

ED388490 1995-10-00 Mexican American Women: Schooling, Work, and Family. ERIC Digest.

ERIC Development Team

www.eric.ed.gov

Table of Contents

If you're viewing this document online, you can click any of the topics below to link directly to that section.

Mexican American Women: Schooling, Work, and Family. ERIC Digest.....	1
SCHOOLING.....	2
WORK.....	3
FAMILY.....	4
CONCLUSIONS.....	5
REFERENCES.....	5



ERIC Identifier: ED388490

Publication Date: 1995-10-00

Author: Ortiz, Flora Ida

Source: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools Charleston WV.

Mexican American Women: Schooling, Work, and Family. ERIC Digest.

THIS DIGEST WAS CREATED BY ERIC, THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER. FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ERIC, CONTACT ACCESS ERIC 1-800-LET-ERIC

The Bureau of Census (1994) reports there are approximately 13 million U.S. citizens of

Mexican descent. Over 30 percent reside in the South and over 45 percent in the West. The lives of Mexican American women, wherever they reside, are affected profoundly by schooling, work, and family. This report shows the interdependence of these factors; changes in one affect the others.

SCHOOLING

To begin our discussion, we examine two aspects of the schooling of Mexican American women: (1) persistent conditions affecting the quality of education they receive, and (2) evidence of improving achievement despite continuing challenges.

Mexican Americans are the least well educated group among Hispanics and the total U.S. population (Bureau of the Census, 1994). Comparisons of Mexican American males and females show slight recent increases in the educational achievement of females and a consistent trend of females doing better than the males. Carter and Wilson (1993) report high school completion rates of 47.8 percent for males and 57 percent for females during the 1990-91 school year, which is a decline for males and a slight increase for females.

However, the quality of education for Mexican American women nationally lags behind other groups. Meier and Stewart (1991) claim that the low quality of education for Mexican Americans is due to second-generation discrimination. They report that in "virtually all cases, Hispanics were overrepresented in situations with negative connotations and underrepresented in situations with positive connotations" (p. 162). These authors examined the relationship of minority representation on school boards to representation on administrative staffs and school faculties. Further, they examined the impact of these relationships on Hispanic student success. They found that Hispanics were more likely to be placed in classes for educable mentally retarded (EMR), limited-English proficient, and bilingual education than in classes for the gifted. The rate of Hispanic students assigned to trainable mentally retarded classes dropped as the enrollment of black students increased in the school. Likewise, rates of suspension and expulsion were related to the proportions of middle class Hispanic, black, and white students. As the proportion of low socioeconomic status (SES) black and/or white students increased and the proportion of middle-class Hispanic students increased, positive placement in classes, lower discipline rates, and greater high school completion rates were recorded for Hispanic students. The relationship between the SES of Hispanic students and representation among school board members, administrators, and teachers was also demonstrated. The higher the Hispanic SES and school board and staff representation rates, the more positive the Hispanic students' school experiences. Thus, because most Mexican American women are located in low-SES communities, their school experiences are likely to be negative.

The inadequate delivery of educational services throughout the K-12 period not only affects the academic preparation of Mexican American women, but, according to Reyes,

Gillock and Kabus (1994, pp. 362-363), "by the end of their first year in high school, students' perceptions of caring and emotional support from both their families and schools" and social support from peers deteriorate significantly.

The data reflecting the improvement of Mexican American women's educational achievement are difficult to access because: (1) the data are collapsed under the rubric of Hispanic, and (2) the data are not presented uniformly in any one report. Carter and Wilson (1993) present data that show some improvement in higher education for Mexican American women. In 1991, among high school graduates, 39.1 percent of Hispanic women ages 18 to 24 enrolled in college, up nearly 10 percent from 1990. The rate for associate's and bachelor's degrees conferred improved 5.5 percent and 11.6 percent respectively for Hispanic women and 4.1 percent and 6.6 percent respectively for men. For Hispanics, the number of women earning master's degrees rose by 9.7 percent, compared with 7.2 percent for men. The number of Hispanic women receiving doctorates increased by at least 70 percent between 1978 and 1988 (Nieves-Squires, 1991, p. 5). Since 71 percent of the Mexican American population is under 35, compared to 54 percent of the U.S. population as a whole (del Pinal & DeNavas, 1990), these improved percentages are noteworthy.

