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Examining the Impact of Intergenerational Trauma due to Immigration-Related Policies among
Mixed-Status Latinx Youth

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ABSTRACT

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By Yesnely Anacari Flores

Introduction. In the United States there is a total of 37% of Latinx families are part of mixed-status household contains at least one undocumented family member. These families face significant distress due to various factors such as migration, immigration political climate, family separation and deportation. These anti-immigrant policies are rooted in the long enduring history of oppression.

Method. Six in-depth focus groups were conducted to explore the relationship of immigration-related policies to intergenerational trauma and identify conditions and characteristics that foster resilience among mixed-status Latinx families. Additionally, a sociodemographic form was given which entailed migration-related demographics and adapted Perceived Immigration Policy Scale (PIPES). The focus group guide includes questions that explore mixed-status Latinx experiences including undocumented status perceptions and concluded with an immigration-related political analysis led from participants.

Results. A total of 62.16% of participants indicated that they experienced a friend or family detained by immigration official indicated and 56.76% indicated that they have a friend or family member being deported. Subscale threat to family, children's vulnerability and total PIPES scale displayed a high PIPES score indicating high levels of perceived immigration policy impact. Analysis showed five emergent themes describing how structural racism through immigration-related policies results in the experience of traumatic stress which include hypervigilance, shame, and helplessness.

Conclusions. Immigration related policies highlight the ways in which structural racism perpetuate the intergenerational trauma impact on mixed-status Latinx youth resulting in traumatic stress. Participant's recommendations were the following: universal healthcare, abolish prison to detention center pipeline, allow individuals to obtain driver licenses and the implementation of undocumented worker fair wages and rights.

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GLOSSARY

Latinx- A gender-neutral term for *Latino*, or *Latinoamericano* meaning a person who originated from Latin America, including the Caribbean; also include descendants of inhabitants of U.S territories formerly part of Mexico.

Intergenerational trauma- The cumulative emotional and psychological wounding that is transmitted from one generation to the next.

Transgenerational trauma – The effects of trauma experience in one generation on the wellbeing of individuals in subsequent generations.

Historical trauma- The cumulative wounding across generations resulting from massive violence such as enslavement, colonization, and genocide.

Ethno-racial trauma – The individual and/or collective psychological distress and fear of danger that results from experiencing or witnessing discrimination, threats of harm, violence, and intimidation directed at ethno-racial minority groups.

Nativism- The opposition toward ethnic minorities based on the belief that foreigners are “un-American” and are a threat to the purity of the national culture.

Ethnocentrism- The beliefs that one’s own ethnic group’s beliefs, values and practices are superior to all others.

Structural Violence- political, economic, and social arrangements that put individuals and populations in harm’s way.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

The Latinx population has rapidly increased throughout the years in America. In 2019, the United States census estimated a total of 60.6 million Latinx individuals (Bustamante, 2021). This number, while significant, does not account for the millions of Latinx individuals that currently reside in the United States undocumented (Ayo'n et al., 2017). An undocumented status, particularly for Latinx individuals in America, leads to navigating several obstacles such as restrictive immigration policies, negative immigrant rhetoric, and the pressure/stress of acculturation (Ayo'n et al., 2017). Cumulatively these factors and ethnocentrism, nativism and other “isms” such as racism lead to the potential ability for the following generation to be vulnerable to compounded levels of trauma (Estrada, 2009). Therefore, this shows the importance of gathering research regarding intergenerational trauma among mixed-status Latinx youth. Intergenerational trauma is the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding transmitted from one generation to the next, looking through a lens of transgenerational and historical trauma (Cerdeña et al., 2021). Currently, there is a limited understanding of the impact of policies on intergenerational trauma amongst mixed-status Latinx youth, which creates the possibility for more immigration policies to be enacted without really understanding the full impacts of these policies on Latinx families.

Additionally, research on intergenerational trauma is typically limited to populations such as Native Americans, Jewish, and Black, with little on Latinx individuals (Isobel et al., 2021). This study will focus specifically on intergenerational trauma among Latinx youth who are part of a mixed-status family residing in Georgia. A mixed-status family is a family that consist of family members with different citizenship statuses (Rubio-Hernandez & Ayón, 2016). Research

has shown that mixed-status families, whether the parent or youth whom are undocumented, carry the trauma from the four stages of migration which are premigration (stress occurring in one's host country), stress during migration, stress during resettlement, and post-migration stress (stress occurring in one's host country) (Jolie et al., 2021).

Currently, numerous anti-immigrant policies have been established both at the federal and state level. Historically, immigration policies have always played a role in the United States, with the 1790 Naturalization act requiring individuals to be a "free white person" with a "good moral character" in order to migrate (Gany et al., 2014). This under-lining theme of racism has been intertwined with immigration policies throughout the years therefore seen as anti-immigrant policies. Georgia, a southern state that historically does not contain Hispanic roots, has seen a surge of Latinx population (Sabia, 2010). Currently, there are many Latinx individuals in Georgia totaling up to an estimated 18.7% of the state's population. Additionally, it is important to note that as of 2021 Georgia is among the top 10 states with the fastest growing Latinx populations (Bustamante, 2021; United States Census Bureau, 2021). New settlement states or destination areas are defined as new states that are experiencing the surge of the Latinx population (Held et al., 2018). Compared to traditional settlement states (E.g. California, Texas, and New York), new settlement states have fewer supports for the Latinx population due to their possible lack of bilingual and bicultural infrastructure such as bilingual schooling, mental health services, and legal services (Mann-Jackson et al., 2018). Additionally, Georgia in particular has some of the strictest immigration laws compared to other states such as California and New York such as Georgia's Security and Immigration Compliance Act (S.B.529) (Mann-Jackson et al., 2018; Vargas et al., 2017).

This information is relevant as policy effects on immigrants have statistically shown to create some mental health damage surfacing as depression, anxiety and trauma (Torres et al., 2018). Another important factor, contributing to the intergenerational impact on Latinx mixed status families is the racial/ethnic discrimination that Latinx individuals face, which has been shown to be linked to poorer health outcomes (Gee & Ford, 2011).

Problem Statement

The Latinx community faces several obstacles linked to their immigration status, and these challenges are then transmitted onto the following generations, resulting in higher levels of intergenerational trauma (Cerdeña et al., 2021). In Georgia, 18.7% of the population self-identifies as Latinx, with a large portion of this number dedicated to families being part of a mixed-status household (Bustamante, 2021; United States Census Bureau, 2021). Further, these mixed-status families face more significant levels of cumulative trauma at different levels on the socio-ecological model. For example, at the individual level, these families face personal traumas at the interpersonal level, they endure acts of racism followed by community-level trauma such as exposure to community violence, and finally, trauma at the institutional level such as immigration policies. Immigration policies contribute significantly to the mental health burden for these families, and little research focuses on children's perspectives regarding navigating society as part of mixed-status families. Many refugees and populations with historical trauma report greater risk for developing mental health symptoms and poor physical health through an intergenerational effect meaning transmitting historical trauma onto the following generations (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019). This then creates a variety of health issues which has been documented in the Native American and Jewish population (Cerdeña et al., 2021;

Estrada, 2009; Isobel et al., 2021). Additional research is needed to precisely understand how historical trauma and other contextual factors such as current racism and public policies affect the health of Latinx youth in mixed-status families.

Purpose Statement

The issue being investigated in this thesis is intergenerational trauma due to immigration policies rooted in structural racism on Latinx youth in mixed-status families. *Intergenerational trauma* is the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding transmitted from one generation to the next (Cerdeña et al., 2021). The aim of this study is to explore how structural racism enacted through immigration policy impacts the experience of intergenerational trauma in mixed-status Latinx families in Georgia. While previous studies have utilized quantitative methods to examine different psychological and well-being outcomes as intergenerational effects of trauma, many of these studies focus on adult Holocaust survivors and Native American families (Cerdeña et al., 2021; Estrada, 2009; Isobel et al., 2021). This study seeks to gather qualitative data from Latinx youth of immigrant parents to better understand intergenerational trauma in this understudied population. Currently, the lack of studies with this population that incorporate youth perspective of intergenerational trauma and its relationship to policies results in limited interventions; therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by exploring the relationship of policies to intergenerational trauma among Latinx families and identifying cultural and social influences that impact relationships between policies and intergenerational trauma.

Research Question

How does structural racism enacted through immigration policy impact the experience of intergenerational trauma among Latinx youth from mixed-status families in Georgia?

Sub Aim: What are the conditions and characteristics that foster resilience in Latinx mixed-status youth who experience intergenerational trauma?

Theoretical Framework

A combination of two theories will be applied to understand the intricate details of intergenerational trauma from policies from the perspective of Latinx youth in mixed-status families. The first theory is intergenerational trauma theory, the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding transmitted from one generation to the next, looking through a lens of transgenerational and historical trauma (Cerdeña et al., 2021). Additionally, applying an intersectionality framework will allow for further exploration of the complex way interlocking systems of oppression and anti-immigrant policies impact Latinx individuals, families, and communities, focusing on ethno-racial trauma (Chavez-Duenas et al., 2019). A combination of intergenerational trauma and intersectionality framework that focuses on ethno-racial trauma will further explore mixed-status youth experiences and how social and cultural factors impact the relationship between policies and intergenerational trauma.

