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Immigrant Latino Fathers' Perceptions of Child Abuse and Neglect

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Abstract

The objective of this qualitative research was to study the lived experiences of child abuse and neglect for immigrant Latino fathers whose children are involved in the child protection process. We documented the narratives of nine immigrant Latino fathers attending fatherhood groups regarding their perceptions of child abuse and neglect. The immigrant Latino fathers highlighted their lack of agency and marginalization due to acculturative parenting stress, structural discrimination, and immigration status. They are burdened with physical and emotional pain that diffuses into their children's lives and results in unhealthy coping strategies. The Latino fathers faced everyday microaggressions, racial abuses, and discrimination due to their agency and role as Latino immigrants. They chronicled their frustrations due to distrust of the mainstream social service providers, police, immigration officials, and abuse meted on them due to their marginalized identities. We provide practice and policy recommendations for professionals working with immigrant Latino families.

Keywords: child abuse and neglect, Latino fathers, Latino families, parenting, immigration, undocumented status, descriptive phenomenology

Child abuse and neglect are a public health problem in the United States and around the world. Referrals to Child Protective Services increased 15% from 3,598,000 in the fiscal year 2013 to 4,136,000 in the fiscal year 2017 (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2019). The three most significant percentages of perpetrators of child abuse and neglect are: White (50.3%), African-American (20.7%), or Hispanic (18.6%), and most victims are from one of the three ethnicities – White (44.6%), Hispanic (22.3%) and African American (20.7%) (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2019). The United States is home to many immigrants from Central and South America who have enriched our diversity over many years. The Latino population accounts for 17.6% of the United States total population, or approximately 58.9 million people, and is the fastest-growing group in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Latino children are 3.19 times more likely than White children to be reported as alleged victims with an investigation response (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2019). National data indicate that the proportion of children confirmed as victims of maltreatment who are Latino increased from 14.2% in 2000 to 19.3% in 2019 (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2019). Professional mandates require that social service providers recognize and value diverse cultural perspectives when addressing child abuse and neglect. However, lived experiences of child abuse and neglect for immigrant Latino fathers are missing in the professional literature (Gassman-Pines & Skinner, 2018). It is critical to research this understudied population, and the objective of this qualitative exploratory research was to study the narratives on child abuse and neglect for immigrant Latino fathers whose children are involved in the child protection process.

Background

Latino parents from different cultures face distinctive life conditions and have values and priorities unique to their contexts (Bush & Peterson, 2014). Latino parents do not approve of or support child abuse, and emphasize intimacy, protection, and interdependence (Aldoney & Cabrera, 2016). Familismo (familism), respeto (respect), and educación (education focused on learning good manners) are prominent cultural guides for family members (Aldoney & Cabrera, 2016). These values interconnect with each other to highlight and strengthen the rules governing parenting. In addition to the values of familismo, respeto, and educación, Latino families endorse high masculinity in males (machismo) and self-sacrificing attitudes and family-oriented behaviors in females (marianismo) (Pinto & Ortiz, 2018). The reframing of machismo concept remains tenuous, and machismo can be construed positively and negatively. Some research documented machismo positively where Latino men are caretakers and protectors of their families (Glass & Owen, 2010). Other research portrayed machismo in a negative light labeling Latino men as chauvinistic and misogynistic womanizers, uninvolved fathers, and strict disciplinarians within the family (D'Angelo, Palacios, & Chase-Landale, 2012). Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, and Tracey (2008) contended that the negative and positive dimensions of machismo coexist rather than manifest in either/or scenarios.

