

# Emotional Health and Well-Being with Immigrant Families: A Literature Review of the Last 10 Years

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## Abstract

The United States has reinforced its anti-immigrant reforms frequently. With these changes in the social and political context, they are a great challenge for this population. Although the immigrant tries to face them, they become toxic stressors for them. Therefore, interactions between parents-children and their family dynamics are affected by stressors associated with the migration process. One of the most worrying is immigrant's emotional health and well-being. There are international reports that refer to the high level of anxiety and depression experienced by immigrants and their families. This could increase the likelihood that children will become to intensify maladaptive behaviors. There are some theoretical models that point to the training of the practices of parents, inserted in the Theory of Learning Social Interaction (SIL) and in an ecological model to benefit the results of the child, the adolescent and the adult from different social roles. Therefore, the methodology about literature review could be one option to manage it. The objective was to identify the strategies reported in the literature to guide and strengthen the practices of the families of Latino immigrants (in particular Mexican families), encouraging a process of learning and training to cope them. This propose is one way to learn to parents, insert them into a community of cohesion, which can teach their children more effectively and they learn to manage the stress for acculturation. Unfortunately, this proposition is theoretical too, although it has evidence of the voices of different investigations done in the last 10 years.

**Keywords:** Emotional-health, Well-being, Immigrants, Program, Model, Literature Review.

## Introduction

The immigrant's people emotional health and wellbeing is affected from the moment that they decided to leave their natal land. The most reason to do it has been reported as go behind of "to search the American Dream", which is translated like the son's or daughter's future and familial wellbeing. The figure 1 synthesizes theoretically the pathway that migrant become to be very vulnerability situation, and their big need to rebuild a strong identity, to work in acquiring self-confidence and a social support networking in the destination country. Due to diverse jeopardize situations by which they cross during their trajectory to the destination residence, their adaptation and acculturation process will be in risk. This the same figure emphasizes that they live at the day, in one arousal stage, putting attention what happen already them every time. But, this sense of live here and now all time could be a big opportunity to help themselves to recover the control of their life. One way is making more consciousness that they go behind the Mexican Dream (see the appendix I).

## External stressors which difficult the acculturation process in immigrant families

Immigrant families in the United States experience a series of external or structural stressors, such as: family networks view the care of children as a shared responsibility (Cardoso, Gomez & Padilla, 2009); poverty, discrimination, linguistic and cultural barriers, and family conflict (Dettlaff, Earner, & Phillips, 2009); living with fear to deportation and losing their children are daily realities that make undocumented women (Hancock, Ames, & Behnke, 2014; Marrs, 2012); others environment determinants like: language barriers, economic distress, experiences with discrimination, and family separation (Holtrop, McNeil, & Scott, 2015); enculturation, and parental separations (Gudino, Nadeem, Kataoka & Lau, 2011).

These challenges can be debilitating for Latino immigrant families' mental health and wellbeing (Ayon, 2014). Marrs (2012) refers that the Immigrant Mexican people in United States should learn to cope with, to manage, or handle a problem and

for that they have to know over formal support systems are social service agencies, shelters or churches police, and courts, whereas informal support networks include, family, friends, clergy members and school personnel (Jung & Zhang, 2016).

Associated with the immigration process which to make very difficult their assimilation experience (Cardoso, Gomez & Padilla, 2009). United States have made a series of hard changes in the social and political context over challenges and exclusionary legislation against the non-citizens people as Latino Immigrants Then, this people have to learn how live with this new national dispositions and found the form resolving their basic needs. It is obvious that the parent-child interactions are affected by contingencies outside of the home, such as: migration process, low income affects their parenting practices including the, and no accesses to resources and privileges (Baumann, Domenech, & Parra-Cardona, 2011). Even, some stressors affect the family cohesion, and lower family cohesion, parent-child conflict, youth substance abuse via ineffective parenting (Holtrop et al., 2015). Martinez (2009) found that the migrant families' children and adolescents in public school in New York, adopted older age-graded identities that do not coincide with full-time schooling in the United States and that to make more difficult their adaptation in host country.