Qualitative Approach

A phenomenology approach was used to look deeper into the unique experiences of mixed-status youth to understand details that affect their health trajectory from their lived experiences. This method allows for a better understanding of mixed-status youth experiences to emerge from an analysis of five focus groups in addition to the conceptual model policies and

intergenerational trauma. The research will explore youths' perspective of the mixed-status experiences and the trauma transmitted across generations through the form of intergenerational trauma from immigration policies and cultural impacts to their development. This is done by carefully analyzing each groups perspectives and experiences, focusing on the underlying meaning.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the Census in 2020, approximately 62.1 million of the United States population is Latinx individuals which an increase of 23% of the past decade (Pew Research Center, 2022). Furthermore about 50% of the United States immigrant population is composed of Latinx people (Jolie et al., 2021). Additionally, a total of 37% of Latinx families are a part of a mixed-status household meaning there household contains at least undocumented family member (Bustamante, 2021). These families face significant distress due to various factors such as migration, immigration climate, family separation and deportation, and violence exposure due to structural racism which results in a complex and collective trauma over time and across generations (Jolie et al., 2021). Latinx youth, who are part of mixed-status families, are more susceptible to the interwoven intricates of intergenerational trauma (Alcántara et al., 2013).

This cumulative stress stemming from historical trauma, has a long history starting back with the Spanish colonialization with of what is now the southwestern United States and its oppression and exploitation of the indigenous population, which was the start of social classes based on race and place of birth, and the internalization of racial inferiority (Estrada, 2009). It is here where intersectionality is essential to acknowledge the history of Latinx individuals. Intersectionality is a theory coined by Black feminist Kimberly Crenshaw. It focuses on the ways in which systems of oppression based on race, citizenship, etc.) impact individuals who contain any identity markers in those multiple social constructed groups formed particularly with the Latinx community from the start of the Spanish colonization (Chavez-Duenas et al., 2019).

During this westward expansion, the United States settlers disposed of Mexico's lands, and human rights were violated, especially by the Texas Rangers, who brutally killed Mexicans

(Estrada, 2009). This population was conquered, and those who decided to stay in the United States would become Mexican Americans. They endured much discrimination, were exploited for cheap labor, and were not given the same political and land rights as Anglo America (Mohatt et al., 2014). This discrimination was further galvanized with economic downturns and the segregation of neighborhoods and schools (Hartmann et al., 2019).

An identity was formed from this history; Mexican Americans, or anyone of Latinx ethnicity, were seen as criminals, and this narrative was put into action with the militarization of the United States Mexico border (Estrada, 2009). This manifestation of racism, discrimination, and ethnocentrism put Latinx individuals at the forefront of structural violence. This community was targeted with anti-immigrant sentiment across generations, which was further heightened during the Trump administration (Torres et al., 2018). During his administration, several executive orders were put in place, making it easier for individuals to be eligible for deportation and a zero-tolerance policy which prosecutes any individual crossing the border, with no exception of asylum seekers and those with minor children leading to a massively forced separation of migrant families (Kandel, 2019). These orders have hindered these families' physical mobility and mental health by provoking high alertness due to their constant fear of deportation (Cross et al., 2021). Additionally, immigration policies and procedures have been placed that such as further exacerbates social isolation and their mistrust of law enforcement authorities leading families to fear any limited governmental support (Cross et al., 2021; Theodore & Habans, 2016).

In addition to these policy-level impacts, migration of these families presents a complex and high level of stress. Migration has resulted in stress, trauma, and violence exposure throughout all stages of mobilization to the United States (Torres et al., 2018). There are several

stages of immigration trauma, including premigration (stress occurring in one's host country), stress during migration, stress during resettlement, and post- migration (stress occurring in one's host country) (Jolie et al., 2021). Research has shown that the driving force for migration is ensuring safety and long-term survival (Vesely et al., 2017). This migration for a vast majority of families allows them to temporarily escape violence exposure, threats of violence, or adverse experiences (Chavez-Duenas et al., 2019).

Premigration Stress and Mental Health

Before migration, many issues directly affected the health of these immigrant families, such as violence, poverty, political conflict, and limited resources in their homelands, guiding that motivation to leave their homeland (Estrada, 2009). For example, a recent study interviewed 234 Central American immigrant caregivers in Texas regarding their premigration histories, and results showed that 77.8% of families fled their country due to concerns about violence, and 87.2% reported some form of trauma exposure (Jolie et al., 2021). This study showed that most of these individuals did not trust United States officials for protection, in addition to the general fear of returning to their homeland (Jolie et al., 2021). Overall, these traumatic experiences and stressors vastly impacted well-being but also hindered their mental health such as depression, stress and anxiety. Ultimately, this effect is amplified during resettlement due to additional stressors such as race-based discrimination and legal status.

Stress and Mental Health During Migration

Migration can be hazardous, stressful, and overwhelming. Many families are exposed to various unsafe situations and are at increased likelihood of violence (Jolie et al., 2021). An

example of this violence could be *coyotes* (individuals hired to smuggle people into the United States) that take advantage of these families by extortion, raping, or even murdering their clients for financial gain (LC., 2008). In addition to the violence, migration travel has numerous hazards that impede individuals' health, such as dehydration, health strokes, and accidental injuries (Jolie et al., 2021). Finally, many families have experienced some level of trauma when encountering or being caught by border patrol (Ayón et al., 2017). For example, growing evidence has shown that border officials mistreat Latinx immigrants whom have been captured with excessive use of force and verbal and physical abuse (Sabo & Lee, 2015). Overall, the travel to America from their homelands is not easy and creates long-lasting negative mental health and, at times, physical health impacts.

Stress and Mental Health During Resettlement and Postmigration

Once families arrive in the United States, the overwhelming feelings of acculturation, stress regarding their home country situations, and the physical migration further exacerbates the trauma these families endure. Postmigration and resettlement carry an array of structural violence, including fear of family separation, legal difficulties, social exclusion, lack of education and job opportunities, discrimination, and language difficulties (Cross et al., 2021). As previously mentioned, being part of a mixed-status family involves navigating a system that is not meant for them such as healthcare, education, or social services. These feelings of social isolation are further exacerbated when Latinx immigrants settle in new destination areas such as the Georgia that lack bicultural and bilingual infrastructure such as bilingual schooling, mental health and legal services. Additionally, Georgia has a historical, social and political landscape of a Black- White social divide therefore it's racial tension (Held et al., 2018). Consequently, Latinx

mixed-status families further feel social isolation and difficulties finding their own space in this racial division (Held et al., 2018). Overall, resettlement particularly in newer settlement states leaves families with an internal feelings of being paralyzed by the inability to physically and emotionally be seen as part of society and an accumulation of trauma (Jolie et al., 2021).

Policies

Latinx mixed status families face three major categories of immigration policies once resettled in the United States. There are immigration policies that affect three broad areas: (1) healthcare, (2) exclusion from structural support, and (3) discrimination are associated with greater adverse outcomes throughout history to the present day leading to less trust and confidence in systems such as health care, law enforcement, and the criminal system (Becerra, 2016). Additionally, research has shown that throughout history, these anti-immigrant policies and the emotional distress they create for families are carried throughout the following generations until a level of citizenship is contained. However, even then, families are still at risk for discrimination due to the ongoing historical impact of being Latinx in a country that sees them as an "outsider/criminal" (Estrada, 2009).

Healthcare

Immigration policies explicitly restrict or limits access to healthcare. Immigration policies that impact healthcare takes on two forms, one of which completely restricts health access and the second of which limits health services (Gany et al., 2014). For example, these policies explicitly state that undocumented immigrants cannot seek health services or contain specific clauses that require health professionals to report their documentation status leading to medical deportation, meaning a physical removal by a non-governmental entity of an immigrant

patient who is currently injured or ill (Rhodes et al., 2015). This undocumented status thus means excluding vital services (e.g., STI screening, prenatal services, COVID care) provided by governmental agencies or nonprofit organizations that receive government funding. While some of these services are available to undocumented individuals, this population fears and are hesitant to visit a health center or emergency room because of the possibility of deportation (KFF, 2021). Additionally, Latinx mixed-status families further avoid health services because of the financial burden it will cost due to the lack of health insurance they contain (KFF, 2021).

Exclusionary policies

An example of an exclusionary policy is Public Charge Rule. The Trump administration enacted sweeping changes to its guidelines. This rule shows directly how discrimination is enacted for the Latinx immigrant community based on their race, ethnicity, citizenship status and socioeconomic status(Quinlan, 2021). Historically, the concept of public charge dates back to 19th-century immigration law (Perreira et al., 2018). Currently a person is defined as a public charge as a person who is primarily dependent on the government for more than half of personal income (Perreira et al., 2018). Those guidelines essentially state that anyone who was labeled as a public charge can be denied legal entry to the United States, hindering the possibility of them going from having a visa to becoming a legal resident and if this public charge rule was within the first five years of their entry they could be arrested or deported (Perreira et al., 2018). The modification to these guidelines under the Trump administration expands to state that any immigrant who "uses or receives one public benefit," meaning that nearly all public benefits from federal, state, or local governments could be considered a public charge (Perreira et al., 2018). Research has shown that immigrant families hesitate or do not reach out for financial, food, or medical support through a governmental agency during times of need to avoid the

possibility of public charge, which leads to emotional distress and economic/food insecurity (KFF, 2021).

