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La Calidad de Vida dentro de La Villita: An Investigation of Factors Affecting Quality of Life of Latino Residents of an Urban Immigrant Residential Enclave

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The goal of this study was to examine factors affecting the quality of life of Latino residents of Little Village—a predominantly Latino urban gateway community in the city of Chicago. Two focus groups with Latino residents and eleven interviews with stakeholders in this community were employed to collect the data. The findings show that the quality of life of Latino residents was affected by a number of interrelated factors, including environmental degradation, insufficient access to open spaces, low sense of community, fear of crime, and undocumented status of many residents. Findings of this study are discussed and a number of practical implications are provided.

KEYWORDS *Quality of life, Latinos, urban gateway communities*

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INTRODUCTION

Although the destinations of migration flows have become diversified in recent years, major cities remain the settings where the majority of the world's migrants settle. As Benton-Short and Price (2008) have put it, major urban areas act as “command and control centers of globalization” (p. 4). According to Singer (2008), in 2005 almost 96% of immigrants to the U.S. resided in cities or metropolitan suburbs, including 37% living in the metropolitan areas of New York, Los Angeles, Miami, and Chicago alone. Recent scholarship in geography, sociology, and migration studies has increasingly focused on gateway cities, defined as metropolitan areas with Census 2000 immigrant population of over 1 million (Singer, 2004). Benton-Short and Price commented that gateway cities are “not only settlement points for immigrants, but also critical entry points that draw from a wide range of sending countries, facilitate cultural exchange, and are nodes for the collection and dispersion of goods, capital, and people” (p. 6). Singer (2004) identified six major types of gateway cities, based on the size and growth rates of the immigrant population in the twentieth century. She grouped them into two categories: *established immigrant gateways*, which included former gateways, continuous gateways, and post-World War II gateways, and *twenty-first century gateways*, which included emerging gateways, re-emerging gateways, and pre-emerging gateways. In addition to general designation of having to achieve an immigrant population of over 1 million people, continuous, post-WWII, emerging, and re-emerging gateways must have the proportion of the foreign-born population higher than the 2000 Census national average of 11.1% and/or growth rates among the foreign-born population higher than the 1990–2000 national average of 57.4%.

Based on this classification, Chicago with its long-established history of immigration and continuous flows of new immigrants can be classified as an established, continuous gateway. In fact, in 2005, the foreign-born population of Chicago reached 1,625,649, the percentage change in foreign-born population between 1990–2000 was 60.3%, and 17.5% of residents of the metropolitan area and 21.3% of resident of the central city were foreign-born (Singer, 2008). Established gateways, such as Chicago, are generally well-researched immigrant destinations since they have been experiencing significant levels of immigration for more than a century. As Benton-Short and Price (2008) observed with respect to New York—another established gateway—their urban landscapes “have been continually reshaped by wave after wave of new migrants making their influence felt” and have “layer upon layer of diversity in the landscape” (p. 8).

This study will focus on the Latino population in one of the residential communities in the city of Chicago. In 2004, the Chicago metropolitan area had more than 1,607,000 Latino inhabitants (approximately 20% of the total population), 79% of whom were of Mexican descent (Ready & Brown-Gort,

2005). The greatest increase in the number of Latinos in the metro Chicago area took place in the 1990s when, primarily due to immigration, the Latino population grew by nearly 570,000 (or about 57,000 per year) (Ready & Brown-Gort, 2005). The rate of increase slowed slightly in the first four years of 2000s, when Chicago's Latino population increased by about 50,000 per year. In a reversal of the trend from the 1990s, in recent years Latino population increase among the U.S.-born has slightly outpaced that due to international migration. Today, more than half (53%) of Latinos residing in the Chicago metropolitan area were born in the U.S., including more than 84% of Latino children. However, the majority (65%) of adult Latino residents of the city of Chicago were born abroad (Ready & Brown-Gort, 2005).

While the focus of the majority of recent theoretical and empirical research has been on gateway cities as immigrant destinations, in this study we will focus specifically on one of the residential gateway communities in Chicago—Little Village or *La Villita* (official name, South Lawndale). Little Village can be classified as “dominant residential enclave,” in which 50% or more of immigrants in the neighborhood belong to a particular ethnic group (Lo, 2008). Located between the Stevenson Expressway in the south and Cermak Road (or Metra line) in the north, with Western Avenue and Cicero as its east-west boundaries (see Figures 1 and 2), Little Village was first settled in the aftermath of the Chicago Fire in 1871 by Germans and Czechs (Bohemians), and later by Poles, Italians, and Irish. Latino immigration to the area began in the 1960s and 1970s. Today, Little Village is the largest Mexican neighborhood in Chicago and it serves as a gateway for Mexican American migrants to much of the Midwestern United States. In 2000, the area's population reached 91,071, 83% of whom were Latino, and of those, 69,191 (92%) were Mexican (U.S. Census, 2000). The population of Little Village has been described as “in transition,” since many Latino families are moving in and out of the area from and to other parts of the city, suburbs, other parts of Illinois, the southern U.S., and Mexico (LVCDC, 2005). In 2000, the median household income was \$32,320 (for comparison purposes, median household income in Chicago PMSA was \$51,680), 23.1% of residents lived below the poverty level (10.5% in Chicago PMSA), and the unemployment rate in the community was at 11.7% (4.1% in Chicago PMSA). Little Village was also characterized by the youngest population of any Chicago neighborhood (median age under 21 years of age; median age in Chicago PMSA was 33.7 years) (U.S. Census, 2000). The profile of Little Village's population closely resembles those of other Latinos in the Chicago area, with 45,885 of its residents (51.7%) being born in the U.S. and 44,017 (48.3%) being foreign-born (U.S. Census, 2000). The majority of young Latino residents of Little Village have been born in the U.S.

