

Qualitative Findings

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

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Qualitative Findings

Purpose

In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of NEW VISTAS families, the UCSB Research Team conducted structured interviews with a subset of NEW VISTAS families. Though there is a variety of research on the general experience of delinquent youths, specific investigation into the experience of Latinos and females is sparse. In order to best meet the goals outlined in the grant of designing programs to work specifically with these two neglected populations, case study interviews provided a rich and detailed account of 10 families participating in NEW VISTAS.

Procedures

Information was collected by the UCSB Research Team in order to best maintain confidentiality and elicit sensitive information. Families were referred for interview by treatment planners, who explained the purpose and process of the interview before gaining family's consent to be contacted by research team members. A team of two interviewers met with each family and used the Ethnographic Interview Protocol (EIP) to interview the primary caregiver and youth in separate rooms for approximately two hours. Participating youths and parents were given monetary compensation for participation in the interview session. Each interview was tape recorded and transcribed for analyses.

Measures

Ethnographic Interview Protocol (EIP)

The EIP (O'Brien, Jimerson, Saxton, & Anderson, 2000) is a qualitative interview designed by NEW VISTAS Research Team members to address key areas of the literature related to delinquency with Mexican-American families. The interview has a youth and parent format each with a number of open-ended questions addressing the following broad areas: (a) familial factors (acculturation, changes in living situation, economic opportunity, neighborhood characteristics); (b) parent-child relationships; (c) parental criminal involvement and substance abuse; (d) sibling relationships and peer relationships (gang involvement, substance use, relationships quality); (e) school experiences (special education, behavior, academic success); (f) individual characteristics (personality, extracurricular activities, maturation, substance use, gang involvement); (g) delinquent behaviors; (h) psychological factors; (i) sexual activity; (j) social life; and (k) future career and personal expectations. Families are asked to respond to questions with as much detail as possible and interviews were audio taped for transcription. A coding scheme was created to report results in both quantitative and qualitative ways.

Sample

Qualitative data were collected with 10 NEW VISTAS families, split equally by gender. All families were Mexican American. All mothers and all youths referred by treatment planners completed the entire interview. One father also completed the interview.

Additional information on the past and current experiences of NEW VISTAS families was gathered through case studies.

An Ethnographic Interview was created by research team members in order to include a comprehensive set of questions taken from the extant literature.

UCSB NEW VISTAS Research Team members conducted 10 case studies with involved youths and caregivers.

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Results

In order to provide a rich picture of the qualitative findings, results are provided in two manners. For broad sections, a summary of data quantified through the coding process will be presented. To provide more detail and illustrate specific family experiences, quotes from specific interviews will be presented.

Cultural Background

Half of the youths were the first in their family to be born in the United States and the other half had been born in Mexico. Three youths identified as Mexican American, four identified as Mexican, and three identified as neither. Most of the families primarily spoke Spanish in the home.

Family

About half of the families had experienced divorce. The relationships with their mothers that the youths described were generally positive, including communication and respect. When youths disagreed with their parents, little communication or silence was the norm. Most mothers had experienced physical and/or verbal abuse from their parents. Most youths had fathers with criminal involvement, and half of the fathers were not involved in the youths' lives. Of those who reported a positive relationship with their fathers, these fathers had minimal criminal involvement. Only one mother had been involved criminally. However, about half of the parents (both mother and father) had previous contact with the police. Of the ten youths interviewed, none of the youths identified either parent as abusing alcohol or drugs. Half of the youths reported that their parents were a very important influence in their lives and two highlighted the influence of their siblings. The youths generally reported positive relationships with their siblings. The family size varied from two person households to nine. Often, boyfriends and grandparents were living within the household. Most mothers held either minimum wage or administrative jobs. Most youths characterized their neighborhood as being relatively safe.

Family Substance Use

"I started drinking and smoking pot when I was 17, the usual high school thing. Now I only drink alcohol once in a while, on weekends, but quit drugs about three years ago because I saw my kids getting in trouble and wondered if they knew." - Mother of Latino

"I drink alcohol a little bit. My father was an alcoholic. Both my sister's husband and my husband drank almost daily." - Mother of Latino

Most families had recently arrived to the United States

The majority of families interviewed had experienced a variety of challenges, including substance use, criminality, and abuse.

