

LATINOS-PEW Dec-14-2009 (970 words)

## **Study of Latino youths sees optimism, hope amid struggles**

By Patricia Zapor

[Catholic News Service](#)

WASHINGTON (CNS) -- A major study of the values, circumstances and aspirations of Latino youths paints a portrait of optimism and enthusiasm in the face of significant struggles, including inadequate education, problems with their immigration status and high rates of poverty.

The study by the Pew Hispanic Center released Dec. 11 highlights many similarities between the way previous generations of immigrants and recent Latino immigrants and their children become a part of American society. And it notes that Hispanic cultural traditions of close family ties, religious faith and hard work remain strong even several generations after a family resettles in the United States.

Ties to church were singled out as a particularly strong influence in helping young Latinos avoid getting involved with gangs.

"Between Two Worlds: How Young Latinos Come of Age in America" reported on a national survey sample of more than 2,000 Hispanics questioned in August and September. Focus groups from Chicago, California, New Jersey, Maryland and the District of Columbia provided further information.

One particularly pervasive problem faced by Latino youths more so than other demographic groups, the survey reported, is that they are much more likely to become involved with weapons, fights and gangs, and more likely to land in jail or prison.

First-generation and second-generation offspring of Hispanic immigrants in particular are more likely than immigrants themselves to have been in fights or have friends or family members who are in a gang, the Pew report said.

It noted that 7 percent of youths who are immigrants reported getting into a fight and 17 percent said they know someone in a gang. That compares to 16 percent of U.S.-born Latino youths who had been in a fight and 41 percent who said they know someone in a gang.

One factor for that, the study suggested, is that immigrants tend to be more involved with their churches than do later generation Latinos. And "young Hispanics who are highly religious are significantly less likely than others to engage in risky behaviors," it said.

Young Latinos who attend church services at least once a week are less likely to say they have had contact with the police, gotten into a fight, carried a weapon or ever been in a gang, it said.

"Regular attendees of religious services also are less likely to say they have ever been in a gang (2 percent versus 7 percent) or to have been questioned by police in the past year (17 percent versus 25 percent)."

Forty-one percent of immigrant Latinos said they attend religious services weekly, compared to 31 percent of those born in the United States. Among both immigrants and U.S.-born Latino youths, those who attend church regularly were only half as likely to report being threatened with a weapon in the previous year -- 5 percent -- compared to their peers who are less religiously involved -- 12 percent, it said.

The report did not analyze the connection between avoiding violence and going to church, beyond saying "religion may help explain why immigrants, who tend to be more religious than native-born Latinos, are less likely to tempt fate by carrying weapons, getting into fights or joining gangs."

Among some of the other findings in the 100-page report:

-- Large majorities of Hispanics, both young and old, immigrant and U.S.-born are satisfied with their lives and optimistic about their futures. U.S.-born Latinos are even more optimistic about being upwardly mobile than are immigrants, with more than three quarters saying they expect to be better off financially than their parents. Just 66 percent of immigrant Latinos say the same.

-- Among all young Latinos, 89 percent ranked being successful in a career as very important. There was no difference among immigrants or U.S.-born people. The next priority listed as very important was "having children," cited by 50-60 percent, followed by "being married," cited by 41-53 percent. "Being wealthy" was cited as very important by between 21 and 28 percent of Latino youths.

-- "Living a religious life," was listed as a very important priority by 60 percent of immigrant Latinos, and by 51 percent of all Latino youths. That compares to the 39 percent of the general population age 16-25 who considered a religious life very important.

-- Latino youths even a generation removed from their family's home country tend to support the tradition of children living at home with their parents until they marry. Sixty-nine percent of all Latinos agreed with that tradition, as did 61 percent of those between ages 16 and 25. Eighty-one percent of immigrants agreed with the statement, while just half of first generation U.S.-born youths agreed and only 45 percent of those whose parents also were born in the U.S.

-- Across all generations, more than 85 percent of all Latinos believe that "relatives are more important than friends."

-- All Latinos attend church services at about the same frequency as the general population. Among young Hispanics, 40 percent of immigrants attend religious services at least weekly, compared to 31 percent of those whose families have been in the U.S. at least two generations.

-- Among all Latinos, 60 percent identify themselves as Catholic, followed by 14 percent who say they are evangelical. Among immigrants, 66 percent of young people are Catholic. That figure declines to 49 percent among U.S.-born Latino youths. U.S. native Latino young adults are more likely to describe their religion as "other."

The report was drawn from National Survey of Latinos and an oversample of 1,240 Hispanics between the ages of 16 and 25, interviewed for the Pew Hispanic Center by Social Science Research Solutions. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish, by cell phone and land line.

The margin of error for the full study is plus or minus 3.7 percentage points, and plus or minus 4.6 percentage points for the survey of 16- to 25-year-olds.

END

---

Copyright (c) 2009 [Catholic News Service](#)/USCCB. All rights reserved.

This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or otherwise distributed.

CNS • 3211 Fourth St NE • Washington DC 20017 • 202.541.3250