As Singer (2008) commented, residential enclaves such as Little Village, have both positive and negative connotations. On the positive side, they offer new immigrants support, familiarity, and services provided in their native

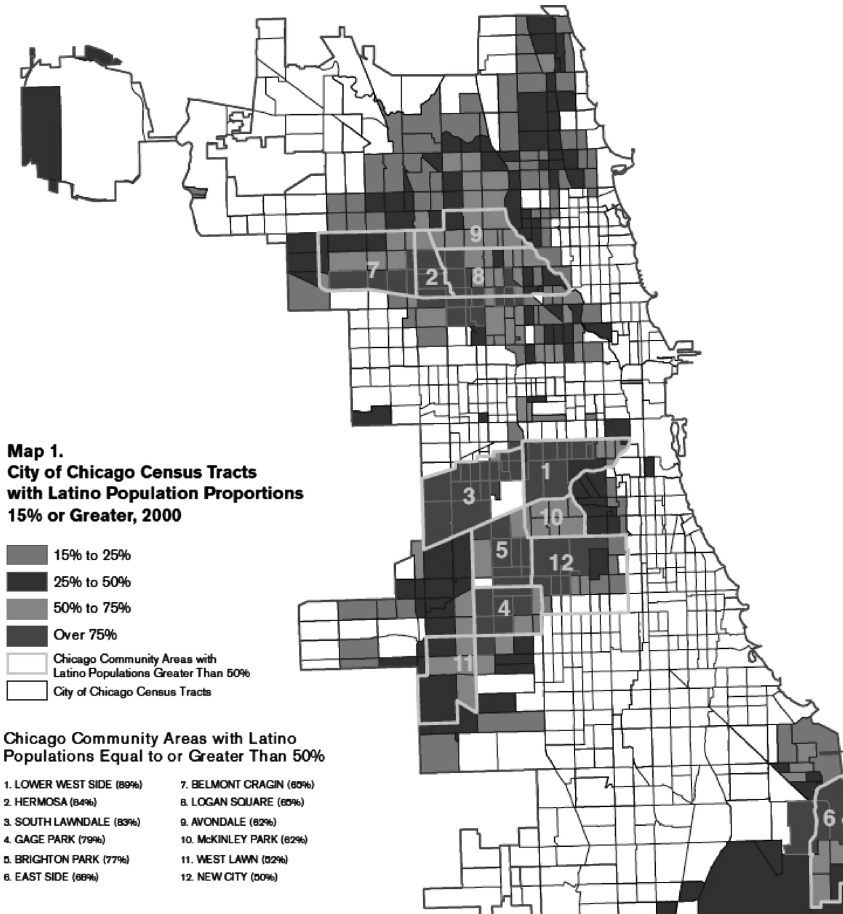


FIGURE 1 Source: Ready & Brown-Gort, 2005.

language, which may ease their transition into the host society. On the negative side, they are often considered destinations of last resort for incoming immigrants and are viewed as “isolated areas with low-quality housing and services that restrict the incorporation of immigrants into the mainstream” (p. 5). Foner (2008) and others, in their discussions of established immigrant gateway cities identified an array of factors that may negatively affect quality of life of residents of traditional immigrant destinations, including prejudice and outright discrimination from the dominant group, interethnic tensions, overpopulation, crowded and substandard living conditions, and tensions between long-term residents and new arrivals. While most of the recent scholarship has focused on social and economic geographies of gateway cities, in this study we will examine quality of life issues within an established dominant residential enclave at the heart of a major gateway city.