Among consequences: interrupt parents' ability to engage in positive and nurturing parenting practices; an imbalance of positive-to-negative interactions. Which could increase the probability of children engaging or escalating maladaptive behaviors (Baumann, Domenech, & Parra-Cardona, 2011). Many times, children of immigrant families tend to exacerbate and develop a series of symptoms due their lack knowledge of this situation which contributes child's problem behaviors and externalizing symptoms (Lindahl & Malik, 1999). Family educational involvement has been identified as a particularly beneficial practice for the achievement and behavioral outcomes of their children (Tang, 2015). In children and adolescents, the educational aspirations could be a positive relationship to recover the control of their life too (Jung & Zhang, 2016).

The objective was to identify the strategies reported in the literature to guide and strengthen the practices of the families of Latino immigrants (in particular Mexican families), encouraging a process of learning and training to cope them. This propose is one way to learn to parents, insert them into a community of cohesion, which can teach their children more effectively and they learn to manage the stress for acculturation. Then, I thought in to make a literature review to answer the following research question, ¿Are there some strategies to help immigrant people decreasing their vulnerability situation and recover the control of their life? And these strategies should be to give them support to work for themselves and not only across one therapeutic intervention.

## Method

### Sample, Instrument and Procedure

The diagram 1 shows that the sample was integrated for 42 articles (see diagram 1), which were collected from the Boolean search system, across the next algorithm:

*((T=("Mexican immigrant\*" OR "Latin immigrant\*" OR "Latin\*immigrant\*famil") AND TS=("well\*" OR "well\*mental" OR "subjective well\*" OR "mental health" OR psychological OR behavioral OR psychosocial AND program OR model OR intervention OR training))) AND Language: (English) AND Kind of documents:(Article). Period of time de 10 years=2008-2018 (see the appendix I).*

## Results

The articles reviewed (n= 42), they were organized in two big categories according the interests of this paper: (i) Aspects of influence to decrease their emotional health and wellbeing, (ii) pathways or strategies to improve parental practices into immigrant families and resilient response to immigration consequences.

**(i) Aspects of influence to decrease their emotional health and wellbeing.** According Cardoso et al. (2009) there are a combination of direct factors: logistical barriers, conflicting mandates of other agencies, lack of accurate information concerning international placement, and fear of the unknown. Environmental factors were implicit in respondent narratives and environmental factors promote the conditions that lead to a lower likelihood of international kin placement when working with Mexican immigrant families.

In general, Cervantes and Cordova (2011) reported six domains to manage external and acculturative stressors and improve their psychosocial and healthy adaptation: (a) immigration, (b) communication and language, (c) school and academic, (d) peer, (e) family, and (f) social and economic. For Cisneros and Lopez (2016) this topics or factor should have

been developed in terms of Knowledge and skills, but awakening consciousness in them, mainly. In few words, this is called by Fernández, Pereira, Aicart, and Salas (2017) and Juang et al. (2018) like Psychological Empowerment. The family is the source of support helping to re-build feelings of chronic/recurring loss, and meaning making (Solheim, Zaid & Ballard, 2016).

The mental health practitioners or multiagent (child, parent, teacher, clinician) have to make intervention over negative perceptions of Mexico reference to feelings of fear, lack of safety, worry, stress, sadness, etc. (Gulbas, Zayas, Yoon, Szlyk, Aguilar, & Natera, 2016; Patel, Clarke, Eltareb, Macciomei & Wickham, 2016; Rojas-Flores, Clements, Hwang Koo, & London, 2016). But, all interventions according Santisteban, Mena and Abalo (2013) these must be tailored, adapted and targeted for addressing distinct cultural characteristics and does not do it in a systematic or just replicable for fashion. And they have to consider that these Perceptions can be the result of things learned through media, conversations with friends/family or direct experience.

**(ii) Pathways or strategies to improve parental practices into immigrant families and resilient response to immigration consequences.** Baumann, Domenech, & Parra-Cardona (2011) propose different pathways to improve resilience skills in these families. They took from literature the Parent Management Training the Oregon Model (PMTOT; Forgatch, Patterson, De-Garmo & Beldavs, 2009) which is inserted over Social Interaction Learning Theory (SIL) and Ecological Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and was used to manage children with delinquency problems. According this option, the families learn strategies and social skills into generate and keep thoughts to make network, including those that are built in home and school or with close and significant people, for example: parent-child, child-peer, child-teacher or personal school interactions (Baumann et al., 2011). In particular, they observed two aspects to work from social justice principles with them: first, maintain a sense of competence to be energized and motivated all the time and manage multiple, close and personal significant relationships. The same time, they recommended to make through CAPAS, an intervention treatment by Domenech (2011; *Criando con Amor: Promoviendo Armonía y Superación*). Moya, Ayon and Gurrola (2013) referred some similar. Used that ecological model, they reported the influence over individual's well-being, in this case with Mexican immigrant families, keeping and building close relationships all the time.

