanish. Many of the students shared their experiences with work that was too challenging or hard to understand. Maria, a fifth-grade student, stated, "Sometimes we have to do a lot of activities that like, I don't understand . . . The teacher she told me that I didn't do good in my scores. I wasn't used to it yet. I didn't get it." Adjusting to differences in language and schooling can be difficult for emigrating students (Levitt, Lane, & Levitt, 2005). Without a strong support system and teachers who are able to properly adjust the curriculum, it may be difficult for these students to be successful. Madrid (2011) suggested that Latino students must be presented with rigorous and consistent coursework, high-quality teachers, and parental support to excel academically.

Some students mentioned problems with tests in particular, feeling anxious about their performance and worried about whether or not they understand the material. When describing his experience with the recent Ohio Academic Achievement (OAA) tests, the standardized test for Ohio, Mateo explained, "Like the OAA, like when they came to me like the OAA, I got scared because it was too many questions. And I couldn't remember anything." High-stakes standardized testing puts undue pressure on students to perform well. La Roche and Shriberg (2004) argued that Latinos continue to not perform well academically as a result of high-stakes testing and differences in cultural values between families and U.S. schools.

In addition, students complained about excessive homework that reduced their opportunities for peer interactions and extracurricular activities. Most of the participants shared that homework was a source of significant stress, mainly because of the time required to sufficiently complete the assignments. Strict deadlines and weekend assignments were frequently listed as stressors, as students wanted to spend their time competing in sports, playing in the park, and spending time with family and friends.

Finally, a majority of the participants described family pressure to perform well academically, which resulted in significant stress and worry. Almost all of the students mentioned specifically that their parents demonstrate interest

in their grades, and will encourage their child to “get the scores up” and “do good on grades.” Jesus described the positive pressure his father places on him, encouraging him to do well in school:

My dad is saying that he’s really proud of me and that he wants me to make something of my life, so I always try to do really good. He says he wants me to do really good in my life and most of my cousins are going the wrong way. He says that every time people ask him about his kids he says he’s really proud of us and he said he don’t want me to let him down.

Although the pressure was frequently positive, it was difficult for students to manage when coursework and tests were difficult to understand. The literature suggests that parental pressure, whether positive or negative, can negatively affect school achievement among students from all cultural and economic backgrounds (Luthar & Becker, 2002).

Language stress. A majority of the students mentioned difficulty coping with language barriers after emigration from a Spanish-speaking country. For many students, language barriers create difficulties succeeding in school (Cervantes & Córdova, 2011). All nine students first learned English in a school classroom in the United States. Eight of the nine students in this project learned English at their current school. When asked to speak about their stress experiences, many students described how difficult it was to learn English after arriving in the United States. Adriana stated, “Yeah. It was hard. I couldn’t pronounce the words.” Some of the students described the significant help they received from supportive and accommodating teachers within their bilingual school environment. This help, they argued, made it easier for them to adapt to their new environment and quickly learn English.

Previous research indicates the positive effects bilingual education may have on academic achievement among Latino youth. For example, Lindholm-Leary and Hernández (2011) found that Latino students in a dual language program had higher levels of proficiency and achievement in both Spanish and English when compared with peers in mainstream programs. Still, bilingual education and a supportive school environment may not be enough to eliminate the stress associated with language differences for new immigrants (Ko & Perreira, 2010). One student stated that despite 5 years in a language immersion program, he still does not feel confident speaking English. Alex confessed, “I still can’t speak it that well. Some teachers speak English when I come here, so I asked my friends in Spanish, ‘What are they saying?’ They translated for me.”

Several students described the effect that language barriers have on academic performance, with many struggling to complete and understand homework assignments and the school curriculum. When asked to indicate their least favorite subject in school, several students chose a class in which language caused significant stress. Flor said that she struggles with math, a subject that is taught in English at her school. Flor recounted, "I have problems and I don't understand the English." Similarly, Jesus reported that he has had difficulty understanding the scientific terminology in science class, which is also taught in English. Jesus explained, "Like science, if you give me a test in English I will understand it perfectly . . . but if you give me in Spanish, I don't think I will understand." These statements demonstrate the additional pressure learning and communicating in two languages may place on students within the school environment.