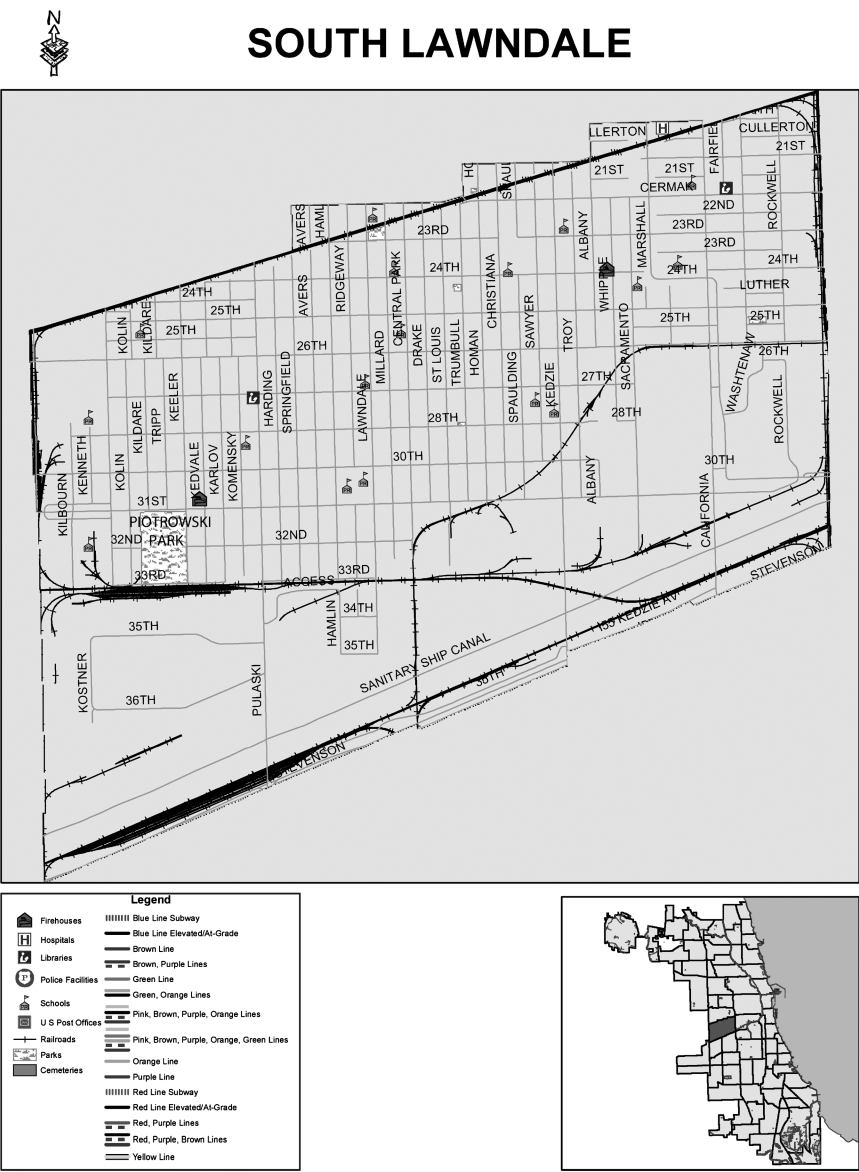


FIGURE 2 Community Area No. 3 (South Lawndale) Depicts the studied Community—Little Village. *Source:* City of Chicago (2008).

LITERATURE REVIEW: QUALITY OF LIFE

The notion of quality of life (QOL) has been studied in many contexts and from many perspectives. For example, quality of life has been viewed as an individual's perceived level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with life (Andrews & Withey, 1976), level of happiness or unhappiness (Geller &

Nimmer, 1987), overall standard of living as indicated by Gross Domestic Product (Eckersley, 1999) or as sense of well-being (Deiner, 1984, Deiner & Suh, 2000). The definition of QOL can be value-laden, and vary across individuals and cultures. Moreover, perceptions of QOL are impacted by environmental factors and the influence of these factors is experienced differently by people. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines it as an individual's perception of their position in life in the context of culture and value systems and in relation to their goals and expectations (Utsey, Chae, Brown, & Kelly, 2000). QOL is a broad ranging concept connected in complex ways to a person's physical health, psychological state, level of independence, social relationships, and to their connection to salient features of the environment.

The measurement of QOL is also quite complex. Both objective and subjective approaches have been developed (Diener & Suh, 1997). Objective approaches typically employ a wide range of observable criteria as indicators of how well people are living. For example, Leiss and Shapiro (1987) used per capita figures for income, square feet of housing space, toilets, telephones, automobiles and television sets as a measure of QOL. A benefit of objective measures is that comparisons can be made across nations, regions, cities or neighborhoods. However, the applicability of these indicators is dependent on agreement about what factors are most desirable and contribute to QOL. As Diener and Suh noted, reaching such a consensus is often difficult in heterogenous societies where life priorities may differ across social groups. In contrast, subjective QOL research is concerned with an individual's "experiences of life" (Osborne, 1992) and has been connected to qualities such as exhibiting self-control and displaying personal integrity, how an individual perceives the state of her or his health (Compton, 1997), and level of happiness or unhappiness (Geller & Nimmer, 1987). As noted by Lloyd and Little (2005), quality of life research concerned with large-scale evaluation of social policy to set national agendas will most likely use quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. However, at the individual level, qualitative methods can be used to assist practitioners in providing more individualized services and help to identify problems and inequities in service provisions (Rapley, 2003).

Tann (2005) noted that developing a succinct concept of QOL in the Latino culture is difficult given the heterogeneity within the population. She noted that given, "the intra-ethnic diversity of the population, coupled with numerous factors related to length of time since immigration, naturalization status, degree of acculturation, and individual variability, makes conceptualizing QOL a difficult task" (p. 137). Moreover, variability in issues such as limited financial resources, poor treatment, and legal and social discrimination must be considered as they relate to QOL. Tann indicated, however, that despite the large degree of ethnic diversity with the Latino population, a shared ethnic identity does seem to exist due to shared cultural values

and language similarities. Thus, there appears to be some common cultural patterns that contribute to their unique identity and QOL. Triandis (1989) indicated that one primary characteristic is that of being a collectivist culture where people place a higher value on the family and larger community than they do on the individual. Central tenets of collectivist cultures include interpersonal relationships and the interaction between individual, family, and the environment (Gloria, Ruiz, & Castillo, 2003; Triandis & Suh, 2002). The nuclear family in the Latino culture often includes the immediate family, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and members in the community unrelated by blood. Purnell and Paulanka (2003) indicated that this concept of nuclear family often leads to multigenerational Latino households which are much less common in the dominant population. Thus, the concept of QOL within the Latino culture may be more reflective and responsive of the family and the larger community than to specific individuals.

In contrast to the collectivist culture, members of an individualistic culture emphasize the goals and values of the individual rather than those of the community (Triandis & Suh, 2002). Further, the concept of “overall health” from an individualistic perspective is typically defined as personal and individual whereas in the Latino culture it is more reflective and responsive to the larger community. It should be noted that some have suggested Latinos believe in a certain degree of inevitability related to their health, and that their health is to some extent related to “good luck” or the will of a higher power (Davison, Frankel, & Smith, 1992; McCarthy, Ruiz, Gale, Karam, & Moore, 2004; Welch, Comer, & Steinman, 1973). However additionally, health and overall quality of life is believed to be closely linked to personal relationships *outside* one’s self with those in the larger community (Tann, 2005) and may include feelings of safety, trust and community well-being. For example, Kagawa-Singer (1988) proposed a “transcultural framework” of QOL. Within this framework, the broad domains of quality of life include the need for safety and security (i.e., food, shelter, physical comfort), a sense of integrity and meaning or purpose in one’s life (i.e., perceiving oneself to be a contributing member of one’s group), and a sense of belonging (i.e., connection to others). All of these factors are considered vital to one’s overall QOL. Along these same lines, the goal of this study was to examine what factors affect the QOL of Latino residents of Little Village—a dominant residential enclave in Chicago.