In examining how Mexican American women fare in higher education, Nieves-Squires (1991, p. 6) wrote, "The isolation of Hispanic women [in graduate school] is compounded by the relatively small number of Hispanic persons of either sex, students, faculty members or administrators, who can serve as role models, mentors, colleagues and peers." Hispanic men represent 2.3 percent of students and women represent 2.7 percent. Hispanic women hold 1.2 percent of full-time faculty positions and 0.7 percent of administrative positions, while men hold 1.7 and 1.3 percent respectively.

Lango (1995) reports that only 1 percent of Mexican American women enroll in graduate programs, and these women tend to be assimilated into the mainstream dominant society. The factors affecting success appear to be Chicanas' perceptions of racism, sexism, economics, family responsibilities, support networks, role models, and mentors. Flores (1988) reported that single women are more likely to complete graduate programs than married women.

WORK

In 1990, Hispanic females were employed in technical, sales, and administrative support positions in a major way (about 39 percent). Service occupations provided employment for about 24 percent of Hispanic females compared to 17 percent of non-Hispanic females (Bureau of the Census, 1993).

The median family income for Hispanics was \$25,064, compared to the median income of \$35,225 for all Americans. The Mexican American female's median family income with female householder and no husband present is \$12,714 (Bureau of the Census, 1993). In 1993, 51.9 percent of Mexican American females were in the labor force, while

11.4 percent were unemployed (Bureau of the Census, 1994). Tienda, Donato, and Cordero-Guzman (1992) describe how recessions have a greater impact on women of color and how education influences the effects of race and Hispanic origin. Due to lower educational attainment and limited skills, women of color tend to be located in low-level, more vulnerable work positions. Those positions cannot offer protection during a period of layoffs nor do they offer advancement.

Many Mexican American women bring to the work force skills they have gained through their experiences as wives, mothers, and community workers. Their skills include fund-raising, organizing neighborhood groups, and negotiating with authority figures, such as priests and city officials (Prado, 1991). These special skills, because they are unacknowledged and unapplied by employers, cannot improve the inadequate working conditions of Mexican American women: segregation by sex and ethnicity; impediments to the development of a work culture including harsh competition, high turnover rates, unfavorable immigration laws, labor restrictions, and protective legislation; and unions that have not accommodated Mexican American women in leadership positions (Soldatendo, 1991).

A woman's work identity pertains to the importance of paid labor in formulation of her sense of self. Mexican American culture does not place a high premium on using women's success in the labor market as a gauge for determining their worth as individuals. Pesquera (1991, p. 116) concludes that among females of working class origins, "family socialization serves to shape work attitudes and their behavior, whereas professional workers acknowledge the centrality of work identity and ideologically reject, in a somewhat ambivalent fashion, cultural expectations" (p. 116). Why working class individuals face barriers to establishing a work identity and shedding cultural expectations to a greater degree than professionals is an intriguing question.

FAMILY

Many Mexican American wives and mothers work in the paid labor force. In those cases, wives highly valued the roles of wife and mother but leaned toward nontraditional sex-role attitudes, expecting their husbands to be flexible and assume some responsibility for housework and child care (Herrera & Del Campo, 1995). About 70 percent of Hispanic families are maintained by married couples, about 9 percent by a male with no wife present, and 22 percent by a female with no husband present. It is reported that 23.4 percent of Mexican American families live in poverty.

Chicanas continue to describe high levels of ambivalence concerning the interplay between motherhood and employment (Segura, 1991). This may be because, as Flores-Ortiz (1991) reports, "blue collar workers' marital distress increased as they shifted away from a traditional value orientation with regard to gender roles" (p. 172). That is, these women struggled with the dilemmas that arose from trying to meet expectations of their families and their employers. For many women, there are two

primary contributing factors to this tension: the work is similar in both settings (such as housework and other service jobs), and they occupy subordinate positions both at work and at home. Even those women who described "egalitarian relationships in their marriages" did not think their influence was equal to their husband's (p. 173). The gap between financial obligations and inadequate income is a major factor in the stress levels experienced by these women and their families (Romero, Castro, & Cervantes, 1988). Additionally, the cycles of unemployment--common in their types of jobs--sever social networks and decrease psychological well-being.