Gulbas et al. (2016), Holtrop et al., (2015) and Leyendecker et al. (2018), suggested the parents should have been kept on discipline interaction, monitoring, problem solving and acculturative stress, according characteristics of child's age. Jung and Zhang (2016) observed some similar, using an ecological perspective they reported in specific three ways: (i) Parental English Proficiency (PEP) which expands the traditional conceptualization of parental involvement because involve them into understanding and communicating in English with their children. (ii) Parent Control Monitoring (PCM) and (iii) Parental Involvement School Education (PISE) to know them deeply in their activities, providing instruction of academic skills, cognitive mental structure, values and believes (Aldoney & Cabrera, 2016) through learning activities and educational experiences.

Have focus on children and adolescents is necessary because they are in transition to adult stage and they have the responsibility to transmit other generations a new model of immigration and adaptation model (Martinez, 2009). Ayon (2014) called it Familyism, and including discussions of different forms of discrimination with goal to develop educational advices and healthy coping strategies with their children. In other side, Tang (2015) found that parents are responsible for their children's moral development while the school is responsible for their academic development. The children' self-efficacy is built while more likely of parent to engage actively in their children's academic development.

Mendez and Westerberg (2012) observed that promote PEP in their children, the families can make activities like: talking about feelings, emotion recognition, learning new words, vocabulary building, shapes, colors, storytelling oral language development, narratives, alphabet connection and phonetic awareness in direction to increase the social competence, emotion expression and regulation, the creativity and imagination, the self-esteem and self-efficacy, although the parent-child warmth relation.

Marrs (2012) developed an environmentally-based model intervention and prevention in three routes: (a) provide informative material, social, and educational supports, (b) provide assessments, referrals, and advocacy to improve consciousness, and (c) provide counseling and help them to express bad emotions. Which was adapted and confirmed by Hancock et al. (2014) with undocumented immigrant people.

The figure 2 represents a synthesis of said above. In general, the pathway of reasons, situations and stages that the migrant people cross during their process into search their American and Mexican Dream. This has one superior part which is integrated in first instance by factors associated with migration experience and the wellbeing's deterioration in immigrant people, for example: discrimination and marginalization. These aspects are known as distal and proximal factors with direct or indirect influence. But, the diagram only shows those affect the parental practices as consequences of immigration process. And, because this paper was done in virtue to know more about what aspects do they have influence on children and adolescents' unadaptive behaviors.

In the same upper part, the central section different approaches, tested in the migrant population, with families, children and adolescents. Among which we can highlight the ecological systematic model, multicultural and acculturation perspectives with base on the of social justice principles, all this under a closeness of harmony and love. Therefore, this part has direct influence over their wellbeing.

The inferior part shows and describes the ecological and systemic model, in its different systems, each one with its specific characteristics, but all are cross by the social capital (it means, by the macrosystem). Every system and all aspects fall down in the individual system, which could be translated that if the immigrant does not work in improving his or her resilient or coping response to it, his or her emotional health and wellbeing will decrease seriously. The final column (all squares over right side) represents the pathway with strategies, actions, recommendations, options of intervention for family's member, school personnel, clinicians, counselors, practitioners of health or for the immigrants learn about them and will put in practice by themselves. Each element of the figure corresponds to what in psychology is named as psychological empowerment (see the appendix I). If we tried to teach them this kind of coping or resilient strategies, we can return them their control of their life, which was robbed from them in the moment when they decided to leave their natal land.