METHODS

This study employed qualitative methodology—focus groups with Latino American residents of Little Village and interviews with stakeholders in this community.

Focus Groups

Two focus groups were conducted between June and September 2007. One of the focus groups was conducted with Latino residents born in the U.S. and one with first generation immigrants. Eleven Latinos (6 men and 5 women) took part in the focus groups. Participants' ages ranged from 18 years old to the mid-60s. They included a nanny, a teacher, a teaching assistant, a car mechanic, two students, an unemployed individual, two stay at home mothers, and two factory workers. All the interviewees were of Mexican descent.

Focus groups lasted between one and a half and two and a half hours. The interview with first generation immigrants was conducted in Spanish and the one with Latinos born in the U.S. was conducted in English. One of the focus groups was conducted in the residence of one of the participants and one was in the residence of one of the researchers. Participants were paid \$25 for participation. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and the one conducted in Spanish was subsequently translated to English by the Mexican-American researcher involved in the project.

Interviews

In order to clarify and expand the data obtained from focus groups with residents, 11 interviews with stakeholders in Little Village were conducted. The interviewees included Carlos (a high-ranking member of Little Village Community Development Corporation [LVCDC], recently renamed Enlace), Isabel, Elena, Ricardo, and Pedro (four members of –Little Village Environmental Justice Organization [LVEjo]), Raul (a high-ranking member of the 10th District of Chicago Police Department), Michael (one of the pastors of Little Village Community Church), Maria (a high-ranking member of the local park district), Fernando (one of the Principals of Little Village High School), Enrique (alderman of a local city ward) and Luis (assistant to the alderman). All of the interviewees, with the exception of one (the pastor), were Latino. Eight of them were men and three were women. The youngest interviewee was 18 years old and the oldest was in his late 50s. The interviews were conducted in the offices of the stakeholders. They lasted between 25 minutes (one interview) and 2 hours 45 minutes (three interviews). All of the interviews were conducted in English by the first author of this paper. They were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Pseudonyms were used when referring to all study participants.

Analysis of the Focus Groups and Interview Data

After all the focus groups/interviews had been transcribed, the transcripts were analyzed using a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss,

1967). In order to isolate the themes and subthemes and to group them into categories, each focus group/interview transcript was independently read several times by all two researchers and then discussed until a consensus was reached on the classification of the data. After all the relevant points had been synthesized, the transcripts were re-read again to ensure all of the important aspects of the phenomena had been included.

FINDINGS

The five main themes identified in this study—environmental degradation, insufficient access to open spaces, low sense of community, fear of crime, and undocumented status of many residents were significantly interrelated. We grouped them based on the scale of their effect—from those that operated at the broadest scale impacting all residents (environmental issues) to those that affected only individual Latinos (undocumented status).

Environmental Issues

Many focus group participants brought up the issue of environmental degradation in Little Village as negatively affecting quality of life of local residents. Daniel was the one to start the discussion: “There is manufacturing here. Very toxic!” Paulina picked up his story: “There is [a] train at the end of the block that passes all the time and [pointing to a tall red and white smoke stack towering above the community] there is a power plant here.” Asked if pollution was an issue in the community, she replied, “It probably is. You don’t see it, but it’s here.” Other interviewees also believed that the coal power plant was the leading pollutant in the community. As Elena from LVejo commented, “Right here we have over 250 industries in the community. And some of them pose higher health threats than others but still . . . the coal power plant is definitely the leading pollutant.” Ricardo, also from LVejo, made a direct connection to the issue of environmental justice: “It’s not a coincidence that these coal power plants are all located within either Black or Latino community. It’s environmental injustice. ‘Cause it’s a low income immigrant community they are gonna take advantage of.” Focus group participants also made note of the industrial smells present throughout the community and to the Stickney Water Reclamation Plant, the largest wastewater treatment facility in the world, which was located on the outskirts of Little Village. Issues of environmental justice were related not only to the presence of undesirable industry in the neighborhood, but also to the lack of quality open spaces (equivalent of Mexican *zócalo*) available to the residents and to the fact that the existing public spaces, including the only park in the community, were poorly maintained, unsafe, and overcrowded.

Lack of Open Spaces

Our study revealed that Little Village has only 61 acres of public open space—the second lowest open space-to-resident ratio of the 77 Chicago community areas (LVCDC, 2005). With its 23 acres, Piotrowski Park is the neighborhood's only large park (the remaining are block-size “pocket parks”). Asked whether they thought Little Village had sufficient access to natural areas, participants were in agreement. For instance, Belen replied,

Definitely not! I live on 31st and Pulaski. There is only in existence one park. It is also very small for all the people that live there. A lot of times we pass driving through there and it's always full. My kids need more sociability and they are no places where they can be. There is need for more parks.

Martha linked Little Village residents' desire for open spaces to their limited access to backyards and to the traditional Mexican culture.

In Little Village not a lot of people have backyards. And you can't just let your kids running by themselves. They need to play. In Mexico there are bigger spaces than just an apartment. Some people don't have backyards and they are used to being outdoors. You walk a lot in Mexico. You do a lot outside. You are used to that.