CONCLUSIONS

Mexican American women's schooling, work, and family are so highly interdependent that any changes in one affect the others. The importance of schooling includes providing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in work; providing the social context in which Mexican American women can learn to relate socially and personally to Anglo Americans; and improving the social position of the Mexican American woman.

However, as reported by Meier and Stewart (1991), the socioeconomic status of the Hispanic community has a strong bearing on political action to increase Hispanic representation at all school organization levels, thereby improving conditions for Hispanic students.

REFERENCES

- Bureau of the Census. (1993). *We the American...Hispanics*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce.
- Bureau of the Census. (1994). *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1994*. Springfield, VA.: U.S. Department of Commerce.
- Carter, D. J., & Wilson, R. (1993) *Minorities in higher education (1992 11th Annual Status Report)*, Washington, DC: American Council on Education, Office of Minorities in Higher Education. (ED 363 250)
- del Pinal, J. H., & DeNavas, C. (1990). *The Hispanic Population in the United States: March 1989 (Current Population Reports: Population Characteristics Series P-20, No. 444)*. Suitland, MD: Bureau of the Census, Dept. Of Commerce. (ED 324 166)
- Flores, J. (1988). *Chicana doctoral students: Another look at educational equity*. In H. S. Garcia and R. C. Chavez, Eds., *Ethnolinguistic Issues in Education, 1988*. Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech. Univ., College of Education. (ED 316 041)
- Flores-Ortiz, Y. G. (1991). *Levels of acculturation, marital satisfaction, and depression among Chicana workers: A psychological perspective*. *Aztlan*, 20(1 & 2), 151-175.

Herrera, R. S., & Del Campo, R. L. (1995). Beyond the superwoman syndrome: Work satisfaction and family functioning among working-class Mexican American women. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 17(1), 49-60.

Lango, D. R. (1995). Mexican American female enrollment in graduate programs: A study of the characteristics that may predict success. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 17(1), 33-48.

Meier, K. J., & Stewart, J. J. (1991). *The politics of Hispanic education: Un paso pa'lante y dos pa'tras*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Nieves-Squires, S. (1991). *Hispanic women: Making their presence on campus less tenuous*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges. (ED 334 907)

Pesquera, B. M. (1991). "Work gave me a lot of confianza": Chicanas' work commitment and work identity. *Aztlan*, 20(1 & 2), 97-118.

Prado, M. (1991). Creating community: Mexican American women in Eastside, Los Angeles. *Aztlan*, 20(1 & 2), 39-71.

Reyes, O., Gillock, K., & Kabus, K. (1994). A longitudinal study of school adjustment in urban, minority adolescents: Effects of a high school transition program. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 22(3), 341-369.

Romero, G. J., Castro, F. G., & Cervantes, R. C. (1988). Latinas without work: Family, occupational, and economic stress following unemployment. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 12(3), 281-297.

Segura, D. A. (1991). Ambivalence or continuity?: Motherhood and employment among Chicanas and Mexican immigrant women workers. *Aztlan*, 20(1 & 2), 119-150.

Soldatendo, M. A. (1991). Organizing Latina garment workers in Los Angeles. *Aztlan*, 20(1 & 2), 73-96.

Tienda, M., Donato, K. M., & Cordero-Guzman, H. (1992). Schooling, color, and the labor force activity of women. *Social Forces*, 71(2), 365-395.

Flora Ida Ortiz is a professor in the School of Education at the University of California, Riverside.

This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and

Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. RR93002012. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI, the Department, or AEL.

Title: Mexican American Women: Schooling, Work, and Family. ERIC Digest.

Document Type: Information Analyses---ERIC Information Analysis Products (IAPs) (071); Information Analyses---ERIC Digests (Selected) in Full Text (073);

Available From: ERIC/CRESS, P.O. Box 1348, Charleston, WV 25325-1348 (free).

Descriptors: Educational Attainment, Elementary Secondary Education, Employed Women, Employment, Females, Higher Education, Mexican American Education, Mexican Americans, Mothers, Role Conflict, Sex Role, Socioeconomic Status, Womens Education

Identifiers: Chicanas, ERIC Digests

###



[\[Return to ERIC Digest Search Page\]](#)