Child Welfare System and Latino Immigrant Families

There is a significant body of research examining the involvement of child welfare services with Latino households (Ai, Lee, Solis, & Yap, 2016; Bailey, Brazil, Conrad-Hiebner, & Counts, 2015; Cardoso, Dettlaff, Finno-Velasquez, Scott, & Faulkner, 2014; Johnson-Motoyama, Dettlaff, & Finno, 2012). Prior research has focused on the differences in child maltreatment

characteristics as well as protective and risk factors for Latino households with varying immigration statuses. Cardoso et al. (2014) noted that children of non-citizen parents were less exposed to parental behaviors that constituted abuse than United States citizen parents. Despite higher poverty rates, non-citizen Latino families exhibited critical protective factors, i.e., the presence of both parents in the household, lower teenage childbearing, and more moderate use of addictive substances and drugs (Cardoso et al., 2014). Dettlaff, Earner, and Phillips (2009) and Dettlaff and Johnson (2011) documented that even though immigrant families presented many risk factors, their children faced significantly less child abuse than the United States born Latino parents. Caballero, Johnson, Muñoz Buchanan, and DeCamp (2017) and Johnson-Motoyama et al. (2012) substantiated the same on parental nativity as Latino children in immigrant and mixed immigration status families had a lower probability of being involved in a confirmed case of child abuse and neglect as compared to children born to Latino parents born in the United States. Mixed immigration families have shown significant strengths because of the parents' aspirations for their children as well as greater access to resources in the United States, and resiliency they developed due to their immigration journey (Johnson-Motoyama et al., 2012).

Additionally, immigrants' culture and relationships to their countries of origin also served as critical protective factors (Hancock & Siu, 2009). Family functioning and informal social networks were critical protective factors (Bailey et al., 2015). Clear expectations, open communication, and emotional support, rooted within values of familismo and respeto, were contributing factors to emotional resilience in at-risk Latino families (Bailey et al., 2015). Moreover, Bailey et al. (2015) noted family functioning was just as critical in low socio-economic status Latino families as in higher-income Latino families. Social networks have shown to play a vital role in supporting Latino families involved with the public child welfare system. However, immigrant (documented and undocumented) Latino families receive incorrect or conflicting information because their networks are "limited to people who are in their same circumstances which limits their ability to access formal sources of advocacy and support" (Ayón, 2011, p. 2061). Furthermore, exposure to childhood physical abuse faced by Latino men has also been documented to be positively associated with lifetime substance abuse, age, being United States-born, and perceived discrimination (Ai et al., 2016).

The literature review on working with immigrant Latino families around child abuse and neglect has expanded over the past three decades. Prior research focuses on comparisons between immigrant and United States citizen Latino families served by Child Protective Services. However, very few studies focus on the experiences of immigrant Latino parents around child abuse and neglect. No research has utilized descriptive phenomenology to document experiences of child abuse and neglect for immigrant Latino fathers whose children are involved in the child protection process. Researching this hidden population can shift our professional practice from the dominant perspective to one that is culturally responsive, and our research addresses this significant gap.

Research Methodology

The Institutional Review Board approved this research at a public university in the New England region. We interviewed nine immigrant Latino fathers whose children were involved in the child protection process. This study reflects the critical constructivist perspective where the historical, social, cultural, economic, and political contexts inform our perspectives of ourselves and the

world around us (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Using critical constructivist lens, we worked to unmask the dominant interpretation of the Latino experiences by engaging in and putting at the forefront the narratives of immigrant Latino men regarding child abuse and neglect.

Phenomenology is well suited to study commonalities of a shared experience (Grbich, 2012), which in this study was the perceptions of child abuse and neglect of immigrant Latino fathers whose children are involved in the child protection process. The study employed descriptive phenomenology to gain a deeper understanding of participants' lived experiences from their perspectives and in their words (Creswell, 2013). In phenomenology, the sample size is generally small and is guided by the need to uncover the key variants, and it is typical to study 5 - 25 individuals (Creswell, 2013).