Family stress. Independent of immigration and academic stress, the students described family stress as a significant source of anxiety and worry. Family stress, according to the students, included difficult relationships with family members as well as the pressure to take a leadership role within the family. Several of the students described significant extreme stress associated with family relationships. This stress was extremely salient for Cristian. He described tumultuous relationships with two of his brothers as well as his father. Cristian explained his relationship with his brother: "He always have to say lies about me. He says that I hit him. He hits me." Cristian also described the abusive actions of his father toward his mother, before refusing to discuss his family further.

Cristian felt that his only choice was to actively ignore his brothers and avoid his father. Cristian absorbed verbal abuse and accepted blame for the actions of others. It is likely that this chaotic home environment could contribute to future problems with depression (Hovey & King, 1996), internalizing problems, and lowered self-esteem (Smokowski, Rose, & Bacallao, 2010). For example, Smokowski et al. (2010) examined the interpersonal factors that related acculturation stress to future internalizing symptoms and psychopathology among foreign-born and native Latino adolescents. Their research revealed that parent-adolescent conflict and family dysfunction are related to both acculturation stress and internalizing symptoms.

Three students identified their role as caretaker, cultural broker, or family leader as a source of stress. These participants serve as caretakers, translators, and tutors for their siblings and older relatives. Alex described his role as a translator for his relatives:

Well like, if I see a family member worried about something I help them out because I'm very good at English. Like one day, my dad hurt his hand playing soccer, it cracked right here. I called the police and went to the hospital to take care of him all night.

As a seventh grader, Alex is placed in charge of complicated and overwhelming tasks due to his English proficiency. He is expected to not only perform well in school and adapt to a challenging new environment, but also serve as a caretaker and translator for his family in emergency or otherwise important situations. Jesus recounted his annoyance when helping his younger sister with her schoolwork: "When I try to help her I feel like walking away but my mom is like, 'No, help her.' Yeah. I try to help her but sometimes she just gets on my nerves."

Protective Factors and Resilience

Protective factors are the individual, familial, community, or cultural attributes that support resilience and reduce risk for negative outcomes (Masten, 2004). Protective factors may include religious affiliation, gender roles, access to resources, social competence, parenting, self-efficacy, optimism, and a host of other conditions that support adaptive development and functioning (Ungar, 2008). Among the students who participated in this project, individual (e.g., coping strategies), familial (e.g., family support networks), school (e.g., school and environmental supports), and community factors (e.g., peer support networks) were determined as important supports when dealing with various stressors.

Coping strategies. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined coping as the "constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (p. 141). Coping strategies are frequently distinguished between those efforts that actively confront a source of stress and those efforts that avoid dealing with the source of stress. In general, the active, problem-solving coping strategies are associated with adaptive outcomes whereas avoidant strategies are associated with maladaptive outcomes (Crean, 2004). In addition, research suggests that individuals with significant social resources and support networks are less likely to use avoidant strategies, emphasizing the importance of building social resources among children and adolescents experiencing a great deal of stress (Crean, 2004).

The students identified short-term, immediate coping strategies to deal with stressful situations. These coping strategies were both emotion-focused

coping, such as relaxation techniques to ease anxiety or exhaustion and distracting oneself through alternative activities. Some of the children named “playing” as their most frequently used coping mechanism. Students played video games, board games, and computer games, as well as more physical activities such as soccer or basketball. Flor indicated that she liked to play outside or in the park to relieve stress. Other immediate emotion-focused coping strategies included listening to music, writing poems, going to sleep, and taking deep breaths. Mateo explained a strategy that he learned from his personal mentor, a teacher at his school:

Take three breaths. Stay calm. Think calm. Ms. B said if you’re feeling bad or stressed out, like some of your friends are calling your names or all this stuff, take three breaths. And don’t think bad, think good. Like what you’re gonna do, where you’re gonna go.

Students applied these coping strategies across all overwhelming or frustrating situations, whether immigration, academic, family, or peer-related stress.

When dealing with relationship stress in particular, students indicated three specific coping strategies. Most of the participants stated that their first response to relationship stress is to ignore the peer. Alegra explained, “If I get in a disagreement I would just let it slide. I would maybe not talk to them for a little bit and then start talking and hanging out again.” Jesus, Mateo, and Cristian also stated that they were mostly likely to simply ignore stressful relationships until the situation was resolved. The second strategy was for students to explicitly tell peers to stop their teasing or aggressive behavior. Jesus, Alegra, and Adriana stated that they would likely tell a peer to stop annoying or threatening them in a stressful situation. Jesus commented, “If you are messing around I’m like, stop messing around and I just don’t talk to them anymore.” Third, several of the students stated that they would react to a stressful peer relationship by retaliating against a peer or becoming physically aggressive. Mateo told a story of teasing and taunting a peer who had been mean to him earlier in the day, while Alegra stated that she would hit a friend if the disagreement escalated.