All of the stakeholders agreed that lack of open spaces negatively contributed to the quality of life of Little Village residents. Elena from LVejo commented,

We have been struggling as a community for open space for a long time. With a community of this size we should have at least 120 acres of open space [referring to the city's official Cityspace Plan], and we are barely at maybe 20–25 acre mark.

Besides overcrowding, both focus group participants and the stakeholders also commented on the poor quality of open spaces available in the community. Paulina, one of the interviewees, described Piotrowski Park:

It is disgusting! When it rains it is always flooded on the path around the park. There are these big holes that they just filled them up with rocks and part of the track around the park. There is broken glass all around. The water runs in the bathroom. The pool is just crowded, dirty. There is [sic] just too many people there.

Maria, a high ranking member of the local park district and one of the people responsible for managing Piotrowski Park, described park's

improvement initiatives and commented on problems with maintaining park space in Little Village.

I've never seen as much graffiti, tagging, as in this community. It costs so much money to remove the graffiti from park buildings! Our [Latino] families do not respect the park the way they should, they throw away diapers, food. I have asked people personally to respect the park "Would you throw this dirty diaper on the floor in your house?" "Would you throw this plate on your own floor?" You are only as good as your community is!

Lack of care shown to the only park in the neighborhood seemed to be related to broader issue of lack of sense of community in Little Village. While some focus group participants and interviewees commented that Latino families took very good care of their households and backyards, they were less careful when it came to common places in the neighborhood.

Lack of Sense of Community

Many interviewees commented that local residents were unlikely to work together to improve the quality of life in the community. Focus groups revealed a sense of helplessness among the residents and lack of belief that things in their community were going to change. Paulina made a comment with respect to the poor maintenance of the local park described in the previous theme: "Yeah, they [Little Village residents] will sit and complain but no one actually cares, takes a stand or anything." Daniel shook his head "I don't think it's about not caring, it's just believing that the change might happen. It's this sense that you can do something but nothing is going to happen, so why bother? It speaks towards the apathy among people."

Pastor Michael and Alderman Enrique provided two reasons for the low involvement of residents in the matters of their own community—their preoccupation with matters of everyday life and constant strive for survival, and traditional customs brought from their home country. Pastor Michael commented,

I think it's the fact that people are so busy. If you're working 7 days a week 12 hours a week plus raising 5 kids, plus going to church on Sunday ... I don't have time for these things! And I think that for a lot of people if they had time they would probably do something, but everything else gets pushed out of the way when you gotta get food on the table.

Immigrant belief in self-reliance, lack of trust in government, and differences in legal and cultural systems between Mexico and the U.S. were also

brought up as possible reasons for the low sense of community. Alderman Enrique commented,

Because they are immigrant, because they understand they came here on their own, it's sort of that work ethic as well as, you know, "nobody's really taking care of me, nobody's really done anything for me." So they have low expectations of their local government and local communities. It's something that comes from Mexico, low expectations for their government that served them before. Therefore they don't really get involved.

Frequent mobility of the population also created feelings of mistrust toward strangers and lack of responsibility for public resources. Fear of crime and overpopulation heightened feelings of mistrust toward the newcomers. Paulina, a 20-year-old student commented,

People are upset over overpopulation. You don't know what kind of people are coming into your neighborhood. There is this kind of fear in general. People want safety. They look at newcomers like, "Who are you?" "What are you about?" Just because you don't know if they are a good, honest, hard working people, or they are having friends who steal or stuff like that.

Fear of crime, and of gang crime in particular, not only led to low sense of community among Little Village residents, but was also one of the most important factors negatively affecting their quality of life.

Fear of Crime

According to the interviewed police commander, in 2008, there were six Latino gangs operating in 4.4 square miles of Little Village: *Ambrose, Satan Disciples, Two-Six, Two-Two Boys, Latin Kings*, and *Insane Cullerton Deuces*. Lawndale Avenue divided the community along a north-south axis (see Figure 2). The area roughly west of Lawndale Avenue was controlled by Two-Six (a gang belonging to the Folks Nation Alliance) and a large portion of the area east of Lawndale Avenue was controlled by Latin Kings (belonging to the Peoples Nation).¹ Frequent fights over the control of gang territory, retaliations for perceived infractions of gang rules, and drug dealings led to frequent drive-by shootings, victims of whom were often innocent bystanders. These incidents contributed to constant feelings of fear among Little Village residents and to their perception that gangs "took control of the entire neighborhood."

Many focus group participants reminisced about the dangers of living in a gang-ridden community. Martha, a 25-year old teacher's assistant

recalled an incident that happened to her and her friend from an adjacent neighborhood:

Two days ago a friend came from Cicero. He drove to here and his brother was wearing a cap and he was wearing it regularly. He wasn't doing anything and they started asking him. And they ended up punching his brother who was on the passenger side before they were able to pull up the windows.

Fear caused by gang activity restricted residents' use of public spaces, especially during certain hours. People were reluctant to take their children for walks in the neighborhood, to spend time in backyards, to visit parks, and to travel at night in their community, especially through the territory controlled by a different gang from the one that was "in charge" of their part of the neighborhood. Several of the participants remarked that gang activity decreased their desire to visit Piotrowski Park. Others indicated that they visited the park, but only at certain times of the day when the gang activity was at its minimum and commented that one needed to be careful about dress patterns while walking in the neighborhood.