Limited worker rights hinder the ability for immigrants to fully be part of society in fulfilling and safe ways, which shows another example of exclusionary policies. Evidence has shown that Latino descendants within the United States have higher rates of on-the-job fatalities (Gany et al., 2014). A study by Pransky, showed the numerous ways in which limited worker rights led to a multiple exposure to hazardous work conditions, lacked appropriate work safety training in Spanish or restricted access to formal and health insurance benefits for this population. Historically, Latinx individuals have been seen as a source of cheap labor (Gany et al., 2014). Especially undocumented Latinx immigrants are often placed in a marginalized position in which they are vulnerable to social exclusion and the presumption that they are not entitled to basic rights. This leads to employers exploiting the undocumented status by hiring them in low-paying and hazardous occupations, including manufacturing, construction, restaurants, moving, and cleaning (Rhodes et al., 2015). Studies have shown that undocumented Latinx immigrants experience wage theft and serious work-related injuries in addition to depression, and social isolation (Fernandez-Esquer et al., 2021; Gany et al., 2014).

Discrimination

Deportation is a huge fear that is intertwined throughout all these policies. While Trump exacerbated immigrant rhetoric, deportation was previously drastically increased during the Obama administration showing over two million undocumented immigrants being deported (Street et al., 2015). Additionally, there has recently been an increase of children migrating to the United States unaccompanied with the hopes of a successful migration which has resulted in the apprehension and deportation of children (Rhodes et al., 2015). While the Obama administration

stated that the focus of deportation was on criminals, statistics show that most (56%) of the deportations in 2009 were from non-criminals and individuals fleeing their homeland due to political eruption, economic hardships, or violence. Since 2008 to 2020, there has been an increase in immigration policy deportations, which has led to state and local law enforcement officers' involvement in immigration enforcement (Rhodes et al., 2015). The 287(g) program is an example of partnership initiatives between state and federal enforcement. This program allows Georgia's police department and ICE partnership to allow local and state officers to perform ICE immigration functions including deportation and apprehension (ICE, 2021).

The presidential transition from Mr. Trump to President Biden provided temporary relief for undocumented Latinx families with a minor decrease in deportations and the reforming of the immigration structure (Bhattacharyya, 2021). This was a temporary relief because data has shown that the number of detainees in the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detentions has more than doubled since the end of February 2021 to nearly 27,000 as of July 22, proving to be 22,000 more than the previous summer with Mr. Trump as president (Herbert, 2021). While President Biden has started the process of reforming the immigration structure, there has been little follow through with these actions leading to cumulative feelings of emotional distress and uncertainty for Latinx mixed-status families (Herbert, 2021).

Intergenerational Trauma

This study uses Intergenerational Trauma theory as a framework to explore how structural racism enacted through policies impacts the experiences of mixed-status Latinx youth. Intergenerational trauma was defined in relation to the effects of the Holocaust and the mental health of survivors and their descendants in 1966 by a Canadian psychiatrist Vivian M. Rakoff

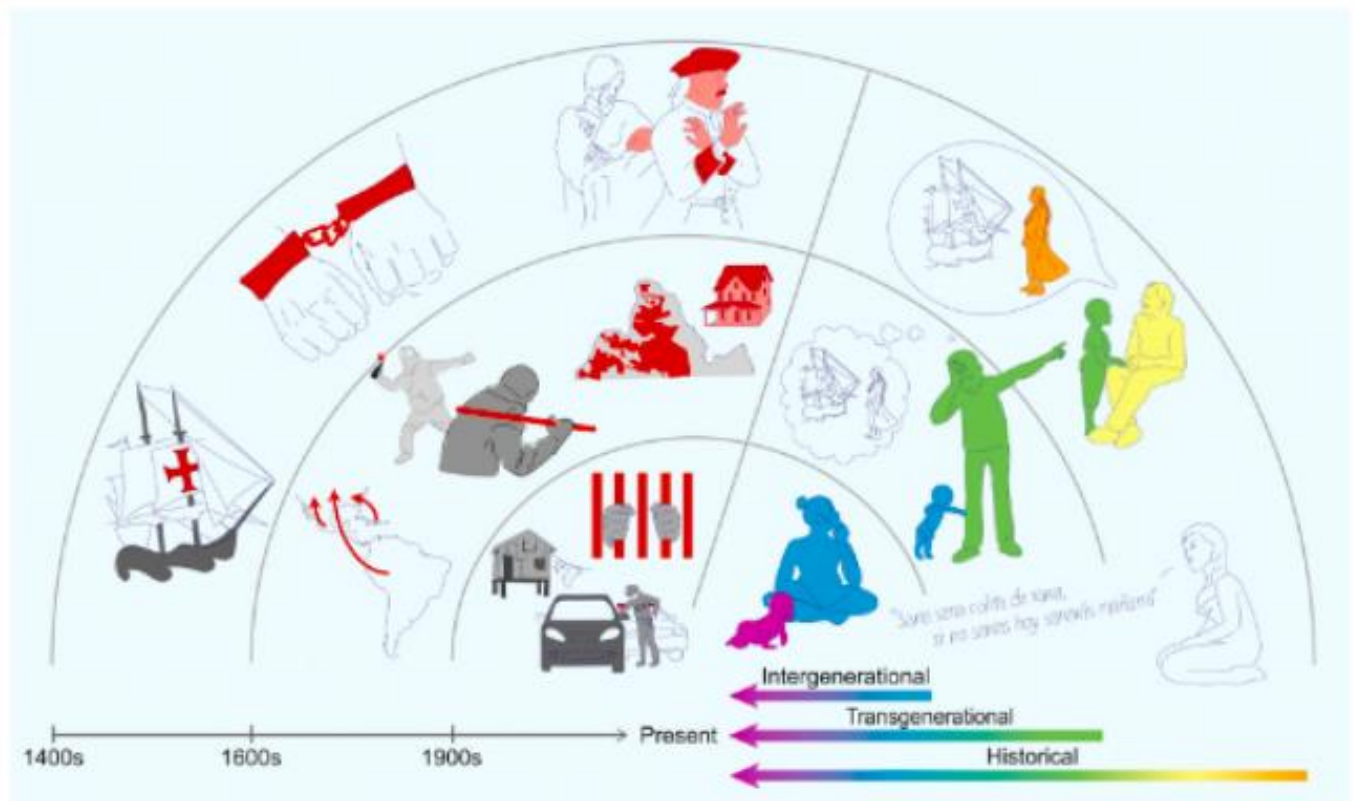
(Cerdeña et al., 2021). *Intergenerational trauma* is the emotional and psychological wounding transmitted from one generation to the next (Cerdeña et al., 2021). The conceptual framework of intergeneration trauma focuses on the historical trauma first by further understanding this cumulative wound across generations. Understanding the complex biological and cultural roots among the indigenous tribes of Mexico and the Spanish colonizers allows for a deeper perspective of this community (Estrada, 2009).

An extensive scoping review showed that exposure to traumatic events constitutes significant mental health risk factor, as seen in the conceptual intergenerational model (Cerdeña et al., 2021). This model focuses on the traumas that are retold through the collective memory of the Latinx community, such as the Spanish colonization, history of European oppression, criminalization of Mexican Americans, migration, poly victimization, and interlocking systems of oppression. This model analyzes all these traumas from the 1400s to the present day that contribute to intergenerational trauma categorizing these traumas into two categories: historical and structural (Cerdeña et al., 2021).

Trauma became collective for this community as a result of the “war on drugs” and the dehumanization and criminalization of the U.S. border (Vernice et al., 2020). The “war of drugs” was established with President Reagan with the goal to combat illegal drug use. However, their “strategies” targeted racial/ethnic minorities increasing their vulnerability to structural violence (Cooper, 2015). Overall, the historical and structural form of oppression that this community has faced shows the need for a deeper understanding of its complexities. The model will further understand how current structural violence is imposing these intergenerational effects on mixed-status Latinx youth of today. The conceptual model of intergenerational trauma is shown in **Figure 1**.

Additionally, this historical trauma is reenacted through painful recollections, revealed through the upkeeping of white supremacy structures of power. For example, Latinx mixed-status youth are shown to be negatively impacted by the upholding of white supremacy structures particularly seen in academic setting in such as the “English only” language restriction. Mixed-status families youth in particular are confronted with navigating their native language with the narrative of “English only” discourse from peers, educators and society leads to academic, identity and emotional trauma (Cammarota & Aguilera, 2012).