Research on the effects of coping responses for peer victimization on psychological adjustment is complex and often conflicting. Singh and Bussey (2011) found that coping self-efficacy contributed to more positive psychological outcomes for victims of peer harassment. The authors suggested that increasing proactive behavior, limiting self-blame, avoiding aggressive behavior, and not labeling oneself as a victim, mediated the association with peer victimization maladjustment, including externalizing symptoms,

anxiety, and depression (Singh & Bussey, 2011). However, Visconti and Troop-Gordon (2010) discussed the conflicted nature of peer victimization research. The authors found that avoidance, for instance, was related to better social behavior for boys but poor social adjustment for girls. In addition, the authors argued that physical retaliation relieved stress for highly victimized children but contributed to poor social adjustment for less victimized children (Visconti & Troop-Gordon, 2010). Further research is needed to identify the implications specific to foreign-born Latino youth.

Family support networks. One external protective factor described by some students in this study was family support networks. For Mateo and Maria, family members were essential in dealing with academic stress. Both of these students described the role of their mother in helping with homework and relieving the stress brought about by a lack of understanding. Mateo recounts, "I asked one day to my mom, I don't understand this. And she said, 'OK, come here and sit down.' So we all sat down and I get it better. It was easy to me when she explained it." Without her support, Mateo struggled to complete his homework and was easily frustrated by his assignments.

Family support networks were essential in overcoming other forms of stress as well, as these children relied on trusted and caring individuals for emotional support. Alex and Alegra detailed the support they receive from immediate and extended family members. Alex relied on his cousin when he was feeling stressed, stating that he only expressed his fears, worries, and concerns to his cousin: "When we first came here my cousin and I told a lot of secrets, and he's the one I trust." Alegra identified her mother as her main source of support. Much like the cousin described above, her mother is available to listen to and assist Alegra when her stress is overwhelming.

Consistent with previous research examining the experiences of Latino children and adults, the findings suggest that family networks serve as a protective factor for Latino immigrant children. Family networks and the cultural values that support these networks are understood as *familismo* (familism). Padilla and Villalobos (2007) defined familismo as a broad group of cultural characteristics such as loyalty, respect, interdependence, family connectedness, and solidarity that exists within immediate and extended family networks. Familismo helps maintain relationships among distant family members and promotes stability throughout the family system (Falicov, 2005). Research suggests that Latinos, in comparison with other ethnic groups, are more likely to have strong family ties and connectedness (Gaines et al., 1997), which have been found to predict health care seeking behaviors (Tamez, 1981) and psychological well-being among Latinos (Rodriguez, Mira, Paez, & Myers, 2007).

School and environmental supports. The school environment also played an important role in helping the majority of students deal with academic, language, and peer stress. For example, many of the students identified their teachers as a positive support when dealing with academic stress. Several students recognized the ways in which teachers promote learning and accommodated students who were having difficulties adapting to a new environment or learning new material. In addition, some reported that they felt respected by their teachers, who work to challenge, assist, and advance the children in their classes.

Some of the students detailed the ways in which their school is particularly helpful to recent immigrants. Jesus talked about the benefits of a bilingual program:

I get to learn Spanish a little bit more. I know Spanish; I can write it. But as you learn English you are losing your Spanish . . . and here at least you learn a little bit about it and keep on it, on your brain.

Jairo attributed his success to his school environment. He described the opportunities he has received through his school, such as being awarded a scholarship that will allow him to go to college after high school.

In addition, many of the students discussed the role of school faculty and staff in preventing violence and keeping children safe. These students recognized the ability of school officials to intervene when children are teased, bullied, or threatened. Each student identified at least two adults within the school with whom they could share sensitive information. These adults were essential to the functioning of the school and student coping skills, allowing students to feel safe within the classroom environment.