All of the stakeholders confirmed the detrimental effect of fear of crime on the quality of life of residents of Little Village. Some recounted their own experiences with gangs and offered their opinions on causes of the gang problem. For instance, Carlos, a high ranking member of LVCDC/Enlace commented,

Crime is a serious problem in the community both in terms of what people say when you talk to them [and] about the quality of life. It's a major challenge that the community has to contend with if we are to improve quality of life. People feel more helpless about doing something and they feel that they can become victims of gang violence whether they are involved or not.

Raul, a high ranking member of the 10th District of Chicago Police Department whose jurisdiction includes Little Village commented that children as young as 10–11 years old were recruited into gangs and that "gang-banging" was a tradition in many families. He noted,

By the time the kids are in fifth grade they are already identifying with the group and they see some of these older gang members as their older cousins sort of. And both of these communities, especially Two-Six and Latin King and Satan Disciples have two-three generations of families that are gangs. They call themselves a Nation because it's almost synonymous with the word "family."

Undocumented status of many residents and, thus fear of deportation prevented them from seeking help of local authorities in trying to combat gang problem in the community. Daniel, a young Little Village resident commented,

There is an issue about illegality. If you are undocumented you don't want to go and speak up. If you do, they may ask you "Who are you?" You can't do that. You just got to deal with the problems and you deal with the gang bangers issue yourself.

Undocumented Status

Lack of legal status not only affected residents' ability to deal with the crime issue, but also prevented them from obtaining quality jobs, protecting their rights in the workplace, and using community services to the full extent. Lack of documentation led to a constant fear of deportation, negatively affected the types of jobs the residents could obtain, constrained their mobility (lack of driver's license) and thus, ability to travel outside of the neighborhood. As Pastor Michael commented,

That goes back to that culture of fear. If you keep your mouth shut and you do what you are supposed to do, you are fine. And that's just kind of the way it is and so people don't cause ripples. If something happens at work that's not just quite right, you are not gonna go to talk to your boss about it, you are not gonna make a scene. These are all quality of life issues that I feel are tied to each other. The fact that [because of immigration status] people can't get decent jobs, the fact that people live in fear, the fact that people won't necessarily look for help they could get because they are afraid. People won't go and get services because they afraid of getting in the system.

Living in a constant fear of deportation not only contributed to negative community dynamics, but also had significant negative psychological consequences for the residents. Pastor Michael continued,

When there is fear, people respond in a certain way. You always have this sitting over you, it's going to cause more conflict, and violence, and depression. You know, all these things are gonna come because you are constantly living in a state of fear. Yeah, it's psychological emotional trauma for the people, it's gonna have this across the board effect.

Immigration raids contributed to the feelings of fear among undocumented immigrants. As Alderman Enrique observed, "They've seen raids on Little Village, they've seen the agents come and some of those neighborhoods

and it brought a little bit of chaos . . .” Ricardo (LVejo) also commented on the immigration raids Little Village:

This past summer we had a lot of ICE [U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement] raids in the community. They raided our local mall. They came in with machine guns, huge machine guns! So that’s the power, that’s intimidation, right there . . . that they are using.

Although fear of immigration raids only affected a portion of the community (those of undocumented status), almost each of the residents was either related to someone or knew a person who was affected by the lack of documentation. Thus, although fear of deportation was not as widely affecting quality of life of local residents as environmental degradation or lack of open spaces, the impact on their everyday life seemed to be even more severe. Stories of people rounded up during raids in workplaces, laundromats, or during trips to the mall, of families torn apart by deportation, and of children being left without parents reverberated strongly in the narratives of the community.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our study has helped to identify a combination of factors that affect the quality of life of Latino residents of a dominant residential enclave with an established gateway city of Chicago. Literature on each of these factors, as they relate to the Latino immigration to the U.S., does exist, but varies greatly in scope. Our findings are consistent with the conclusions of some of this work, but simultaneously tend to contradict other research. Most importantly, however, our work suggests that in order to fully appreciate the extent to which such factors affect the lives of immigrants, they need to be examined in relation to each other. For instance, while issues such as the lack of open spaces and environmental degradation affected all residents, even if they were to be addressed, still it would not result in improving the quality of life for many Latinos in the community. Several of our focus group participants commented that even if new parks were developed, they would likely quickly deteriorate and be overtaken by gangs if the community itself did not take care of its assets. Thus, it was the lack of the sense of community and the belief that “no matter what we do things are not going to change” that decreased many of its residents’ willingness to work to improve the resources available at the community level. Undocumented status, although it affected only a select portion of residents, seemed to be the root cause of many of the community’s problems. It contributed to the peoples’ inability and unwillingness to deal with the gang problem (contacts with the police were generally avoided) and to participate in improvement efforts that

required contact with elected officials and, thus necessitated “coming out of the shadows.” The attitude that “if I only take care of myself and don’t stick my head out, I will somehow survive” led to the decreased quality of life among all the residents as change in terms of improved quality of natural environment and increased safety could only come if residents were willing to make their voices heard and to work in partnership with the community stakeholders. Thus, while factors negatively affecting quality of life of local Latinos could be broadly classified into those that operated at the community level (e.g., environmental degradation and lack of access to quality natural environments) and to those at the individual level (e.g., undocumented status), these two levels were inseparably linked.