Descriptive (eidetic) phenomenology aims to recognize the essence of a phenomenon and a new understanding of it by removing what is perceived and leaving what is required (Morrow, 2015). Historically, in descriptive phenomenology, the researchers 'bracket out' their assumptions to separate themselves from the world they are a part of to achieve transcendental subjectivity (neutrality and openness to the reality of others) (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). However, Giorgi, Giorgi, and Morley (2017) contend, and we agree that, "transcendental reduction aims for a completely purified consciousness which has no relationship with anything empirical...transcendental reduction speaks about any possible consciousness but no real consciousness...but we are interested specifically in actual human consciousness" (2017, p. 181). We employed Colaizzi's distinctive 7-step process for data analysis, as detailed by Marrow (2017) for this research: (a) familiarization with the data; (b) identification of significant statements, (c) formulating meanings by first reflexively bracketing own assumptions, (d) clustering themes, (e) developing an exhaustive description, (f) producing the fundamental structure, and (g) seeking verification of the fundamental structure (pp. 643-644).

Participants

Criterion sampling was used in this study, and the criteria included being "immigrant Latino fathers whose children are involved in the child protection process." The participants interviewed for this research lived in the New England region in the United States. Three men were immigrants from El Salvador, two from Guatemala, and one each from Chile, Costa Rica, and Cuba. One participant from Puerto Rico self-identified as a migrant to Puerto Rico and the United States, even though Puerto Ricans are United States citizens. As the access to this hidden population is difficult, all the interested participants were interviewed by the community partner even though they came from various Latin American countries. All participants spoke Spanish, two were bilingual, and only one was multilingual, and all identified as Christian. Two participants had bachelor's degrees, one had an associate's degree in arts, three completed high school, two completed middle or elementary school, and one reported having no formal education. Their ages ranged from 27-55 years, with an average of 43 years.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Study Participants

Fathers' Characteristics	
Age	43 (mean); 27 – 55 (range)
Country of Origin	
Chile	1 (11%)
Costa Rica	1 (11%)
Cuba	1 (11%)
El Salvador	2 (22%)
Guatemala	3 (34%)
Puerto Rico	1 (11%)
Education	
No Formal Education	1 (11%)
Middle or Elementary School	2 (22%)
High School	3 (34%)
Associates in Arts	1 (11%)
Bachelor's Degree	2 (22%)
Children per Family	1.56 (mean); 1 – 4 (range)
Household Size	4.22 (mean); 1 – 6 (range)
Immigration Status	
Documented	5 (56%)
Undocumented	4 (44%)
Languages Spoken	
Multilingual (Spanish, English, Amharic)	1 (11%)
Bilingual (Spanish & English)	2 (22%)
Spanish Only	6 (67%)
Religious Affiliation	
Christianity	9 (100%)

Five participants reported having legal immigration status, and the others were undocumented. Some families also had mixed immigration statuses where children and one parent were United States citizens, and some family members were undocumented. Eight participants lived with their spouses/domestic partners and children in the same household, and one participant lived by himself but was involved in raising his children. They had been in the United States from 5 to 35 years; even though the range of time that the participants had been in the United States was quite long, only two participants had been here for a long time (around 19 years), and the rest of the participants were recent immigrants. Their household size ranged from 1 - 6 people, with a mean of 4.22, with 1 - 4 children in the household, with an average of 1.56 children per home.

Procedure

We worked with a trusted Latino community partner to identify interested immigrant Latino fathers to participate in in-depth individual interviews. The community partner connected with the participants through thirteen weeks long fathering groups he was offering to Latino fathers at

the Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Services Division, in the New England region. The men were referred to these fathering groups because there were open child welfare cases alleging abuse or neglect. Some of those cases were not involving the men directly, and their partners may have been the target of child welfare involvement. Men whose parenting issues were substance abuse, domestic violence, or acute mental illness were not referred to these groups. Men who were in recovery or had completed other forms of treatment successfully were allowed into the group. The participants were provided a \$50 Walmart gift card as an incentive to participate in this research. Funds for the research (incentives for participation and transcription services) were supported through a university faculty senate grant. The community partner conducted eight interviews in Spanish and one in English. The interviews lasted approximately 60-90 minutes. The Spanish interviews were interpreted and transcribed in English by a bilingual colleague, and the community partner reviewed the transcribed interviews for accuracy.