Figure 1. *Conceptual model of intergenerational trauma*

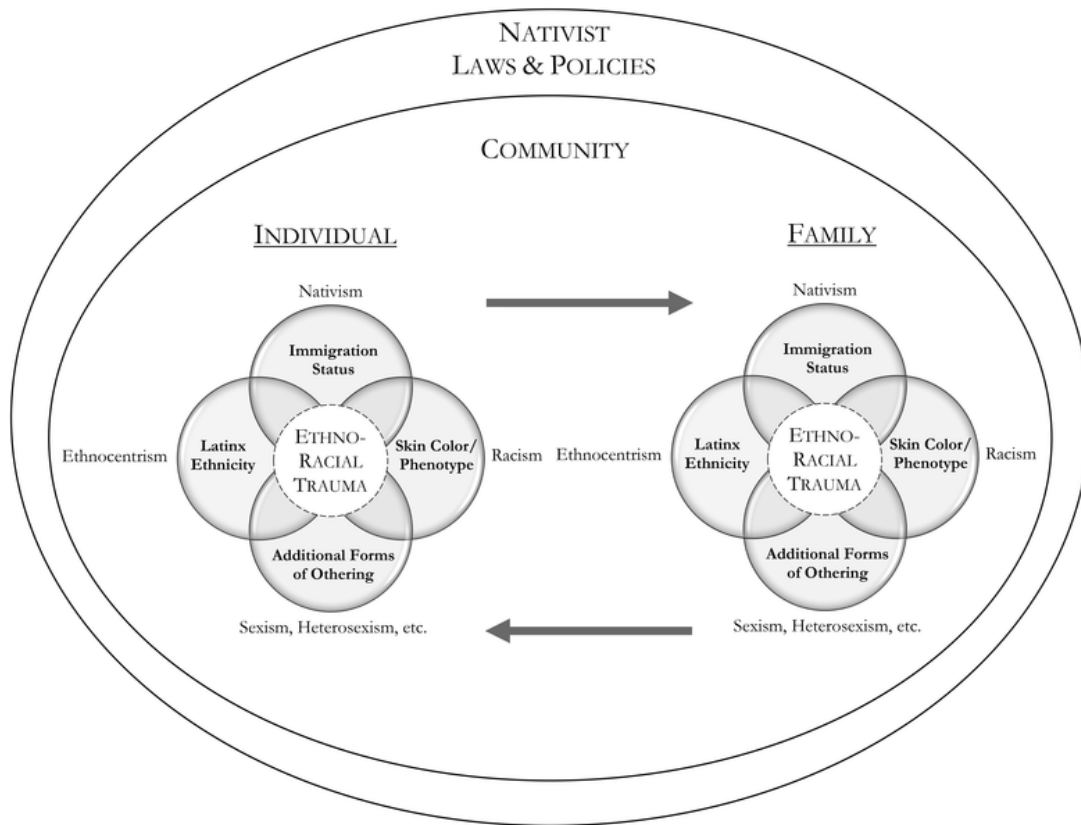


Note. From “Intergenerational trauma in Latinxs: A scoping review,” by Jessica P. Cerdeña, and Luisa M. Rivera, 2021, *Social Science & Medicine*, 270, p.113662. Copyright 2022 by Elsevier.

Intersectional model of ethno-racial trauma

This study will also use an intersectional model of ethno-racial trauma to further investigate how historical and structural systems impact the level of intergenerational trauma among Latinx youth in mixed-status families. Researcher Chavez-Dueñas and colleagues developed this model to consider how nativist laws and policies impact community, family and individuals in Latinx immigrant families. Studies have shown that Latinx individuals have a high level of complexities that impact their health due to racism, ethnocentrism and nativism in the United States, and the traumatic stages of migrations, which results in higher levels of ethno-racial trauma among this community. Using the intersectional model of ethno-racial trauma will allow for a deeper analysis of how ethnocentrism, nativism, additional forms of othering, and racism interplay at the youth's perspective, family, community with the overarching lens of nativist laws and policies. This model accounts for the ways in which intersecting historical and structural factors impact the wellbeing of the individual, family and the larger community. Additionally, this conceptual model intersectional lens allows for a broader, more in depth analysis of racism as a structural factor that intersects with other inequalities such as immigration policies and power dynamics (Chavez-Duenas et al., 2019; Viruell-Fuentes et al., 2012). The intersectional model of ethno-racial trauma is found in **Figure 2**.

Figure 2. Conceptual intersectional model of ethno-racial trauma in Latinx immigrant communities



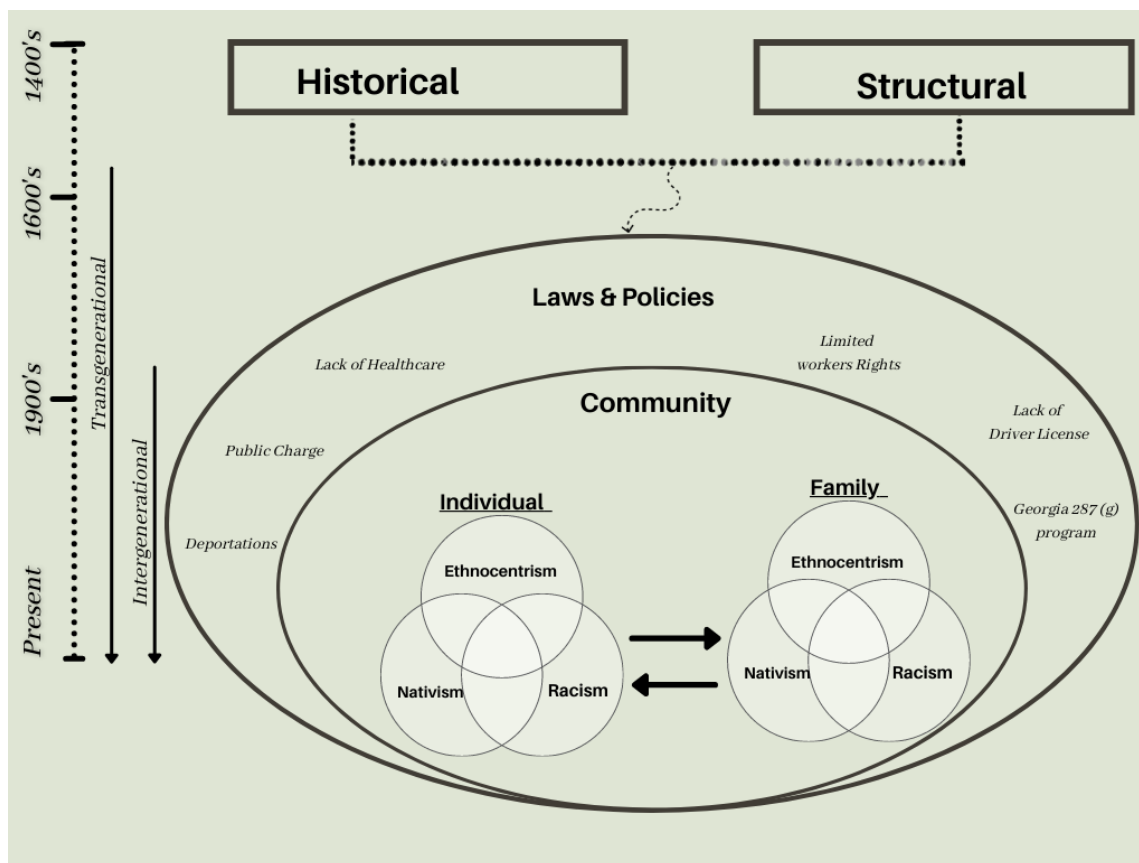
Note. From “Healing Ethno-Racial Trauma in Latinx Immigrant Communities: Cultivating Hope, Resistance, and Action,” by Nayeli Y. Chavez-Dueñas, and Hector Y. Adames, 2019, *American Psychologist, Special Issue: Racial Trauma: Theory, Research, and Healing*,74(1), p.49. Copyright 2022 by American Psychological Association.

Model of Policies and Intergenerational (ethno-racial) trauma

Therefore, in order to fully understand the complexities of Latinx immigrant identity, an intersectional model of ethno-racial trauma depicts how structural and historical systems impact the well-being of health and the resources available to Latinx individuals, families, and communities, emphasizing social inequities, aggressive immigration policies and power dynamics (Chavez-Duenas et al., 2019). The merging of these two conceptual models as seen in

Figure 3 allows for a deeper analysis of an ethnic-racial perspective through an intergenerational overview that focuses on the impact of intergenerational trauma on mixed-status Latinx youth due to policies. The below conceptual model is adapted from both the Intergenerational Model (Cerdeña et al., 2021) and the Ethno-Racial Trauma Model (Chavez-Duenas et al., 2019), demonstrating the historical and structural trauma transmission to the current anti-immigrant policies. The model shows how anti-immigrant policies impact the community, family, and individual level and the ways in which these interlocking systems of oppression (racism, ethnocentrism, and nativism) transmit intergenerational trauma (Chavez-Duenas et al., 2019).

Figure 3. *Conceptual Model of the relationship between Policies and Intergenerational (ethno-racial) trauma amongst Latinx Mixed Status Youth*



Note. Adapted from “Healing Ethno-Racial Trauma in Latinx Immigrant Communities: Cultivating Hope, Resistance, and Action,” by Nayeli Y. Chavez-Dueñas, and Hector Y. Adames, 2019, *American Psychologist*,

Special Issue: Racial Trauma: Theory, Research, and Healing, 74(1), p.49. Copyright 2022 by American Psychological Association.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Study Design

A qualitative research design including semi-structured focus groups was used to describe the experiences of intergenerational trauma associated with policy level decisions among Latinx mixed status children in Georgia. All data collection and study procedures were approved the Institutional Review Board at Emory University.

Community Partner

Ser Familia, a well-established community-based organization in Georgia who serves Latinx families were partners in the research study. This community organization provides a range of programs supporting Latinx families regarding mental health services. A community participatory research approach was used in this study; therefore, Ser Familia played an active role throughout the conceptualization and implementation of the study design. A counselor, program manager, chief executive officer, and clinical manager directly provided feedback and input regarding the design and implementation of the study. In the recruitment process, the mental health counselor assisted in distribution of passive waivers and ensuring eligibility is met. Additionally, they provided direct feedback on the interview guide and are engaged as partners in disseminating study results.