Several of the findings of this study directly relate to the quality of life literature. As Padilla (2003) argued, the influence of culture on quality of life is often overlooked and when these two concepts are connected to one another their mutual interactions are difficult to disentangle. Although there are numerous definitions of quality of life in the literature, they seldom mention culture. According to Padilla (2003), “This omission is understandable, since culture/ethnicity are generally viewed as factors that shape the meaning of quality of life, but are not attributes or dimensions of the construct” (p. 19). The connection between culture and quality of life is clear in this study in that the Latino culture is the context in which quality of life factors are measured. As noted by Triandis (1989), traditionally the Latino culture tends to be more collectivist, where people place a high value on family and the larger community. Being connected to one’s family and community are considered vital to overall quality of life. Thus, it is particularly troubling that one of the major themes in the study was the lack of sense of community among the residents of Little Village. One interviewee noted that there is “constant movement in this neighborhood” and thus a sense of community is difficult to develop. Further, many people spoke of distrust among neighbors because of the mobile population. Neighbors do not get to know one another because people are constantly moving in and out of the community. Thus, those who place a high value on feeling like a member of a larger community may be disillusioned and disappointed, and thus have a lower overall quality of life. Additionally, residents’ had a high fear of crime in their community. They did not feel safe, sometimes not even in their own yards. The participants did not describe any open spaces where they could enjoy one another’s company and have fellowship among neighbors. Rather, they described spaces where they felt frightened and spaces they avoided for fear of crime. They also felt fear due to their undocumented status, which led to feelings of distrust and restricted their ability to take advantage of community services. All of these findings illustrate barriers for developing a collectivist culture in Little Village. Thus, based on the findings of this study, the residents of Little Village do not have a collectivist culture where they place a high value on the larger community. These findings also relate to

the transcultural framework of quality of life developed by Kagawa-Singer (1988). Based on the findings of this study, residents are struggling to feel safe and secure in their neighborhoods and they are lacking a sense of belonging to the greater community, both of which were important domains described in the framework. Many are fighting just to survive, and thus are simply out to save themselves and their immediate love ones. Thus, because of a lack of collectiveness, which is essential to the Latino culture, the quality of life for residents in Little Village is poor. As the Latino population in the United States continues its rapid growth, the need to understand the effect of factors such as environmental quality and access to open spaces, sense of community, fear of crime, and undocumented status of immigrants on their quality of life will become increasingly important.

Findings of the study provided further evidence to support the long-standing line of research on environmental justice and environmental racism that claims that residents of low-income minority communities suffer disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards and related health risks (Bullard, 1994; Taylor, 2000). Interviewees not only complained that laws and regulations regarding environmental toxins were not being enforced in Little Village (Bullard, 1994), but also recounted stories of how pollution emitted by the local industry and power plant led to high incidence of asthma among the residents and made people concerned about allowing their children to play outside. Environmental issues were not only related to the presence of undesirable industry in the community, but also to the absence of quality open spaces. One may claim that such issues are particularly detrimental to the quality of life of minorities who have on average larger families, are accustomed to having access to open spaces in their home country, and lack the resources to travel to suburban communities in search of quality natural environments. Since parks and other natural areas often provide the only opportunity for low cost recreation, restricted access to such environments is likely to have a detrimental effect on minorities' quality of life.

Our finding of the low sense of community among residents of Little Village is contrary to the evidence provided in the studies by Portes (e.g., Portes & Bach, 1985; Portes & Jensen, 1989) of the economic, social, and psychological benefits of in-group solidarity typical to some Latino communities (e.g., Cuban Americans). While many of our participants spoke of the strong ties that bonded them with their family members and friends, they also remarked of the lack of trust pervasive in the community. In fact, erosion of social networks was one of the most salient factors they perceived to differentiate their experience of living in this ethnic enclave in Chicago from their home towns in Mexico. While Putnam (2005) raised the issue of competition for scarce resources that may lead to the low social capital, our participants were more likely to attribute it to overpopulation, frequent mobility of residents, high levels of crime, overwork, and preoccupation with

matters of day-to-day survival. Similar factors were identified by Foner (2008) in her analysis of an established immigrant gateway of New York City.

Our findings of the pervasive effects of crime on the quality of lives of Latino residents are in line with the findings of the criminology literature. In particular, it has been suggested that gang activity might be important in producing fear among urban residents, as gangs are often portrayed as “ruthless” and their attacks frequently victimize innocent bystanders caught in the cross-fire of drive-by shootings (Lane & Meeker, 2003, 2005). Gang violence described in this study was random, difficult to control, and it victimized people in environments that should be safe, such as parks, playgrounds, and busy streets. As such, it was significantly more likely to produce fear and more difficult to negotiate by taking “common sense precautions,” such as avoiding dangerous places at certain times of the day (Mehta & Bondi, 1999). Moreover, it was not just certain areas such as down towns and the wilderness that were seen as unsafe (Keane, 1998; Mehta & Bondi, 1996), but rather the residential spaces that “belonged” to the interviewees where they spent most of their time. Based on that, we can postulate that fear of crime is particularly detrimental to the quality of life among minorities, as crime is present on daily basis in their communities and it is more difficult to negotiate using “standard” methods employed by middle class residents of more affluent neighborhoods. Fear of crime identified in this study was heightened by people’s sense of hopelessness and belief that the circumstances in their community were not going to improve. Undocumented status of many residents and the resulting inability to seek police protection or to take a more active stance in matters of their own community compounded the problem.

Research on the negative effects of undocumented status on immigrants’ quality of life is rapidly developing. According to recent estimates, there were over 12 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S. in 2007, representing 26% of the total foreign-born population. Mexicans made up more than half of undocumented immigrants (Capps & Fortuny, 2007). A survey of undocumented workers conducted in Illinois in 2002 showed that they were mostly employed in service and manual-labor occupations, earned low wages, worked in unsafe conditions, had low rates of health insurance, and reported hour violations at considerably higher rates than the documented workers (Mehta, Theodore, Mora, & Wade, 2002). Findings of our study also hinted to the stress brought to the lives of undocumented Latino immigrants by the recent ICE raids conducted in Chicago. The effects of recent intensification of immigration enforcement by the federal government on the economic and emotional well-being of immigrants and their families, including underage children, are only beginning to be investigated.