Research suggests that self-efficacious and supportive teachers are essential to student resilience, particularly among minority students in urban neighborhoods who face significant structural and social obstacles (Sosa & Gomez, 2012). Teachers of resilient students tend to successfully develop positive relationships with youth, establish high expectations, hold students accountable for their success or failures, and use culturally responsive language in the classroom (Bondy, Ross, Galligane, & Hambacher, 2007). The students in the present study described their teachers as both demanding and supportive, particularly when it came to learning English. Their findings emphasized the role teachers can play in accepting and supporting Latino students' use of Spanish inside and outside of the classroom. In addition, teachers with shared cultural, ethnic, or language backgrounds may be able to empathize with and support students facing discrimination or stress related to race or immigration status (Sosa & Gomez, 2012). Effective and culturally

responsive teachers are thus able to augment or develop protective factors that contribute to resilience.

The students in this study also noted the supportive structure of their school environment. A majority of the children described the ways in which the school environment allowed them to cope with stressful situations, citing teachers, administrators, and the language immersion program as especially supportive. Attending a school that encourages development of bilingual skills, promotes Spanish in the classroom, employs ethnic minority teachers and staff, and acknowledges the diversity of the students may be particularly beneficial to Latino immigrant youth due to the value placed on their language and culture.

Peer support networks. Several of the children described the role of their peers in helping to reduce stress. Although Cristian mentioned his well-established peer relationships only once, Alex went into great detail describing the importance of friendships and strong peer bonds in eliminating relationship, academic, and language stress.

Alex provided nine separate stories of occasions when he relied heavily on peer relationships and support to deal with a stressful situation. He focused on the long-standing friendships between him and his classmates that allowed the students to stop bullying and resorting to physical violence during school hours. Over the course of the past several years, Alex and his classmates have created a network of support that allows students to resolve problems without aggression. Alex shared a story typical of his experience:

In the third grade people were fighting, and you know this person Jairo? He was crying and I told him to cheer up. It's OK, they are gonna get in trouble. I'll help you out. From there, from now on, when he's in trouble or wants to fight or something, I'm always there for him.

Alex prided himself on the support he received and provided, stating that they "all treat each other fair and square," discouraging teasing, bullying, and fighting among all students in the school. Alex emphasized that his classmates did not always behave in this way; but now, after years of working together, the classmates have formed close bonds that allowed them to overcome difficulties. They were role models for the rest of the school, something that Alex was extremely proud to share. Alex concluded, "Yeah cause it's all for one, one for all. We are all musketeers who help each other. There is nobody left behind."

Research on youth resilience suggests that individuals with strong, positive relationships, especially with friends, adults, relatives, and neighbors,

can more effectively cope with difficulties that would otherwise lead to poor health outcomes and can create more positive feelings toward learning, school and academics (Harvey, 2007). Several of the participants detailed their positive peer relationships and the effects these relationships have on their social and emotional functioning. Still, all of the children reported peer stress, including peer victimization. To better promote resilience and develop successful coping strategies, the negative peer relationships among these students need to be addressed. Research suggests that fostering positive learning environments and encouraging feelings of competence work to simultaneously improve peer relationships and personal resilience (Harvey, 2007).

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the contextual risk and protective factors that contribute to the stress experiences of Latino immigrant youth in a nontraditional migration city, while paying specific attention to the strengths within the school and greater community to promote resilience. Previous research has indicated that Latino immigrant youth and their families experience a range of stressors, including stress related to communication and language, family relationships, peers, school and academics, immigration, and financial resources. The results of the present study suggest that Latino immigrant youth also face a great deal of adversity from relationships, academics, and minority status. The results of the current study demonstrate five sources of stress among these first-generation Latino immigrant students: immigration stress, language stress, academic stress, family stress, and peer relationship stress. Although their definitions of stress varied in detail, these children recognized stress as demonstrating a negative effect on their mental health, physical health, and school performance.

Significant research on Latino immigrant children and adolescents has examined the effects of race and discrimination on stress experiences (e.g., Cervantes & Córdova, 2011; Córdova & Cervantes, 2010). It is interesting to note that the students in this study did not mention discrimination based on language, sex, or ethnicity. Because the interviews in this study were designed to elicit the lived experience of the students, we did not explicitly prompt the participants to speak about issues of discrimination. None of the participants introduced information related to race, ethnicity, gender, racism, sexism, or discrimination. Further research is necessary to determine whether the protective factors described above additionally reduce experienced discrimination. It is possible that the community, environmental, and school support factors reduce perceived discrimination among the students. Furthermore, certain attributes—such as gender, nation of origin, socioeconomic

status—complicate the experience of discrimination and should be investigated in more detail.