Population and Sample

The study goal was to explore the impact of intergenerational trauma stemmed from policies amongst mixed status Latinx youth. Ser Familia youth from all four sites located in Kennesaw, Smyrna, Norcross, and Suwanee were asked to participate if they met the inclusion

criteria. The inclusion criteria for the focus groups was the following: 1) Latinx youth between the ages of 13-18 years old who are residing in a mixed status family, 2) Currently seeking or attending services at Ser Familia and 3) Are able to understand the project and give full consent to participant if eligible. Mixed status was defined as families who contain at least undocumented family member. For this study, undocumented is defined any individual who currently does not have legal citizenship but is not limited to any individual who is in the process of seeking citizenship. In order to include a more equitable sample of this population this study did not exclude participants who spoke Spanish or Spanglish.

Participant Recruitment

A community based participatory approach (CBPR) was used to facilitate conversation with community partner Ser Familia. An initial meeting was created to discuss the project, timelines and measures. CBPR is a collaborative research approach that is designed to ensure and establish structures for participation by communities affected by the issue being studied (Baumann et al., 2011). The first half of participants for the focus groups were recruited from a summer learning camp that Ser Familia was hosting, which was hosted in the Norcross, GA location. The researcher attended the first week of the summer learning camp to establish rapport with the community partner and participants. Additionally, they passed out passive parental consent forms to parents. Parent information sheets were both in Spanish and English, and went into detail about the study, contact and incentive information. The researcher gathered parent signatures to acknowledge that the waiver was provided to them. These sheets were returned to the researcher if parents did not want their youth to participate. The passive parental consent form was used to further ensure confidentiality and privacy since all families identified

as part of a mixed status family which may lead to this population of being wary regarding disclosing personal information therefore deter these individuals from participating. Before the focus group, youth read an informational sheet regarding the study. Guidelines and consent, and mandatory reporting are explained and discussed with youth prior to starting the focus group. Additionally, youth were informed that a mental health counselor from CBO Ser Familia would be there to assist them if they needed to step out of the focus group due to distress.

Interview Guide

A structured focus group guide was developed based on the literature review and the chosen theories. The focus group guide was divided into three sections 1) youth's experiences and perceptions regarding mixed status identity 2) youth experiences and perceptions regarding undocumented status in America and 3) youth's ideas of policies that affect mixed status families and ways to reduce the effects. In the third section, youth were given a list of immigration-related policies then were asked to rank three policies that they perceive impact their families the most. Following, the rank order there was an open discussion amongst youth regarding the chosen immigration-related policies. The interview guide was first presented in English. However, after feedback from the first focus group the remainder of the focus groups used a combination of Spanish, English or "Spanglish" based on the comfortability of the youth. For example, some questions would be repeated in Spanish once stated in English based of the group's languages proficiency and comfortability.

Sociodemographic Survey

A sociodemographic survey was developed in order to obtain the following information to describe the sample: age, ethnic background, racial background, gender, domestic situation, grade, household income, household members, citizenship, country of origin, reasoning for immigrating, years in the U.S, English fluency, immigration official interactions. The second half of the survey contained two subscales (Threats to Family and Children’s Vulnerability) of the Perceived Immigration Policy Scale (PIPES) instrument. PIPES was developed in Arizona to assess the implication of state-level immigration policies for parents (Ayón, 2017). The version administered in this survey was all in English and with all the items from the two subscales that have been previously used with youth: (1) Threat to Family (worry about the impact of immigration policy, fear that you or a family member would be reported to immigration officials and worry about family separation due to deportation) and (2) Children’s Vulnerability (stressed about family members being deported or detained, felt unsafe, emotionally upset, feared authorities and difficulties focusing in school due to immigration policies). An example of questions asked on the subscale of Threat to Family is, “Did you fear that you or a family member would be reported to immigration officials”. The Children’s Vulnerability subscale had questions such as, “Do you experience difficulties focusing in school due to immigration policies”. Items were rated on a 5-point scale, with 1 indicating never to 5 indicating always. A dichotomized total and sub scores were categorized into either low or moderate if they contained a mean response of less than sometimes and anything above was categorized as high (Brenda Eskenazi et al., 2018).

Data Analysis

All focus groups were audio recorded and translated if needed verbatim by a bilingual research team. Focus group sessions were moderated by a bilingual staff, who also translated all transcripts into English for data analysis. All focus group transcriptions were quality checked by graduate research assistant and then imported into the MAXQDA software for data coding and analysis. A combination of inductive and deductive coding was used to identify a combination of emerging topics in the data as well as concepts related to the theories guiding this study to create a codebook. Analysis was conducted by two research assistants who coded the transcripts, meeting frequently to ensure coding consistency, and discussing any coding discrepancies. This coding cycle was repeated until a coding consistency of >80% kappa coefficient for interrater reliability was achieved. After a review and description amongst the analysts, similarities and differences regarding each code was identified and further discussed in order to finalize themes found in the data.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Sample Description

Six focus groups with a total of 37 mixed-status Latinx youth were conducted in person between July 23rd, 2021, and October 30th, 2021. The length of the focus groups ranged from 25 minutes to 54 minutes, with an average time length of 36 minutes. Focus groups were conducted at Ser Familia offices. Two of the focus groups were conducted at the Smyrna location and the remainder four were conducted at the Norcross location. The average age of participants was 14 years old with the oldest participant being an age of 17 and the youngest an age of 12. The average grade of participants was 9th grade. A total of 16 participants self-identified as male and 21 identified as female at birth. A total of six participants identified as white and 26 as other. Previous research demonstrates racial self-identification leads to confusion among the Latinx population (Hitlin et al., 2007), which was illustrated in his study with the majority of participants selecting the response option “other” for the race question. In the fill in option for “other” participants selected as Hispanic, Guatemalan, Dominican, Colombia, Mexican American/Chicanx. The average household size was five with the max being 12 (see Table 1).

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Latinx mixed-status youth focus group sample

	M (SD)
Age (years)	14(1.61)
People in Household	5(2.39)
Children in Household	3(1.74)
	N (%)
Gender Assigned at Birth	
Male	16(43.24%)

Female	21(56.76%)
Racial Background	
American Indian or Alaska Native	2(5.88%)
White	6(17.65%)
*Other	26(76.47%)
Ethnic Background	
Hispanic or Latino	37(100%)
Not Hispanic or Latino	0(0%)
Current Living Situation	
Living with both parents	24(64.86%)
Living with one parent	11 (29.73%)
Living with other relative besides parent	2 (5.41%)

Note. ‘Other’ for Racial Background including the following: Hispanic, Dominican, Colombia, Guatemalan, Chicanx and Mexican/Mexican American.

*‘Other’ for Racial Background consisting of ways participants expressed Hispanic/Latino as a racial status

Migration-related Description

A total of 31 participants identified as U.S. citizens with some participants being undocumented or in the process of getting legal residency. The country of origin identified by participants included Mexico, Guatemala, Dominican Republic, and the US. The majority of participants (72.97 %) indicated that they were fluent with their English language skills with few (2.70 %) stating “not well at all” to this question. There was a wide range of reasons for immigrating to the US reported including moving with parents as a child, to attend school, threats of violence, or to obtain a “better life”. A total of 23 participants indicated that they have had a friends or family detained by immigration officials and a total 21 of participants indicated that they have had a friends or family deported by immigration officials.

Table 2

Migration-related of Latinx mixed-status youth in focus group sample

	N (%)
Reason for immigrating	
I moved with my parents as a child	3(30.00%)
To attend school	2(20.00%)

Financial opportunity/work	1(10.00%)
Other	4(40.00%)
Region of Origin	
Mexico	6 (16.22%)
Guatemala	1 (2.70%)
U.S (including Puerto Rico)	24 (64.86%)
Other	6 (16.22%)
Immigration Status	
Undocumented	5 (13.52%)
Citizen	32 (86.49%)
English Fluency	
Not well at all/poorly	1(2.70%)
Fairly/very well	9(24.33%)
Fluent	27(72.97%)
Experienced a friend or family detained by immigration officials	
Yes	23(62.16%)
No	14(37.84%)
Experienced a friend or family deported by immigration officials	
Yes	21(56.76%)
No	16(43.24%)

Note. Others for ‘Country of Origin’ included Dominican Republican and Argentina. Immigration status

‘Undocumented’ was group today for others whom fell on this spectrum to ensure confidentiality. Reason for immigrating ‘Other’ entailed danger, better life and job, and parents moved to US and then had me born here.

PIPES Scale

The items in the PIPES instrument that were the most applicable to youth participants that were used in this study were the following subscales: (1) threat to family and (2) children’s vulnerability. A dichotomized total and sub scores were categorized into either low or moderate if they contained a mean response of less than sometimes and anything above was categorized as high(Brenda Eskenazi et al., 2018). The subscale threat to family had an average score of 7.59 (SD:3.42) indicated a PIPES score of high with a range score of 12. Subscale children’s vulnerability had a mean score of 9.47(SD: 4.12) indicating a high PIPES score with a range score of 14. The modified PIPES total average score was 17.08 (SD:7.07) with a range score of 26. Total PIPES scale and both subscales of children vulnerability and threat to family therefore indicated high perceived immigration policy effects for participants.

Key Findings

Analysis revealed five emergent themes related to the primary study aim of exploring how structural racism enacted through immigration policy impacts the experience of intergenerational trauma in mixed-status Latinx families in Georgia: (1) *Intense emotions and intergenerational impacts on mixed-status families resulting from immigration policies (healthcare, migration-related, and labor laws) specifically*, (2) *Immigration political rhetoric leads to the manifestation of everyday racism, ethnocentrism, and nativism across generations*, (3) *Navigating identities is a side-effect of the eurocentrism stemmed from assimilation*, (4) *Compounded pressures faced are the results of the lack of institutional support* and (5) *Recommended tactics to prevent or decrease the amount of trauma that Latinx mixed-status families face*. These themes detail the perception of immigration policies and the ways they perpetrate intergenerational trauma amongst Latinx mixed-status youth.