## Discussion and Conclusion

With this literature review, we can observe that there are different strategies to help immigrant people toward to find their American and Mexican Dream. In particular, decrease their vulnerability situation and recover the control of their life through some options into dynamic family and with support from school personnel and community's cohesion. The most important strategy, in the case do not let their emotional health and wellbeing decrease, is that they learn to do the opposite of it is reported by literature: avoiding behavior, living only with fear, anxiety and depression but do not make nothing. This paper proposes some viable options for this population. But, unfortunately, this paper is just from theory; although it has evidence of the voices of different investigations done in the last 10 years (2008-2018).

Despite, the most of the articles were done with children or adolescent samples, this not refer that the adult people is not important. But, according the different authors, the young people, for their low level of comprehension of this complex situation, it is the most affect for the immigration process. And their short experience in solving problems, it is waited that their close relationships get it in their hands. In fact, with this kind of actions, it is possible to broke the circle of immigration process intergenerational and by cultural influence.

In this paper had mentioned some programs (proved) to strength the immigrant families and their children, for example: the ecological model, the Social Interaction Learning Theory, a program CAPAS, social justice principles and an acculturation perspective; but these are not unique, in this case they were the options mentioned. However, you can see that each program could be or should be adaptive, flexible, modifiable about the sample's characteristics and cultural traits.

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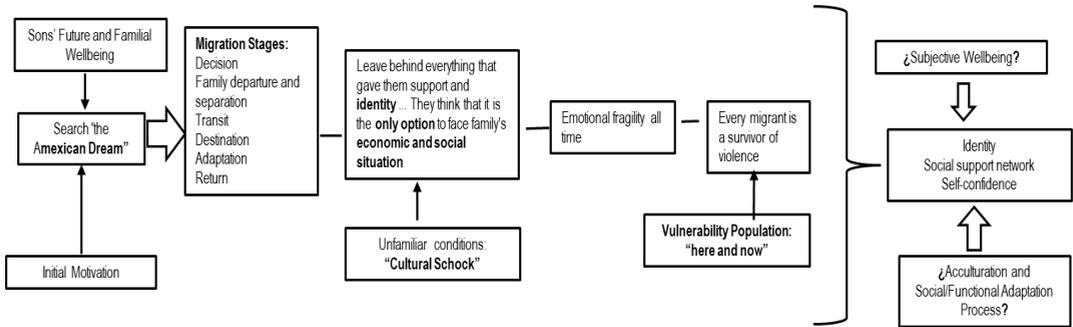
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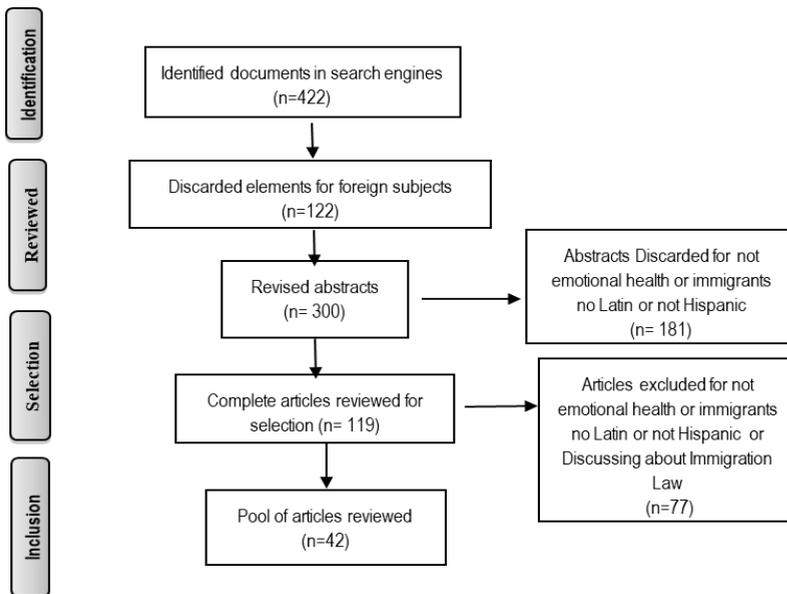
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**Appendix I**

**Figure 1.** Pathway of reasons, situations and stages that the migrant people cross during their process into search their American and Mexican Dream.



**Diagram 1.** Phases of the Literature Reviewed about Emotional Health and Migration



**Figure 2.** Pathway of reasons, situations and stages that the migrant people cross during their process into search their American and Mexican Dream.

