Child Abuse and Neglect in Immigrant Latino/a Families
Goals

1) Participants become familiar with immigration and acculturation experiences and understand how those experiences and disruptions in attachment among family members may play a part in families being referred to the child welfare system.

2) Gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics involved in several case examples of families where there has been allegations of abuse or neglect of the children or the children having sexual behavior problems.
This workshop will describe how common stressors related to immigration and acculturation in Latino/a families can play a role in referrals to the child welfare system.

The presenter has had referrals of Latin@ immigrant families from the Division because of
1) Allegations of physical abuse
2) Allegations of sexual abuse
3) Allegations of neglect of children
4) Domestic violence
5) Children with sexual behavior problems.
Relevance of Topic

25% of all children and adolescents residing in the U.S. are either foreign born or first generation.

This topic is very relevant for child protection professionals in New Jersey because:

1) people born in foreign countries represent more than 20% of the state population

2) half of the foreign-born people are from Latin America (South America, Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean).
Immigrant families present system challenges:

1) Economic problems
2) Language barrier
3) Low educational level
4) Stress of acculturation
5) Threat of discovery
6) Legal issues
Culturally competent practice requires:

1) Thorough understanding of the impact that migration and acculturation has had on the family

2) How those experiences may affect service delivery
Migratory Experience

1) Reason for migration is often the poverty in the country of origin

2) Family members often migrate in stages

3) Children may migrate later as the family becomes more stable

4) Many migrants experience violence, robbery, and sexual assault
Initial Struggles in the U.S.

1) Finding housing
2) Finding employment
3) Shopping
4) Paying bills
5) Navigating the school system
6) Navigating the medical system
Acculturation Stress

Acculturation is a complex process that is dependent on:

1) ethnicity
2) gender
3) age
4) religious beliefs
5) family structure
6) language
7) personality

Acculturation is more difficult for those immigrants who are more distinct from the host culture in factors such as ethnicity, religion, and language.

Immigrants who are more distinct from the host culture in ethnicity, religion, and language are more likely to experience social discrimination and prejudice as a result of the factors that identify them as different from the majority.
Possible Effects of Immigration and Acculturation Stress

1) anxiety
2) depression
3) drug abuse/alcoholism
4) juvenile delinquency
5) family problems
Social Problems in Immigrant Families

• Higher rates of poverty
• Less likely to receive public benefits (TANF, food stamps, housing assistance)
• Less likely to have health insurance
• Do not understand medical system
• Do not understand school system
Characteristics of Latin@ Families

1) Close, loving relationships in the family
2) Parents expect their children to consider the family as the central source of support and loyalty
3) Children are expected to obey their parents, respect their elders, and conform to established rules
4) Tensions may occur as children experience conflict between those parental expectations and the values of the majority culture (which emphasize autonomy and independence)

These value differences can form the basis for significant tension between Latin@ parents who adhere to traditional values and their children, who are rapidly exposed to the social norms of the majority culture through school and television.

Research indicates that increased parenting stress and low confidence in parenting skills are common among Latin@ immigrant parents. Parents may feel they are no longer able to control their children and preserve the closeness of the parent-child relationship they had previously established.
Stressors on Marital Relationships

Changes in gender roles and expectations:

A) Woman enters work force

B) Man has to accept additional responsibilities for child care and housework

This may lead to increased risk for relationship conflict and domestic violence.

The migration and acculturation process may also be a significant source of strength and resilience for Latin@ immigrant families.

Many Latin@ families place considerable emphasis on strength in the midst of crisis and have a strong sense of personal pride and dignity from their accomplishments.
Attachment Theory

Attachment: an affectional bond between an individual and a caregiver.