We believe it would be beneficial if future research directly compared quality of life issues in the traditional and emerging gateway communities as well as among members of the same group residing in inner city

communities and suburban areas. We may speculate that while issues such as lack of access to open spaces and poor quality of natural environments are likely to lose their prominence as immigrants move to suburban localities and new immigrant gateways, new factors are likely to emerge. In fact, the existing scholarship is already beginning to document other factors that may impinge on the quality of life of the immigrant residents. For instance, Odem (2008) and Price and Singer (2008) documented cases of poor reception and exclusionary practices aimed at undocumented immigrants settling in new immigrant gateway communities unaccustomed to high immigration flows. In response to complaints from residents concerned about overcrowding of homes in suburban neighborhoods, local authorities have pursued both stricter enforcement of existing housing codes and occupancy limits, and passed new ordinances to tighten regulations of immigrant households. Many municipalities have also passed anticongregating ordinances directed at day laborers and laws requiring that English be used in signs and billboards in front of local businesses and offices. A good example of anti-immigrant sentiments was the passage of Senate Bill 529 in Georgia that, among others, denied tax-supported benefits, including healthcare to adults who cannot prove legal residence and required police to check legal status of people arrested for felony and DUI and to report any undocumented immigrants (Odem, 2008). Price and Singer also reported cases of interracial tensions in new emerging gateways and laws that restrict house sales and rentals to only those who can show proof of legal residence. Additionally, Fennelly and Orfield (2008) documented tensions among local residents who blamed new immigrants for taking economic toll on the community, for their apparent lack of desire to assimilate into the American culture, and for creating challenge for local schools forced to accommodate the needs of immigrant children. Although such cases are beginning to be documented with increased frequency, many questions remain unanswered. For instance, will Latino residents of the emerging gateways develop a stronger sense of community? Or will issues such as fear of safety and lack of sense of community be as pronounced in neighborhoods with higher proportion of Latinos born in the U.S. as they are in Little Village?

Although this study offered a number of interesting results, it also had some important limitations. It provided only a qualitative examination of one community in Chicago, and thus, its results may not be generalizable to other communities across the U.S. Future research may wish to employ scientifically rigorous and culture-appropriate objective measures of quality of life so the findings are more transferable to other communities. Moreover, the current study identified only a very limited range of factors that affected the quality of life of local residents and did not explore issues that were suggested by previous research, such as lack of access to preventative and primary health care, high rates of teen pregnancy, separation anxiety, lack of language proficiency, and underperforming schools in many immigrant

communities. However, it would be quite difficult, if at all possible, to tackle all these pertinent issues in a single investigation. Moreover, the findings of this study painted an unjustly bleak picture of life in this established residential enclave and discussed only in passing the community initiatives to improve the quality of life in this neighborhood and the benefits accrued from living in this community (e.g., cultural familiarity, ethnic pride, access to ethnic services, access to friends and family members from their own country, access to jobs in the ethnic labor market). Such issues should be explored more in-depth in future research on the topic.

The findings of the study present some practical information that may be useful to both stakeholders and residents of established residential enclaves. For example, residents commented on several concerns related to their undocumented status. One issue raised by interviewees was that their fear of deportation prevented them from seeking help from local authorities in trying to combat gang problems. Further, this fear prevented them from serving as witnesses to crimes. The police authorities need to continue or even increase their efforts to communicate to the residents that neither of these actions would result in deportation. Issues of trust have to be addressed if the police and the residents are to work together and if progress is to be made in addressing the gang problems in the community. Both residents and stakeholders spoke of a lack of sense of community and thus community-building programs are needed to begin addressing this issue. It would be desirable to continue or even expand neighborhood watch programs that are useful in both combating crime and instilling a sense of community. These programs are typically initiated through police departments, which would offer an opportunity for positive contact with police personnel. Lack of safe places to gather and socialize must be addressed. Residents, churches, schools and the police department should work together to offer regularly scheduled street festivals and fairs. These events would serve as community enriching experiences and with active involvement by the police, would offer safe environments for neighborhood fellowship. During summer months these events could be held every Sunday evening and include concerts, plays, family movies, dances and games. These regular events would offer neighbors an opportunity to get to know one another in a safe and social environment.

The objective of this study was to examine quality of life issues within Little Village—an established dominant residential enclave at the heart of a major gateway city. The study identified a number of interrelated factors negatively affecting quality of life of local Latino residents—environmental degradation, insufficient access to open spaces, low sense of community, fear of crime, and undocumented status of many residents. While most of the existing work tends to focus on spatial, social, and economic aspects of migration, quality of life issues are often absent from the contemporary discourses of immigration. Thus, this study provides an important addition

to our understanding of the complexity of the Latino immigrant experiences at both the urban and community gateway scales.

NOTE

1. Street gangs operating in the Chicago area are divided into two main groups formed in 1978. The main gangs associated with the *People Nation* include Vice Lords, Latin Kings, Cobra Stones, Latin Counts, Insane Unknowns, Spanish Lords, and the Gaylords. Gangs forming the *Folk Nation* alliance include Black Gangster Disciples, Spanish Cobras, Gangster Disciples, Maniac Latin Disciples, Satan Disciples, and Spanish Gangster Disciples. The People Nation Gangs wear all identifiers to the left, while the Folk Nation gangs were their identifiers to the right. The People Nation alliance in most instances utilizes a five-pointed star and the Folks gangs—six point star in their gang graffiti.

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