Intense emotions and intergenerational impacts on mixed-status families resulting from the hypervigilance of immigration policies (healthcare, migration-related, and labor laws)

Participants stated that they live in constant fear of family members being deported or detained due to their immigration status. This fear is then harnessing emotions regarding neglect and structural violence and ultimately producing a sense of feeling ‘numb’ and anger for Latinx mixed-status youth. In all six focus groups, at least once the mention of a family, friend or community member being deported was brought up highlighting the prevalence of this traumatic stress that impacts multiple generations. Mixed-status Latinx youth shared that these moments of deportation or being detained with a level of frustration regarding the inability to comprehend

how the United States could treat their community with this amount of disregard to their wellbeing. One participant described how the foundation of immigration policies being ‘no room for mistakes’ makes them feel as if they weren’t human but more like a dog.

“Okay, you're gone like if you were a type of dog or something.”

This metaphor of being treated as a “dog” came up again when some participants mentioned how when their family members or friends were detained there were put in cages. These forms of anti-immigrant laws such as detaining and deportation in the perspectives of these mixed-status Latinx youth are inhumane.

Additionally, it’s important to note that these events of family members, friends, or community members being deported or detained has cascading intergenerational impacts not only affecting individuals directly but family members across generations as one participant mentions.

“It's not just the parents that are getting affected by the deportation. It's everybody that they know is getting affected by it.”

Another participant shared the following:

“...like they don't know how bad people feel when they lose their, like their family members like seeing it.”

Participants throughout all focus groups stated that the constant fear is a norm for their families. Immigration policies left mixed-status Latinx youth saddened due to their families’ inability to function as a part of society regarding daily life manifesting through traumatic stress. One participant shared how simple daily tasks such as driving and failing to come to a complete stop at a stop sign, forgetting to update your car tags, or conducting everyday activities like grocery shopping can lead to the possibility of being detained or deported.

“Um, also I remember this one instance where, um, there's just like grocery store called Tapa the supermercado and it's the one in Smyrna and like ICE, had come to the grocery store because of like some, some little incident, like something that, that, that someone like had reported about the store, um, like a whole team of like SWAT of like ICE came to the store and a lot of people got deported that day (long pause) ...and it's like, wow, like just going to the grocery store just to get food and stuff like can get you deported (tears in eyes).”

Participants mentioned that there was no room for mistakes at any time because it could lead to separation from their family. These immigration policies ignite constant hypervigilance for mixed-status Latinx youth and their families creating a sense of the inability to function freely in society across generations.

Additionally, participants mentioned how immigration policy indirectly or directly impact their interactions and accessibility regarding healthcare or economic stability. All participants discussed how the lack of healthcare support has resulted in a tremendous fear and anxiety regarding their parent's wellbeing because the majority of their parents work blue-collared jobs that makes them vulnerable to work-related injuries.

“A lot of the times, um, uh, a lot of the, uh, like construction working, landscaping, things like that, hardworking jobs. Um, a lot of the times that's taken up by a predominantly Hispanic community and they can get injured, and they don't go to the hospital because they can't afford things and then they have injured backs when they work with that.”

Especially, during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic mixed-status Latinx youth mentioned how they worried constantly regarding being sick or the economic burden that this would leave their family in. One participant mentioned how family members who had gotten sick during the

pandemic were faced both with emotional distress due to COVID-19 and an enormous medical bill that they were faced with afterwards.

“Yeah, a lot of the times that things weren't covered by insurance, like, so there was like one, you're not a citizen, you can't really get insurances as easy or at all. And if you did get COVID and it got really bad to the point where you weren't able to breathe and you would need to go to a hospital, you would be in debt.. and it makes it a little harder for people to access the healthcare system and it sadly caused a lot of family to die.”

All participants were aware of how their parents' immigration status leads to their vulnerability regarding their economic standing. Mixed-status youth mentioned how their parents work difficult jobs for long hours but yet due to the limited worker rights their parents lack any form of protection regarding injuries or equitable pay. One participant mentioned how their parent's health injuries while at their job lead to their parent having to secure financial stability in different dangerous forms due to the lack healthcare and limited worker rights.

“Like for my family situation it would be healthcare, my mom struggles with a lot of problems like I said, before she she had a stroke. And then before that, she had to have neck surgery because she was a nanny. So she would be like carrying around like kids a lot like she's take care of triplets. So it was really difficult for her, so she had to get neck surgery or also like her arm was like, basically not work. So basically, what she had to do is she had to marry someone to get insurance marry this guy who she's now getting a divorce with because he.. she was domestically abused by him. But she got with him just so she could get insurance to like help her pay for like all the medical attention that she needs. That would be like very important for us like, that'd be like, like number one in my family.”

This highlights the ways in which immigration policies created vulnerability for these mixed-status families to endure more violence such as in this case domestic violence. Mixed-status Latinx youth were extremely alert to the ways in which immigration policies creates structural harm to their families. For the youth this awareness and subsequent hypervigilance leaves them vulnerable to traumatic stress. While majority of the time these immigration policies directly impacted their parents, participants shared how there were cascading impacts across generations in numerous ways.

Immigration political rhetoric leads to the manifestation of racism, ethnocentrism, and nativism

Mixed-status Latinx youth discussed how the immigration policy environment allows for everyday the intersection of racism, ethnocentrism and nativism (interlocking systems of oppression) to occur and impact multiple generations within a family. Participants mentioned how their family and them are experiencing these forms of discrimination from teachers, stranger interactions, and peers. For example, one participant mentioned how they do not feel as if they are part of America due to the amount of racism they experience in their local community.

“I will say, I'm not, I wouldn't like, I don't think I will ever consider myself American because I don't feel welcomed in this country... like, during the 2020 election Trump was always saying Mexicans are always this this he was putting all Latinos as Mexicans which is not true and not just one how many people voted for Trump, he won his first that like, literally he won. That's how many people in this country don't like us Latinos.”

The anti-immigrant rhetoric from the previous president Mr. Trump escalated feelings among Latinx youth and parents that they are not wanted which contributes to a sense of hyper vigilance and overwhelming fear regarding their position in society. Additionally, participants mentioned

how most of the anti-immigrant discrimination they face was from their teachers and peers. This environment made them feel inadequate regarding their academic expectations and comfortability in school settings. Several participants have mentioned interactions where they were approached from a peer and were told racial slurs.

“Um one day I was talking with my friend at school, we were speaking Spanish and then a kid came up to us and said “this is the United States, speak English” and then another kid's friend came up and just started saying absolute just racist slurs.”

Alongside peer discrimination in school, participants also felt discriminated against from their own teachers and policemen. Some mixed-status Latinx youth experienced racial/ethnic microaggression from their teachers such as having lower academic expectations of the Latinx student population compared to their white peers. Regarding, policemen and the discrimination they felt from them one participant shared the following:

“I just feel like there's a barrier too, because I feel like the police would be like the best example, because like, in that system that's where like most of the racism is. So, I feel like, if you were like Latino, like family trying to like working with like trying to work with them, they would just like deny it and just be like, no, because of this and because of that...because they have power since they're like police.”

There were also occasions in which youth mentioned witnessing or hearing their own parents' experiences that involved racism, ethnocentrism, and nativism (interlocking systems of oppression). The participants then mentioned how this made them feel powerless without control of the situation.

“My mom, she experienced racism. Uh, she was, I don't know, buying something and she was speaking in Spanish on the phone and then this white lady who was like really old,

said, 'we're in America, speak English' I wasn't there but my mom. (drops phone) oh. um, she told me and I was like, um, I didn't know what to say. I felt bad. But like, I mean, that's the reality (voice shaking)."

Anti-immigrant rhetoric not only directly impacted mixed-status youth but also, they witnessed how it impacted their family. Additionally, this intertwined racism, ethnocentrism, and nativism (interlocked systems of oppression) came from people who were supposed to support to them and provide safe spaces such as peers, teachers, doctors, and policemen. Participants mentioned that this constant racism is the reality they live in manifesting for them and their families as chronic traumatic stress.

Navigating identities is a side-effect of the eurocentrism stemmed from assimilation

While some participants were immigrants, the majority of participants were first generation children of immigrations. Those who were 1st generation mentioned an internal struggle regarding their own identity standing as Latinx and American. Negative immigrant rhetoric has fueled Latinx mixed-status families, particularly the younger generation with the need to assimilate in order to be successful in society. One participant shared this notion of the “American Dream” and how with this dream comes sacrifice regarding their sacrificing their own heritage in order to achieve this dream.

“So again, there's so much influence, we, we as Hispanics/Latinos have to adjust to this American culture in order to survive, make a living, and hope for a better future for the future generations. So it's such a tremendous impact that, you know, we have to, like overcome and in in, we're put in these positions where we have trauma, you know, from our all these experiences...”

Participants then mentioned how even when they attempted to assimilate, they are reminded from white society that they are not “American” and experience frequent microaggressions that take a toll on their mental health. One participant shared how their language and skin color also made it clear even when attempting to assimilate that they were not acknowledged as “American” in regard to how her white society sees them.

"Oh, you're not really American, because you speak Spanish, you you're not white, you're you know, you don't know what this is...you can't pronounce it...right and such and such. So, yeah."