We used a semi-structured interview guide to gather the immigrant fathers' experience of child abuse and neglect. Some examples of questions in the interview guide were, "How do you define child abuse and neglect?", "What would cause you to become worried and intercede with parents who are not taking good care of their children?", and "Can you compare actions and behaviors that constitute child abuse and neglect in your own culture versus White families' culture?" We did not ask them about their family cases but asked them to share their reflections on the broad questions to understand the phenomenon of child abuse and neglect. Each of the co-authors came to the project with personal and professional contacts in the immigrant communities, which facilitated the trust-building process.

Data Analysis

Descriptive phenomenological analysis (Morrow, 2015) was used to examine the data using the following steps: (1) recording a list of assumptions about the positive and negative experiences working with immigrants on issues of child abuse and neglect; (2) bracketing the researchers' experiences with the community; (3) conducting a naïve reading to absorb the entirety of the data; (4) eliminating data that did not pertain to the lived experience of the participant group; (5) creating meaning units from participants' significant statements; (6) eliminating repetitive and overlapping meaning units; (7) categorizing meaning units into themes; and (8) validating the themes according to the interview transcripts. Both the authors were involved in the bracketing and data analysis process. The first author is a first-generation immigrant raising two children in the United States. She is also a board member of two non-profit organizations serving diverse immigrant families, including Latino families. The second author is a third-generation immigrant in the United States and has worked with immigrants and refugees in the New England region on issues of abuse and neglect. Given the positionality of the first author, bracketing and triangulation of our preconceptions were rigorously adhered to. The researchers made consistent efforts to separate themselves from the participants to get an unbiased understanding of the participants' views on child abuse and neglect through descriptive phenomenology. Both researchers triangulated the data analysis as they went through each step of the analysis process separately and then worked together to help capture different dimensions of the same phenomenon.

Results

Five themes emerged through analysis: (a) actions/behaviors that constitute child abuse and neglect, (b) qualities of parents who do not take good care of their children, (c) reasons that would cause them to worry and intercede when parents are not taking good care of their children, (d) mistrust of the social service systems, and (e) recommendations for professionals.

Actions/Behaviors that Constitute Child Abuse and Neglect

The participants viewed child abuse as physical, sexual, and emotional abuse inflicted upon the children by their parents, which results in trauma. The participant from Puerto Rico depicted child abuse as, *"If you hurt your kid that is child abuse... and it does not have to be physical, it could be mental, emotional, and sexual."* The participant from Guatemala added, *"Abuse could be physical as well as the other things, someone who leaves their child outside all night, leaving your child locked in the closet."* Participants differentiated neglect from child abuse and referred to neglect as parents' inability to provide basic needs for their children. The Puerto Rican participant described neglect as *"Neglect is when you are failing to provide needs for your kid like necessities, food, water, clothing, a roof over their head."* Participants highlighted that child abuse can be degrading and leads to perpetual exhaustion and pain. They stated that as children were dependent on their parents for all needs, they are extremely vulnerable and unable to defend themselves when abused, and the participant from Guatemala phrased, *"Child abuse and neglect is gruesome, because, well, children cannot defend themselves."*

Discipline. The participants shared that the use of strict disciplining strategies to punish children is the Latino way of raising children. Discipline might entail hitting and punching them with hands and using objects; demanding young children to do work beyond their ability; and not providing the basic needs. The Puerto Rican participant summarized, *"But, that's life, that's how you raise kids. That's the Hispanic way...there would be red marks, maybe a bruise or two, but never anything serious."*