Adding to our understanding of the stress factors faced by these youth, this study also suggests significant contextual and cultural protective factors that may contribute to resilience in the participants. The students in this study described the use of coping strategies such as relaxation techniques, avoidance, and ignoring behaviors. In addition, the students emphasized their reliance on family networks, peer relationships, and environmental and school supports to resolve stressful situations. Future research should further examine the effects of these supportive networks in mediating acculturative stress experiences of Latino youth, particularly in nontraditional migration locations where the support networks may be less extensive than in traditional migration destinations. In addition, further research is needed to investigate how first-generation Latino immigrant students' coping mechanisms and these community protective factors contribute to positive outcomes, including overall psychological well-being and academic performance.

Another important finding was the role of the academic environment in supporting resilience. The students who participated in this study all attended the same language immersion magnet school. It is likely that the program's emphasis on dual language learning and quality teachers with ethnic and language backgrounds similar to the students contributed to a positive and supportive environment within this school. This finding is consistent with previous literature (Sosa & Gomez, 2012). The students in this study felt connected to their school environment and reported feeling supported in a multilingual and multicultural setting. Attending a magnet school that values and prioritizes their native language and cultural background likely serves as a protective factor that contributes to resilience (Smith et al., 2002).

Unfortunately, this school environment may not be common in nontraditional migration cities. Because the Latino youth population is not as concentrated in nontraditional destinations, it is less likely that dual language immersion programs exist. In these situations, feelings of isolation, alienation, and discrimination may be more common for Latino immigrant students. As a result, it is important for educators to note the qualities that contribute to successful development and academic achievement for Latino immigrant youth, especially within nontraditional immigrant destination areas. Helping to build strong family, peer, school, and community support networks may encourage psychological functioning and academic growth for Latino immigrant children and adolescents.

Sosa and Gomez (2012) argued that effective teachers and schools similar to the one described in this study may form "pockets of success and support" (p. 901). The key becomes expanding these pockets to serve more students,

particularly those isolated from community resources and support networks. According to Condly (2006), resilience depends on opportunities: “Opportunities to rest from resisting a hostile environment, opportunities to explore in safety and security, opportunities to believe and dream” (p. 228). As described by youth in the present study, these opportunities exist within the family, school, and peer support networks that serve as protection against difficult circumstances. This study provides a more nuanced understanding of Latino immigrant youth living within the context of a nontraditional migration city and attending a supportive school that provides a bilingual curriculum.

Limitations

Although the present study extends understanding of stress and resilience among Latino immigrant youth living in a nontraditional migration city, we recognize several limitations. We analyzed the responses of the youth as a single group, not accounting for the potentially unique experiences of these youth based on nation of origin, years in the United States, or reason for immigration. Additional examination of these factors would benefit the contextual understanding of risk and protective factors in foreign-born Latino youth.

To be interviewed, all of the students were required to speak English, limiting both the range of students eligible and potentially the depth of responses. In addition, the small sample size may limit the range and generalizability of the conclusions. The present study would benefit from additional sources of data, such as community, family, or teacher interviews, to triangulate the data collected and further support the results. Future research should explore additional sources of data to better understand the perspectives of community members and families.

Finally, the students in this study are from one school in Cincinnati, Ohio. As a magnet school, students from different neighborhoods across the city are eligible to attend this particular language immersion school located in a nontraditional migration city. This school is uniquely designed to meet the needs of Latino immigrant youth with its emphasis on Spanish language and culture as an embedded part of the curriculum. This is not representative of the larger community or the experiences of all Latino youth. Therefore, caution should be exercised in generalizing the findings to other geographic locations, Latino immigrant youth, and schools. Future research should examine the reported experiences of Latino immigrant youth in schools with less concentrated Latino populations and among schools not specifically designed to serve these populations. It is possible that the vital support networks found in the current study will be absent or function differently in other schools.

Despite these limitations, important implications emerged from this research. First, the foreign-born Latino youth living in Cincinnati expressed stressors consistent with the extant research examining stress experiences of Latino youth in general. Second, the Latino immigrant youth also described important protective factors, including individual (e.g., coping strategies), relational (e.g., family and peer support networks) and community (e.g., school structure, bilingualism) factors. Further research should examine the relationship between these self-identified protective factors and demonstrated academic and emotional resilience among Latino immigrant youth living in a nontraditional migration city.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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