Another layer of the complexities that mixed-status Latinx youth face regarding their identity is the form of guilty and shame they receive from their own Latinx community regarding their own heritage. Several mixed-status Latinx youth mentioned generational tensions occur when family members who migrated have a hard time being able to connect or understand them due to this cultural disconnect. One participant share their frustrations on how many members perceive them regarding their Latinx identity.

"Oh, you're not really Mexican because you're like from the United States, you speak English, you're not, you don't have the roots... you're always speaking Spanglish, you don't know...you don't know what like a certain food is."

This sense of not belonging to any of their dual identities leaves them confused and frustrated regarding their positionality in the United States and within their families. Therefore, many youth stated that trying to navigate these cultural differences across generations leads to insecurity regarding their position in both their internal homes and outside in society.

Compounded pressures faced are the results of the lack of institutional support

The majority of these participants identified as the first citizen in the family therefore had a higher level of English proficiency in comparison to the rest of their family. Due to the lack of structural support that these families face, these mixed-status Latinx youth then acted as the bridge between society and their family. Participants mentioned translating during several high stress situations in addition to simple daily interactions at doctors' offices, schools, and restaurants.

“The same thing like my mom would try and ask me like, we will be reading like this document that or like this, like news article. And she'd asked me like what is this word and I'm like, she's like, 'What is this? Like? What does this mean?' And like, I don't even know myself? Like, it's, um, it's embarrassing sometimes and like the fact, like, if you're like somewhere else, and like, someone's in the room with you who you don't know, and like you're translating for your parents, but you're like, Spanish isn't good. So, it just sounds like, we're trying to explain it to them, and then you don't know how to explain it to them.”

One participant shared how they would attempt to research their best before attending the hospital in order to be prepared to communicate in English about medical terms that will be discussed, as well as their level of frustration when they are unable to correctly translate this information to their family.

“And going back to like the health care thing. Um, it's, there's definitely been moments where like, I didn't know how to communicate to the doctors and stuff like, like that this certain thing has been happening like health-wise, you know, for, for a while and it's like, I would ask like, is there, is there anything else that we can do? Like, obviously I had done my research like I knew that like, after, like you get like head trauma, you know, you

need to get x-rays and stuff, but they didn't want to do that like technically refusing to do the service.”

Mixed-status Latinx youth felt a sense of responsibility due to their level of English fluency and citizenship status to provide this sort of aid to their parents. Additionally, they shared while they felt stress regarding translating information to their Spanish speaking only parents, they also felt a lot of honor to be able to help their parents in this form. One participant shared the following:

“And like it's a good thing that you can translate because like if we weren't there like they wouldn't understand stuff and like what they need or like they would be misunderstood”.

While most of the youth shared that they felt important and as a critical member of the family, it also posed challenges. Participants mentioned that this role as “the bridge” created pressure for them and made them feel as if they couldn’t make any mistakes. This constant fear, guilt and shame regarding constantly needing to be “the bridge” and hypervigilance regarding mistakes reflect another form of traumatic stress for youth. One participant described the amount of pressure they experienced regarding translating important situations such as hospital visits, filing taxes or job interviews for their parents because they knew that they are the only way for their parents to be able to gather this information.

“A lot of pressure because, um, I don't know Spanish well, so like, obviously it's going to be tough trying to translate it and then I'm like, how do I do it? Like, I don't know the words. So we're just like all confused or like, even then like, um, I don't want it to get translated incorrectly so that everybody's on the same page.”

Citizenship status for some these youths meant that they served as a form of hope for their families. All participants mentioned how they felt their parents desperate needs to break this

cycle of distress they lived in due their immigration status. For example, one participant mentioned how their parents have brought up the idea of the participant possibly of enlisting in the military to provide more stability for their family.

“When it comes to papers, my parents have expressed their like that they want me to join the military, to make it easier for them to get papers since they've been trying to get them for a long time. So, they've tried almost every method.”

Youth perceived enlisting in the military as a drastic response to these families need for stability regarding their immigration status. Mixed-status Latinx youth also mentioned that they felt high pressure to succeed academically at different levels compared to their white peers.

“School, a lot of the times you, um your parents put so much expectations on you when it comes to like going to like college and getting like a really good job for something like that, compare it to like, as someone who's like an American citizen in a whole family, uh, they usually are able to like, not focus on college or like you go to different types of college. They don't have to have specific jobs.”

This form of pressure created a high load of stress regarding being “perfect” for these youth.

“Well, my siblings are always rooting for the opposing team and I take a lot of pride in being American. And because it's a sacrifice that my parents made. And I think it goes back to the idea that you're there's a lot of pressure on first generation students, I mean, like people, because your parents made this huge sacrifice, to come here, and create and leave everything behind that they left in their home countries. And they're hoping that their kids are going to go to school be successful find an education. And so there's this immense pressure on us, or at least me to be that to, to, to be and set those standards for my like, for myself, and to um like, meet the needs that

my parents want me to meet, right, because they sacrificed a lot for me. So I have I owe them that.”

Additionally, participants felt the need to succeed in every aspect of their lives and feel grateful for this “privilege” of being born in the United States because they have a plethora of opportunity and safety that their parents did not have.

“I feel like they want us to like, live up to the certain like point and uh opportunities that we have that they couldn't have when they were younger. So like, I feel like they want us to take like every single chance like that we can get just to have like, and live a better life and, um, provide more for our families when we do have them.”

Some participants shared that they try their best to succeed in all settings. Additionally, they feel proud to be able to have all the opportunities they have in comparison to their parents. One participant shared the pride they feel to be American.

“I'm always rooting for the U.S. Well, my siblings are always rooting for the opposing team and I take a lot of pride in being American. And because it's a sacrifice that my parents made.”

Mixed-status Latinx youth overall felt restricted in expressing negative emotions based on expectations to be grateful for the opportunities they had that weren't available to previous generations. For example, some participants mentioned the academic pressure they feel to succeed in school because their parents weren't able to attend school when in their homelands due to poverty and the demand of obtaining a job at a young age. Therefore, youth talked about how easy they have it in comparison their parents at their age. While previous generations were faced with a tremendous amount of adversities such as migration-related trauma, Latinx mixed-status youth are feeling the aftereffects of previous generations trauma one way being their

inability to openly express their emotions due to their own internal perceptions of their daily hardships in comparison to their parents.

Recommended public health interventions to prevent or decrease the amount of trauma that Latinx mixed-status families face

Participants mentioned several potential policy level suggestions that could be seen as public health interventions to prevent or decrease the amount of trauma their families face. Universal healthcare, abolishment of the prison to detention center pipeline, the ability to obtain a driver license, and enforced positive labor laws were the suggestions of the mixed-status Latinx youth. One participant shared the following:

“When it comes to health care, obviously, the number one solution is implementation of universal health care, which is found everywhere else in the world except for America. And chances are it never will happen because political parties are all talking about “ohh capitalism is always great and we can take away private health care”, even though like health care is universal health care is most important.”

Regarding the abolishment of the prison to detention pipelines, youth mentioned how they felt it was injustice to be immediately deported if you are arrested for minor things such as an expired car tag. Participants mentioned the emotional toll this causes the entirety of their family when a parent is arrested, which for them immediately leads to being deported.

Like how badly like, how they don't know how bad the kids or whoever the people that they live with, like are getting deported or like, like immigrants, like they don't know how bad people feel when they lose their, like their family members like seeing it.

This tied in the inability to obtain a drivers license and immediately left their family vulnerable to structural violence such as the potential for being deported or detained. One participant shared the following:

“The driver's license because I feel like if that was to be like revoked um..I feel like if, um, people without like papers were able to get driver's license, it would actually help people's home a lot. I just feel like that's shouldn't really be a thing.”

Mixed-status Latinx youth shared that they felt that in the capitalist society in which money is needed to survive the limited worker rights brings forwards insecurity and instability that affect emotional well-being across generations. One participant shared the following when asked which policy they perceived impacts them and their family the most.

“Limited workers’ rights, because I don't understand why you can't like work. I think like provide for your family or provide for anyone without...I wouldn't say money's everything but without money, you can't really do anything in this world to survive.”

Overall, all participants shared the strong need for change regarding immigration policies. These immigration policies are emotional impacting parents, children and their community. The suggestions that mixed-status Latinx youth recommended can be achievable when see as a public health intervention regarding the disparities around trauma that these families face.

Summary of Findings

Five key themes related to Latinx mixed-status youth perceptions with regards to immigration policies and specific recommendations for immigration-related policies emerged from the focus groups: (1)*Intense emotions and intergenerational impacts on mixed-status Latinx families resulting from immigration policies (healthcare, migration-related, and labor laws)*, (2)

Immigration political rhetoric leads to the manifestation of everyday racism, ethnocentrism, and nativism across generations, (3) Navigating identities is a side-effect of the eurocentrism stemmed from assimilation, (4) Compounded pressures that mixed-status Latinx youth face are the results of the lack of institutional support that mixed-status Latinx families receive, (5) Recommended public health interventions to prevent or decrease the amount of trauma that Latinx mixed-status families. These themes outlined the perceptions of immigration related policies and their perceived intergenerational impact on mixed-status Latinx youth and their parents. Mixed-status Latinx youth describe experiencing the aftereffects of accumulation migration-related trauma of their parents in ways that exacerbates their own experiences of trauma without opportunities to relieve the pressure due to feeling restricted in expressing their emotions. In addition, structural racism enacted through current immigration policies further compound and exacerbate this intergenerational trauma and result in hypervigilance and identity confusion.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Study

The overall aim of this study is to explore how structural racism enacted through immigration policy impacts the experience of intergenerational trauma in mixed-status Latinx families in Georgia. The sub aim of the study was to examine the characteristics that foster resilience in Latinx mixed-status youth. Through focus groups, this study gathered qualitative data from Latinx youth of immigrant parents to better understand intergenerational trauma in this understudied population. The intended purpose is to inform future immigration policies to decrease/prevent the intergenerational impact on mixed-status Latinx youth.