Back home, the participants disclosed being severely disciplined when growing up, and they found it to be an effective disciplining method. The participant from Guatemala shared *"the culture over there is like, if you touch something that you're not supposed to, you get a spanking and they would lock me in a room."* The participant from Guatemala corroborated, *"They would get a cable and hit me, a I would bleed."* The participant from Puerto Rico further elaborated, *"I remember being placed in a corner with raw rice on the floor. Put your weight on it, so it is just your knees, and the rest of your body is straight up, and your hands are up in the air. It was painful."* The participant from El Salvador explained, *"Parents that abuse their children put them to work at a very young age, they struck them, they make them do things that they are not able to do."* The critical differences in disciplining children back home were observed to be due to limited resources as summarized by the participant from El Salvador, *"There they do not state that they are going to be in trouble, or that they are going to punish them verbally or that they are going to take something away because there is nothing to take away. There is no television, tablet, telephone, and so they punish them physically."*

Having encountered abuse in childhood created friction and parenting struggles as the participants themselves adapted to fatherhood in the United States. The Puerto Rican participant

discussed, *“So having to struggle with those feelings growing up it was not easy. Even now, as a man, I kind of find myself fighting some of those emotions like anger, and when I think about it, I am like, damn, like domestic violence still has someplace in my life.”* When referring to the pain inflicted on him as a child by his parents due to intimate partner violence, the participant from Puerto Rico commented, *“Yeah, it is painful, I wasn’t expecting it to be painful, but yeah I am fighting some emotions right now.”* If the disciplining becomes too harsh, it can result in trauma and fear. The participant from Chile disclosed, *“I have a friend that his parents would lock him in a closet. I know this man to this day, he is tall, but he is filled with panic, and if you put him in an enclosed area, he is filled with fright.”*

The participants appreciated raising their children in the United States due to financial stability and positive parenting practices. The participant from Guatemala elucidated, *“Children are vital here in the United States, and that’s what I love a lot about living here because I have never seen that.”* However, all the participants articulated that children in the United States are over-indulged and spoiled. The participant from El Salvador stated, *“So the problem here may be that parents are giving them too much...because you know over there you only get what they buy you and here they don’t.”* The participant from El Salvador shared, *“Well, over there, it is very different because they punish you for any reason, and here they don’t.”*

Qualities of Parents Who Do Not Take Good Care of Their Children

Limited parental education. All the participants shared that parents fail to take good care of their children due to limited education and finances and the inability to provide for them. The participant from Puerto Rico discussed, *“parents without education lack in models...they probably lack in finances and education.”* Lack of control of children and an unsupervised home environment also results in disobedience and imperils children’s wellbeing. The participant from Cuba elucidated, *“...if you don’t control them, then they take advantage of that, like today there is a ton of things that are a bad influence on children.”*

Mental health and addiction. The participants reported that some community members suffer from mental illness and/or addictions that hamper their parental capacity. Increased substance use and addiction limits parents’ ability to care for their children, and can result in further abuse. The participant from Cuba discussed, *“In my opinion, those who do not take care of their children, they love themselves more than anyone else. Yes, they are selfish, and they are addicts. They have some kind of addiction or some mental health issue.”* The participant from Guatemala shared, *“...there are people who use alcohol for good, but there are also people who use that and do a lot of bad things...instead of drinking in moderation they are always inebriated.”*

Disengaged families. The participants discussed that some fathers were not engaged with their families, even when residing together. They commented that a few fathers engage in debauchery and extramarital affairs that result in the breakdown of family relationships. The person from Guatemala shared, *“And they are “libertinaje” (debauchery or licentiousness): that they are free to do as they please. And in our Hispanic culture that is seldom seen because we have never taken anything for granted or have had liberty in that way because the family unit is sacred.”*

Reasons That Would Cause Them to Worry and Intercede When Parents Are Not Taking Good Care of Their Children

The participants shared that they would intercede when they would see the neglect and maltreatment of a child. The participant from Guatemala stated, *“If a parent is hitting them with a belt with no remorse, then I would interfere.”* Also, if a very young child was severely punished in public, the participants shared they would intervene and call social services. The participant from Cuba said, *“If I see neglect or some kind of maltreatment in a child, you call social service.”*