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Family Criminality

“My stepfather was caught for selling pot on the beach once. Someone also found a bag of cocaine in my parent’s room and they were going to blame my mom, so I said it was mine. I spent a day in jail but they figured out it was my stepfather’s and locked him up for a month and then sent him back to Mexico.” - Mother of Latina

“Nothing serious. My father had a few DUIs ($n = 25$) and well, he did go to jail for heroin. My brother also went to jail for selling crack.” - Latina youth, 18 years

Family Abuse

“My parents hit me and locked me up. They made me get on my elbows like when we pray and sit for hours, sometimes we slept that way. My mom also used to tie me up, like tying up the sinners, with my hands above a wire. I have never hit my son. I usually cry, and tell him that I am going to give him away to someone with a different style of parenting if he needs punishment. Now he is too big so I cannot punish him, so I just don’t speak to him.” - Mother of Latino

“My mom used to whip us with a belt, we would try to hide the belts from her. One day I had my mom’s hand mark on me. She’d make me kneel sometimes, in the corner facing the wall. My dad just talked to me. I picked up a lot from my mom, like when my children would cry I would hit them and tell them to stop.” - Mother of Latino

Attitudes About School

Attitudes toward school varied among the youths, most had recently changed school. In general, perceptions were fairly negative, due to boredom and having to wake up early. Friends were reported to be a motivation for attendance. Problem behavior reported included skipping school (all 10 youths), talking back to teacher, and hyperactivity. All students had been suspended from school, and one had been expelled. Likewise, parental involvement in school varied among youths. All youths reported having problems at school at some point in their lives (e.g., truancies, suspensions, fights), however a minimal amount of them receive special education services. All youths reported that they expected to graduate high school and many plan to attend college and get a good job.

School Attendance

“I skipped school in junior high like twenty times, but only got caught once because I would forge my mom’s signature. My friends and I would just go hang out, starting when I was 11 or 12.” - Latino youth, 16 years

“I skipped school a lot to smoke marijuana basically my whole freshman year”
- Latino youth, 17 years

“I used to skip just a few classes and go get high, party, or go home to rest up from partying” - Latina youth, 14 years

About half of the fathers had been involved in criminal acts, and almost all of the mothers had been abused by their parents.

Most youths had negative attitudes about school.

All youths had experienced significant difficulties in school, and all had been suspended at least one time.

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Academic Performance

“Before going to Court school, I was screwing around and not doing my homework. Now I am doing well and would give myself an A” - Latino youth, 15 years

“When I was at public school, I got all Fs. But at County School, they make us do the work. I have a C average and am proud of it.” - Latino youth, 17 years

Suspensions and Expulsions

“I was suspended once for defending my friend, I beat up this guy who was making fun of her brother who had passed away.” - Latina youth, 14 years

“I got accused of stealing and they searched my locker and found my pipe. I got an involuntary transfer, which means I had to leave my school and go to another one” - Latino youth, 16 years

“I’ve been suspended like 20 times for fighting, ditching, and talking back to teachers, not expelled though” - Latino youth, 16 years

Special Education

“I never received special education services but I wish I had. I saw all these other kids getting help and didn’t understand why no one was helping me. While at Court School, I learned to read for the first time in my life.” - Latino youth, 17 years

All youths had attendance problems, and most struggled with bad grades.



None of the youths had received special education services, though many stated that they wished they had received the help.

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Academic and Career Aspirations

The top three things youths would change about their life were to try harder at school, never do drugs, and for girls, never get involved with their boyfriends.