Discussion of Key Results

Key findings for five emergent themes were discussed: (1) *Intense emotions and intergenerational impacts on mixed-status Latinx families resulting from immigration policies (healthcare, migration-related, and labor laws)*, (2) *Immigration political rhetoric leads to the manifestation of everyday racism, ethnocentrism, and nativism across generations*, (3) *Navigating identities is a side-effect of the eurocentrism stemmed from assimilation*, (4) *Compounded pressures that mixed-status Latinx youth face are the results of the lack of institutional support mixed-status Latinx families face*, and (5) *Recommended public health interventions to prevent or decrease the amount of trauma that Latinx mixed-status families face*. These themes outline the perceptions of immigration related policies and the intergenerational impact on mixed-status Latinx youth.

The focus groups findings clearly indicated that mixed-status Latinx youth encounter a range of intertwined complex intergenerational affects stemmed from immigration policies.

Their top concern was family separation therefore hypervigilance was not alone a negative impact. The data also showed that it was a form of survival tactic for these families. Due to this hypervigilance mixed-status Latinx youth felt an enormous amount of pressure and responsibility to break this vulnerability towards structural violence. Some studies have shown that these youth's sense of responsibility may stem from their Latino cultural values *familismo*, which appraises strong family values and support (Rubio-Hernandez & Ayón, 2016). Due to this threat of family separation, Latinx mixed-status youth may be experiencing a combination of hypervigilance and strong family values.

While the hypervigilance stemmed from immigration policies creates a two-fold protective and risk factor for intergenerational trauma there are still an array of emotional distress of complexities that mixed-status Latinx youth face. For example, youth felt an internal struggle navigating the intricate complexities of being a part of a mixed-status Latinx youth. They felt pressure from societal norms to assimilate but when doing so felt as outsiders to the own cultural upbringing and familial settings. This provided generational tensions between the generations who had roots in different homelands in comparison to youth who were born or had some English fluency (Dennis et al., 2010). While it may seem as an interpersonal issue between parents and youth, it is the tension between acculturation and youth's own cultural background due to the continuous anti-immigrant rhetoric that they are victims to that is the real issue. Research has shown that a stronger relationship with your own cultural, racial and ethnic identity serves as protectors from negative mental health stemmed from racism (Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007). Therefore, further research is needed to help mixed-status families navigate this generational cultural difference in a way that bridges the gap between parents and youth by recentering their cultural values rather than the values of the bourgeoisie.

Further, immigration-related political rhetoric led to the everyday of manifestation of racism, ethnocentrism and nativism for mixed-status Latinx youth and their families. Mixed-status Latinx youth not only mentioned their encounter with “isms” but having to witness their parents endure racism, ethnocentrism or nativism. There is currently limited research about vicarious racism exposure-secondhand exposure to the racial discrimination and/or prejudice directed at another individual- effects on children, however, one study found a statistically significant relationship between vicarious racism and risk for depression among children (Heard-Garris et al., 2018). This study shows the importance and the need to further research the health implications of vicarious racism and its impact on intergenerational trauma among mixed-status Latinx youth and families.

Furthermore, the intersection of immigration policies and economic instability was shown by mixed-status Latinx youth to be at the root of their perceived trauma. All these policies interconnected, affecting all levels of mixed-status Latinx youth shows the structural racism that these families face. These findings suggest that Latinx mixed-status youth are vulnerable to experience emotional trauma linked to the effects of immigration policies in the form of fear, intense nervousness, PTSD, and depression (Rubio-Hernandez & Ayón, 2016). Results from this study shown that Latinx mixed-status youth are suffering from the intergenerational trauma effects in addition to current immigration policies that has them vulnerable to structural violence in the forms of economic instability, family separation, and living in a constant state of uncertainty.

Strengths & Limitations

There were a range of strengths in this research study. The first strength was the positionality of the primary investigator as a bilingual Latina woman and previous high school educator. She was able to communicate effectively with the community partners and ensured that various steps of the research process were culturally appropriately for the target population. Their experience as a high school educator allowed for rich data collection from the focus groups of mixed-status Latinx youth due to their facilitation experience. Another strength was the CBPR approach, this allowed for the consistent engagement of the community partner creating trust between the research and community allowed for more in-depth data collection. Additionally, the inclusion of the comprehensive sociodemographic survey allowed a more in depth understanding of the participants and how their lived experiences influence perceived policy implications which would have not been captured unless implemented. Lastly, the sample size of six focus groups was a strength of this research study this allowed for rich and thorough data collection.

This study had several limitations. The first limitation was regarding the sample of the participants coming from a specific community organization that focuses on mental health. Therefore, this sample will not be as generalizable in comparison to other potential mixed-status Latinx youths. Another limitation is the inability to gather a dyad of parent and child to fully grasp the intricates details regarding intergenerational trauma. Another limitation is survey error, mixed-status Latinx youth were unaware of how much their families make financially therefore the socio-economic status data is likely inaccurate. Social desirability is another limitation due to the focus groups format participants might have felt inclined to respond or agree with what the majority of the group was stating.

Recommendations

Latinx mixed-status youth provided a plethora of recommendations regarding decreasing/eliminating the intergenerational impact stemmed from immigration related policies. The recommendations were the following: universal healthcare, abolish prison to detention center pipeline, allow individuals to obtain driver licenses and the implementation of undocumented worker fair wages and rights. All these recommendations encompass this larger structural health intervention which is “Border Abolition”. This political framework calls for a deconstructing of not only the physical border walls but the infrastructure that embody and reinforce immigration related policies and all of its structural violence (Dubal et al., 2021). This political framework must be adapted as a public health intervention in order to achieve health equity amongst mixed-status Latinx families. Important adaptations include focusing on three domains of 1.) community healing, 2) Interdisciplinary research using a CBPR approach and 3.) Policy initiatives with the overall goal entailing border abolition(Chavez-Duenas et al., 2019; Michener & LeBrón, 2022; Nichols et al., 2018). These three domains will encapsulate the complex intricates needed to unravel the structural racism that are imbedded in the roots of anti-immigrant policies.

Additionally, there is a need to start on the unraveling the effects of intergenerational trauma by building on the protective factors found in this study and others. To deconstruct these systems of power that perpetuate intergenerational ethno-racial trauma that Latinx immigrants endure, there must be a space of healing. This space will allow for individuals, families, and communities to create and hold some level of control and power over the ways they are externally and internally oppressed. A current framework that embodies this liberation approach focusing on both the interlocking systems of oppression and trauma that causes psychological distress is the HEART Framework: Healing Ethno Racial Trauma(Chavez-Duenas et al., 2019).

This framework combines treatment models and interventions that address trauma and liberation psychology (Chavez-Duenas et al., 2019). The framework HEART is crucial for the start and ongoing healing of the Latinx community, focusing on the intergenerational conceptual model's individual, family, and community level.

Public Health Implications

This study fills the gap in research of exploring the relationship of immigration related policies and intergenerational trauma among Latinx mixed-status families. Additionally, it identified and described cultural and social influences that impact relationships between immigration related policies and intergenerational trauma. Georgia is a newer settlement state that lacks bicultural and bilingual infrastructure and contains some of the most anti-immigrant state laws. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how mixed-status Latinx youth in this state perceive immigration related policies. Results of this study could be used in Georgia specifically to understand how state and national laws impact the intergenerational trauma of mixed-status Latinx youth. In addition, this research study can provide insight to policy makers regarding the health implications of immigration-related policies in order to mitigate these policies. In relation, this research could help guide community level health interventions to decrease the current level of intergenerational impact on mixed-status Latinx youth. Finally, this data is helpful in understanding ways in which structural violence creates harm on mixed-status Latinx youth in order to start the healing process at all levels of the socio-ecological model: individual, interpersonal, community and institutional.

Reflexivity

I recognize myself a Latina first generation child of immigrants who is part of a mixed-status family as a strength of this study. I recognize while my upbringing was geographically in rural Texas, I still shared the same sentiments as part of the southern Latinx community like participants in this study. My own upbringing and cultural identity allowed for the ability to build trust and a strong relationship with our community partner and youth participants. At the same time this can hinder my broader prospective while analyzing data therefore, I was intentional with completing qualitative analysis memos throughout my analysis process and consulting with my thesis committee who bring strengths in the following realms: trauma, qualitative research, and policy implications.

Conclusion

Mixed-status Latinx families have been victims of structural violence for centuries and this racist history is one that is further perpetrated in current immigration related policies. Mixed-status Latinx youth indicated how intergenerational trauma stemmed from immigration policy and impacted them and their families' everyday lives. Participants discussed several potential recommendations for immigration related policies such as universal healthcare, abolish prison to detention center pipeline, allow individuals to obtain driver licenses and the implementation of undocumented worker fair wages and rights. Immigration related policies highlight the ways in which structural racism perpetuate the intergenerational trauma impact on mixed-status Latinx youth resulting in traumatic stress.

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