However, there was skepticism and discomfort when the participants were asked how they would intervene with community members abusing children. Eight of the nine participants were wary of calling authorities, and the participant from Costa Rica deliberated, *“That is a bit complicated to get involved in a situation of a family in which their child is at risk because sometimes the law even persecutes you and brings consequences and problems...I would not get involved, but if I saw that the child was severely harmed, then I could call some kind of authority.”* Some participants commented that people who abuse their children are sometimes themselves suffering and need support services, and the participant from Chile responded, *“That person needs help psychologically, more than punishment.”*

Mistrust of the Social Service Systems in the United States

The participants believed that Caucasian families were privileged and not charged for similar offenses due to their race and socio-economic class. The participant from Puerto Rico shared his frustrations, *“The white people have more money and are privileged as opposed to all the other cultures. I think that abuse and neglect happen in both cultures, but really more so paid attention to our (Latino) culture because we don’t have the finances to pay lawyers.”* The participants discussed the prejudicial treatment they received from different institutions, i.e., hospitals, police, immigration services, schools, and social services. The participant from Puerto Rico elaborated, *“I can have a situation that happens in my house, I get into an argument with my wife, and the police come to my house, they are going to say it is a domestic violence altercation because they see it is a Hispanic household. And, if a police officer goes into a rich White household, he would see the same action as a verbal altercation, so it’s no longer a domestic offense. As opposed to my culture where somebody gets arrested, nine times out of ten, it is going to be the father or the man of the house. It’s not so much how the family might behave, but how the systems might behave with the families depending on their race and to some degree their class.”* The participant from Costa Rica echoed this sentiment of mistrust with immigration and social services, *“DHHS, they call it the protection of families and children, that I see sometimes, they (professionals) do not do things as they should be doing, in regards to profoundly investigating, because sometimes they lie, and out of lying they create a fake truth. And they persecute anyone.”*

Recommendations for Professionals Working with Immigrant Latino Families

The participants recommended that professionals working with Latino families should be responsive to listening and understanding their consumers’ worldviews and be culturally responsive in their service delivery. The participant from Costa Rica deliberated, *“They*

(professionals) *should know how to talk to people, and they should gain their trust in order to tell us what is happening.*” Professionals must understand complex situations that arise when working with families with undocumented and mixed immigration status. The participant from Puerto Rico stressed, *“Kids need both parents whether you are undocumented or not. Moreover, America was built by immigrants, so why are you going to send them back from wherever they came from, it makes no sense to me...and now they have children here, and we’re separating families because they don’t have a piece of paper. Like forgive me, but I think it’s all bullshit.”* The participant from Puerto Rico continued, *“They need to be culturally competent in order to keep these undocumented families here in America where they can benefit.”*

They recommended that professionals provide parenting groups, family therapy, and disciplining strategies to help Latino parents better acculturate in their communities. The participant from Puerto Rico discussed, *“Abuse and neglect diminish by just allowing these families to stay in the U.S., and educating them on the impact of parenting when it comes to nutrition, education, and discipline.”* The participant from Puerto Rico cautioned, *“In my culture, we have all these life-expanding issues that I think are already pre-biased and prejudged before it even happens.”* The participant from El Salvador shared, *“It feels good to have someone here (professional) to help give a voice and listen to those who do not have a voice.”* The participant from Cuba echoed this sentiment, *“supporting me and understanding me and understanding the problem, and being able to get me out of that problem, would be a great help.”*

Discussions and Contribution to Social Work Practice and Policy

The immigrant Latino fathers’ narratives in this research described deep conflict and spoke to the nuanced unpacking of the unique struggles they faced while raising children in the United States. The respondents voiced that abusing children was unacceptable in Latino culture, and it was the parents’ responsibility to meet their basic needs. And, even though they acknowledged the effectiveness of harsh disciplining strategies based on their lived experiences, they recognized the power of positive disciplining strategies they were introduced to after immigrating to the United States. Lack of agency and marginalization due to acculturative parenting stress, structural discrimination, and immigration status were recurring themes that were highlighted. Moreover, the parenting struggles transcended heterogeneity across the country of origin differences of the participants.