“I want to get my diploma so I can get a better job for now and then go to City College to become a mechanic, doing low-rider detailing.” - Latino youth, 17 years

“I am getting an F in school right now but I plan on graduating so I can become either a beautician or Parole Officer” - Latina youth, 15 years

“I really miss regular high school because of sports. So, I really want to do well at Court School so I can go back and play sports” - Latino youth, 16 years

Activities and Services

The youths reported that they spend most of their free time talking on the phone, working out, shopping or hanging out with friends. They indicated that they participated in mixed-age and mixed-gender peer groups. Most of the youths had peers that were gang members, but only a few identified themselves as gang members. While the youths did indicate that their friends used drug and alcohol, they did not consider it abusive. Most youths felt they had a positive relationship with multiple peers. Few of the youths engaged in organized youth sports or community organizations, however, some participated in school organizations such as performing arts.

All of the youths received probation and mental health services and more than half received assistance from social services. All youths also received some form of counseling or psychological services. Most had positive body images and healthy diets and report maturing earlier than their peers. Half of the youths reported running away from home at least once. All of the youths admit past drug use, but only one reported current drug use. More than half of the youths reported past alcohol use and few reported current use. Most of the youths were exposed to drugs or alcohol by a friend and their first encounter took place between the ages of 11 and 15. Also, most of the youths claimed to be sexually active, but only a few reported not using contraceptives. The youths indicated that if they could change a decision they made in the past, three indicated that they would not use drugs and three reported that they would not have become involved with a gang. The primary obstacles described by the youths were deaths of friends and family members and the use of drugs and alcohol.



Youths interviewed aspired to do well in school for a variety of reasons, including professional goals and athletic interests.

Youths spent most of their free time in unstructured activities with their friends.

Most youths had experimented with drugs and alcohol, being strongly influenced by their peers.

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Alcohol and Substance Use

The majority of youths started drinking by age 13 years. All youths reported that they had used alcohol and marijuana, and most were introduced to substances by friends.

“I don’t like drugs but yeah, I’ve tried them. And I did like them back then. I used to do coke. Once in awhile I used to smoke heroin. I don’t know. Weed, crystal, all kinds of drugs.” - Latina youth, 16 years

“I started smoking weed when I was in sixth grade. I got the stuff from my little cousin whose older brother sold weed. The nine year old would sell me, like, so much weed for like, 20 bucks.” - Latino youth, 16 years

“I used to do coke like once a month. I used to do a line and then start lifting weights and get a good workout. I didn’t like pot much, it makes you all sleepy. But I stopped all that, its unhealthy.” - Latino youth, 16 years

Running Away

“Yeah I ran away once, my mom was going to call the cops again for smoking pot, and I was like, I’m not going to be here for them to get me because I was on probation. I stayed at a friend’s house for like a week.” - Latino youth, 16 years

“I ran away because my parents didn’t let me date my boyfriend ‘cause he was older. So my mom pressed charges and I ran away to go live with my boyfriend.” - Latina youth, 17 years

Arrests

The majority of youths were arrests for the first time around 14-years of age, though one was arrested at age 9 years. Girls were arrested for truancy, fighting, running away, theft, and substance use. Boys were arrested for drug paraphernalia, substance abuse, theft, possession of deadly weapons, possession of stolen items, assault with a deadly weapon, battery, armed robbery with a gun, and selling drugs.

“This girl from another gang started it in with me, and I had a lock in my hand for my gym locker, and threw it at her face and hit her. I got a lot of trouble that time because she pressed charges.” - Latina youth, 18 years

“I done like, say, a lot of curfews, say four vandalism, and two deadly weapons. One was a knife, the other a metal stick, and oh yeah, we broke out a fight at a YMCA dance, after that, they pulled us over, not in a stolen car, but things inside were stolen.” - Latino youth, 17 years

Half of the youths interviewed had run away from home at least once.

Most youths were arrested around 14 years of age, though one was arrested at nine years of age.

The types of crimes youths were arrested for differed by gender.