The attachment system is very robust and young humans form attachments easily, even in far less than ideal circumstances.
Attachment Patterns

- **Secure:** Caregiver is a secure base
- **Avoidant:** The child feels that there is no attachment
- **Ambivalent/Resistant:** Seeking contact but resisting angrily when it is achieved
- **Disorganized:** Frightened or frightening behavior, intrusiveness, withdrawal, negativity, role confusion, affective communication errors, and maltreatment (associated with many forms of abuse/neglect towards the child).
For Effective Interventions

- What impact has immigration and acculturation had on the family?
- How has immigration and acculturation contributed to the actions that led to referral to the Division?
- How immigration and acculturation experiences will affect building a relationship with the family
- How immigration and acculturation experiences will affect family’s response to proposed interventions.
Engagement

• Develop trust
• Understand how stigmatization may impact relationship development
• Understand the culture
Assessment

• Understand culture of the family
• Assess impact of migration and acculturation
• Assess child rearing practices
• Assess stress and depression
• Domestic violence
• Substance abuse
• Intergenerational conflict
• Assess strengths and coping mechanisms
Intervention

- Reduce isolation
- Increase social support
- Reduce stress level of family
- Intervene to address presenting problem
- Homemaker services
- Medical assistance
- Parent training
- Individual psychotherapy
Vignettes

Physical Abuse:
Original referral because 4 y.o. son had red mark on face
Mother, 30 y.o., born in Puebla, Mexico, to U.S. when 20 y.o.
Has four children (ages 7, 5, 3, and a baby).
Mother had in-home parent-training
Therapist concerned that mother may be cognitively challenged.
Mother: 3 years of formal education, cannot read Spanish
TONI-4 (Test of nonverbal intelligence) 5th percentile
Parenting Stress Inventory: feels overwhelmed
Recommendations

- Individual therapy
- Homemaker services
- Benefits (welfare, food stamps)
- Parent-training on a concrete level
- Care management organization to help with communication with school
Vignette: Neglect

Referral: Mother not following up with medical appointments
Mother: 30 y.o., from Mexico, to U.S. when 17 y.o., 6 years of formal education
Caseworker helped mother take 4 y.o. son to medical appointment to evaluate for autism. Six months after that appointment, mother still had not followed recommendations
Caseworker helped mother make regular appointments with pediatrician
Mother had low reading comprehension level
Recommendations

Case management services to help coordinate care for autistic son.
Case management services to facilitate communication between mother and the school.
Parent-training with focus on parenting children with developmental delays.
Vignette: Neglect

Referral: Mother asks Housing Office if she can transfer Section 8 voucher to adult daughter
Mother is 38 y.o., from the Dominican Republic
Reared by her grandparents, felt that she was mistreated as a child.
Had three children while living in the Dominican Republic.
Came to the U.S. in 1998 when youngest child was a baby.
Mother complained that her children did not listen to her and she could not manage their behavior.
Recommendations

Individual therapy for mother to discuss difficulties in her childhood. Also to discuss changes she is making with family.

Family therapy: to discuss her plans to send youngest child (now 15 years old) to the Dominican Republic to live with relatives and that oldest two children will be on their own.
Vignette: Domestic Violence

Referral: Domestic violence incident.
Father: born in the Dominican Republic, father of the youngest three children, supports the whole family.
Mother: born in Honduras, 23 y.o., mother of 6 children
Safety/Protection Plan: Father not supposed to be in home. The father was still in the home. The Division placed the children in resource homes.
Mother and father were using drugs/alcohol. Father agreed to attend substance abuse treatment. Mother was noncompliant with intake appointment for substance abuse treatment.
Recommendations

For mother:  substance abuse treatment
             individual therapy
             parent training

For father:  substance abuse treatment
             domestic violence specific treatment
Vignette: Sexual Abuse

Referral: step-daughter reported that step-father touched her inappropriately.
Mother upset because step-father supports the family. Daughter then retracts the allegation.

Recommendations:
1) Individual therapy for daughter
2) If/when determined to be appropriate, family therapy to include discussion of appropriate boundaries
Vignette: Children with Sexual Behavior Problems

A child is left behind in country of origin when mother immigrates to the United States. She becomes established in the U.S. and starts a new family. She then sends for oldest child to join her in the U.S. In the first few months in the U.S., the oldest child touches a younger half-sibling in an inappropriate manner.

Recommendations: 1) Supervise oldest child’s contact with younger children
2) Sexual behavior problem specific therapy for oldest child.