Even though abusing children was frowned upon in Latino culture, the respondents acknowledged that some parents do not take good care of their children. Irresponsible parents were perceived to have limited formal education, co-occurring mental health and substance abuse issues, and disengagement within families. Prior research supports that discrimination caused by the structural and political forces as well as adjustment pressures due to immigration, burdens the families with physical and emotional pain (Ai et al., 2016; Cardoso et al., 2014; Dettlaff & Johnson, 2011). And, this pain diffuses into children’s lives as well resulting in unhealthy adjustment and coping strategies. Resulting trauma and struggles faced by parents due to acculturative stressors, addictions, language barriers, lack of access to mental health services, lack of extended family/support systems, and limited education lead to the vulnerability of children towards abuse and neglect.

Further, limited understanding of various disciplining strategies used in the United States contributed to rift and tension. All the respondents experienced moderate to severe corporal punishment as a disciplining strategy as they were raised in their country of origin. They perceived this style of discipline to be most effective in their home countries. Many Latino parents use a traditional hierarchical parenting model that demands obedience and respect from their children (Aldoney & Cabrera, 2016; Cardona, Holtrop, Cordova, Escobar-Chew, Horsford, Tams, Villarruel, Villalobos, Dates, Anthony, & Fitzgerald, 2009; Halgunseth, Ispa, & Rudy, 2006). While discussing Latino fatherhood's cultural interpretations, the participants faced the incongruous juxtaposition of wanting to keep up with their machismo beliefs and disciplining their children using what they considered well-tested and effective corporal punishment.

Exposure to corporal punishment in their childhood and their acceptance of the same as an effective disciplining strategy resulted in conflict with mainstream child-centered institutions, i.e., schools, social services, and police. This conflict has been documented by Cardona et al. (2009), where professionals viewed some of the harsh disciplining strategies used by Latino parents as child abuse in the United States. The Latino fathers in our research acknowledged that parents might be experiencing multiple stressors, but they need help and support rather than retribution. The participants feared these institutions' scrutiny making parenting a very challenging endeavor, resulting in fear, anxiety, anger, and frustration. Accessible training programs and support groups to help parents learn about diverse disciplining strategies and parenting tools will help parents raise their children in a new cultural mosaic (Renzaho, McCabe, & Sainsbury, 2011).

The next struggle the Latino fathers discussed was the everyday microaggressions, racial abuses, racism, and discrimination due to their race and financial status, their agency and role as Latino immigrants, and abuse meted on them as a result of their marginalized identities. This discriminatory treatment resulted in suspicion and distrust of the institutions, i.e., hospitals, police, immigration services, schools, and social services, that are in place to support people in need. It is distressing to note that the respondents were hesitant to intervene even if they observed their community members abusing children. They were hesitant to call the police or child welfare authorities due to distrust of the system - only if the child was in severe danger, would they call the police or other authorities.

Despite condoning abuse, fear of persecution and incarceration for themselves and their peers limited their interactions with authority figures. Their perception that Caucasian families did not receive the same scrutiny as they received for similar actions was immensely disturbing. Distrust of social and immigration services makes it difficult for Latino immigrants to integrate into new host communities. Professionals have to continually acknowledge this distrust as it can create further barriers to service access and delivery for Latino families. These struggles are further intensified in our current political and economic environment around racial reckoning, rigid immigration policy and its enforcement, as well as disproportionately negative health and economic effects on the Latino and Black families due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