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Gang Membership

“If someone wants to join the Eastside Ladies, we tell them if you want to claim it you have to gang bang, so if someone comes up to you from a different gang, you have to tell them, ‘I’m from the Eastside and that’s my name’ and if they want to throw it down then you have to throw it down.” - Latina youth, 18 years

“Yeah, I was in a gang but I got jumped out, I was like, why am I in a gang? I’m just getting my ass kicked for a street that doesn’t even belong to me. When I got jumped out, I lost so many supposed friends, that I was like I’m not going to be kissing your ass.” - Latina youth, 16 years

Overall

The semi-structured casual interview process with youths and caregivers separately provided valuable information about the family dynamics, for instance what information was shared between the adolescents and their family, and how their perceptions were sometimes similar and sometimes different. Given the breadth of the ethnographic interview, each discussion explored: familial factors (acculturation, changes in living situation, economic opportunity, neighborhood characteristics); parent-child relationships; parental criminal involvement and substance abuse; sibling relationships and peer relationships (gang involvement, substance use, relationships quality); school experiences (special education, behavior, academic success); individual characteristics (personality, extracurricular activities, maturation, substance use, gang involvement); delinquent behaviors; psychological factors; sexual activity; social life; and future career and personal expectations. Listening to the adolescents reflect on their lives, sharing their experiences, providing information about powerful influences was valuable in understanding the various developmental pathways that led to involvement in the juvenile justice system. Hearing dreams and aspirations of these youths also provided hope that their current involvement with supportive services may play a fundamental role in altering their developmental trajectory towards prosocial behavior, healthy adjustment, and away from using drugs and alcohol.

The ethnographic interviews provided valuable qualitative information. This detailed information about the experiences of families and developmental history of youths was useful for the development of appropriate NEW VISTAS services, both reaffirming existing services and providing insights for further development of appropriate services to address the needs of the NEW VISTAS participants. The NEW VISTAS Research Advisory Panel discussed the results of the interviews and the implications for providing services to these youths and families. In addition, the data from the ethnographic interview were also used to inform the development of the Santa Barbara Assets and Risks Assessment.

Most youths had been involved in gangs and many described painful initiation and exit rituals.

The ethnographic interviews provided valuable information about the lives of the youths and families participating in NEW VISTAS.

Qualitative Findings

Program Costs and Cost Effectiveness

While there is insufficient data to properly evaluate the cost effectiveness of the NEW VISTAS grant program, it is possible to provide information about the cost of alternative settings by which the program participants could have been served. The NEW VISTAS program cost of \$20,118 per stay includes the comprehensive services provided to both juveniles and their families. It excludes the grant funds spent on research evaluation, since counties who replicate the program would not incur those costs.

Figure 1. Juvenile Placement Cost Comparison

Placement Program	Gross Cost per Day	Average Stay in Days	Average Cost per Stay
1.) Santa Barbara Juvenile Hall	\$253.77	13	\$3,294
2.) Los Prietos Boys Camp	\$213.97	192	\$41,082
3.) CYA Commitments	\$136.67	885	\$120,953
4.) Group Home Placements	\$136.10	270	\$36,747
5.) Counseling & Education Centers	\$68.16	72	\$4,908
6.) Challenge II	\$58.31	345	\$20,118

Evaluation data show that of the minors who successfully completed the NEW VISTAS program, zero were placed in expensive out-of-home group placements as compared to 16% of the Historical Comparison Group. For minors who successfully completed the NEW VISTAS program, only 27% were placed in institutional commitments (hall, camps, California Youth Authority) versus 48% of the Historical Comparison Group. If the NEW VISTAS program had not been available, some of these youths were likely to have gone on to commit crimes resulting in placement in the Los Prietos Boys Camp (costing \$41,082), group homes (costing \$36,747), the Counseling & Education Centers (costing \$4,908), or the California Youth Authority (costing \$120,953). In addition, minors who completed the NEW VISTAS program were twice as likely to pay off their restitution and complete their community work service hours as the Historical Comparison Group, again rendering value back to the community.

Dollars spent on families in NEW VISTAS were a strategic investment made in intervention and prevention services. Because NEW VISTAS services are directed at the whole family, not just the involved youth, the cost per person served should take into account all family members. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the average size of a family in the City of Santa Barbara is 3.17 persons. When considering this, the average cost per person served by the NEW VISTAS program is only \$6,346 for an average length of participation of 11.5 months.

Furthermore, to the degree that these NEW VISTAS services were successful, a savings in future costs for the adult criminal justice system, for emergency room visits, and for drug addicted children may also be realized.