



**The Latino Family Study**  
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**1) Provide a one-paragraph summary of your NCID-sponsored project.**

The overall objective of this study is to take into account culturally-specific, Latino values (such as “familismo” and “respecto”) and contextual circumstances (such as financial stress and community violence exposure) in identifying child and familial strategies that promote academic success and psychological well-being among Latino adolescents. While contextual factors, such as financial strain and language barriers, may impede parental school involvement, we seek to identify parenting values and family strategies that promote adolescents’ academic performance. Further, we will investigate factors that may protect adolescents from the negative influence of poverty and community violence exposure in poor neighborhoods. More specifically, we will explore whether factors related to parent-child relationships as well as adolescents’ own coping strategies, extracurricular activities, academic mentors, and sense of school versus neighborhood belonging contribute to psychological well-being and academic success among poor, Latino adolescents.

**2) Describe the extent to which you have been able to meet the expected outcomes of your project. What conclusions or findings have you made through this project, and what questions or next steps remain?**

With NCID funding, we were able to administer surveys to 96 seventh through ninth grade adolescents attending two schools located in economically disadvantaged, high-risk neighborhoods in New England. Currently, our sample has a mean age of 14 years and consists of 37 boys and 59 girls. The majority of Latino adolescents identified themselves as Dominican.

Thus far, we have only conducted preliminary analyses that start to explore the many research questions posed by this project. We have begun to explore three areas: 1) coping strategies used by adolescents in response to community violence, 2) the impact of school and neighborhood belonging on adolescents’ academic outcomes, and 3) school and parental factors that support Latino adolescents’ college aspirations and trajectories.

In our study, preliminary analyses show that higher levels of exposure to community violence were related to “negative” coping strategies, many of which were involuntary coping responses. These strategies were, in turn, related to poorer psychological well-being. Given the traumatic nature of chronic community violence exposure, it is not surprising that involuntary coping reactions to community violence play a large role in the coping process for adolescents.

We found no differences in adolescents’ sense of school and neighborhood belonging based on the two schools attended by the adolescents in our sample (a charter school in Rhode Island and a Catholic high school in Massachusetts). Neither involvement in school-based extracurriculars nor involvement in community-based activities were associated with school or community belonging. Teacher support was significantly related to adolescents’ school belonging when controlling for adolescents’ age and gender. As expected stronger feelings of school belonging predicted adolescents’ school effort and self-reported grades, but neighborhood belonging was not related to any academic outcome.

To investigate adolescents’ aspirations and ideas about attending college, we asked students to select all of the reasons why they “would” and “would not” go to college from a list of 10 reasons in each category. The top three reasons that students endorsed for going to college included “to be successful” (86%), “to make their family proud” (77%), and “to have more opportunities” (66%). Alternatively, the top three reasons why students would not attend college were that “it costs too much” (38%), “my grades are not good enough” (22%), and “I just don’t like school” (19%). Contrary to our hypotheses, the presence of an academic mentor and school support for college were not related to academic aspirations or expectations. However, both family support for college and teacher support significantly predicted educational aspirations, school effort, and self-reported grades.

### **3) How has your project led to or encouraged social or organizational/institutional change?**

Our involvement with the schools that participated in this study remains on-going. In the fall of 2007, we plan to return to one of the schools to conduct college-prep workshops with their students. We have constructed a power point presentation and interactive workshop to provide adolescents with knowledge about college requirements and to foster greater desires to attend college. In the other school where we recruited students, we will return to conduct a “research workshop” with the student members of the school’s multicultural student group. UM graduate and undergraduate students will assist these students in working with the data provided at their school to learn about analyzing and interpreting data.

### **4) In what ways have you worked to promote the sustainability of the project?**

I plan to use the adolescent data that was collected this year as pilot data to help me apply for NIMH funding in order to conduct a larger study addressing these research questions with poor, Latino families. I will also apply to smaller, private foundations for further funding. Additional funding will not only allow me to collect more data, but also provide the means to expand my data collection to interviewing both adolescents and their mothers. Fortunately, I have received permission from the Superintendent of the Lawrence Public School system in MA to recruit students in the Lawrence public schools and thus plan to continue the next phase of this study in Lawrence, MA.

**5) In what ways is your project a national exemplar?**

Our research project highlights several areas of potential emphasis for interventions promoting the academic success and psychological health of poor, Latino students. For example, our preliminary results add to our understanding of the impact of community violence, demonstrating that adolescents who respond to violence with involuntary coping strategies experience poorer psychological well-being. Thus, interventions that target adolescents' automatic reactions to violence may prove especially beneficial to adolescents living in poor, high-risk neighborhoods. Another implication from our findings underscores the importance of family support for college in sustaining adolescents' academic expectations and school effort.