When working with immigrant Latino families, professionals should be informed of the immigration processes. The complex and expensive immigration processes often lead to breakdown within the immediate and extended family support systems resulting in further marginalization of immigrant Latino families. Additionally, many Latino immigrants have mixed

immigration statuses within their households; hence they exhibit cautiousness when in need of social services in fear of retribution or deportation. Undocumented victims are hesitant to go to formal institutions for help, and instead seek informal help groups in their communities (Mowder, Lutzeb, & Namgunga, 2018). They fear police and face negative retribution from the police, ICE, and social services in contrast to the documented Latino immigrants and citizens (Mowder et al., 2018). Professionals have to understand the multitude of immigration hurdles immigrant Latino families interface, and not let their own biases interfere with the help-seeking process. Our professional and ethical mandate is to work with humility, non-judgmental attitude, and compassion as we help immigrant Latino parents navigate complex social service institutions through culturally responsive practice (Lanesskog, Piedra, & Maldonado, 2015). In our current socio-political environment filled with strife, intolerance, and hatred for immigrants, social workers have to exert their professional power to help disrupt and dismantle draconian immigration policies and practices (Ricciardelli, Nackerud, Cochrane, Sims, Crawford, & Taylor (2019).

Social workers working with Latino families should be prepared to provide help in diverse ways. The participants recommended that professionals be responsive listeners and understanding of the lived experiences of the consumers they serve. Being present and genuine will help professionals build trust with the clients and their community members. Additionally, professionals need to understand the multitude of experiences that Latino families interface due to various immigration statuses. They stressed the importance of culturally responsive practices. The following practice and policy recommendations are offered to aid social workers in better serving this population.

Recommendations for Practice

1. Be respectful, have a non-blaming stance, and view the client you serve as the expert. It is our professional mandate to help our clients relate their lived experiences, and it is powerful and empowering for the clients to find their voice. Storytelling is a useful tool that can enable our clients and us to make meaning of our life and find purpose in our experience.
2. Acknowledge and address various factors i.e., addictions, disengaged and fragmented families, distrust of the social institutions, language barriers, mental health issues, isolation, limited education, poverty, and risk of deportation that might lead to vulnerability of children towards abuse and neglect in Latino households.
3. Create accessible training programs and support groups on diverse disciplining strategies and parenting tools to help parents. Such support groups should be embedded within neighborhoods and communities in places such as churches, community centers, schools, and health centers.
4. Help immigrant Latino families build informal social support networks and mentorship opportunities in the community where they reside to help foster a genuine connection for emotional support, information, and advocacy.
5. Build trust and mutual respect amongst the Latino families and human service organizations serving them to help facilitate culturally responsive service delivery.

Policy Recommendations

1. Be informed about various immigration statuses as well as the historical context of immigration policy in the United States.
2. Keep current on evolving state and federal level immigration policies and procedures that negatively impact clients.
3. Continuously advocate for just and fair immigration policies and confront oppressive and discriminatory policies and procedures i.e., detention, interdiction, travel restrictions, and undocumented status.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Although this study discusses the unique struggles faced by immigrant Latino fathers while parenting their children in the context of child abuse and neglect, it is essential to acknowledge the small sample size of this research. These results are not generalizable beyond the current sample of nine immigrant Latino fathers, whose children are involved in the child protection process, and were interviewed for this research. The study participants had an excellent rapport with the community partner, who helped with the data collection of this research. Building rapport with the participants helped build trust and reduced the risk of participants giving socially desirable answers. However, it was a self-selected sample, and, likely, fathers who were passionate about the topic came forward to be interviewed. Additionally, data was not collected on the participants' occupation and socio-economic status in the current research. Future research, with a larger sample size and more comprehensive variables, will better inform practitioners on specific helping strategies.

The experiences of the immigrant Latino fathers whose children are involved in the child protection process challenge us to think outside of our cultural framework on child abuse and neglect, and be non-judgmental when working with them. Their experiences guide us to positively reframe the cultural gender guided narratives of control, abuse, and neglect of children. Given our professional and traditional emphasis on advocacy, empowerment, and social justice, we are expected to become self-aware and more responsive to the needs of this growing population that regularly interfaces discrimination at multiple levels. There is a need for further research on Latino parents' experiences raising children in the United States. More quantitative and qualitative research studies should be undertaken to improve our understanding of their cultural adaptations, acculturative stress, and parenting challenges.

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