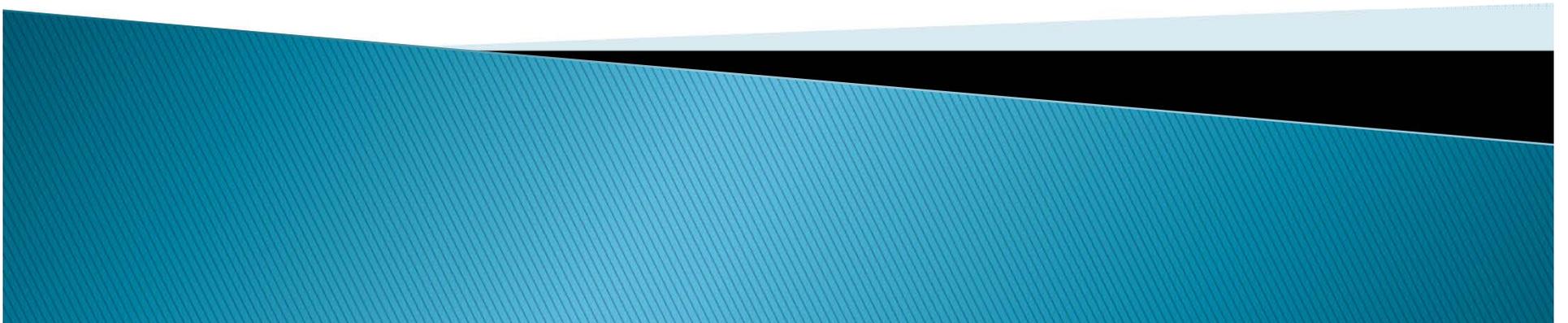


# Moving around to get by and try to get ahead

Immigration experiences in new settlement  
communities of the Midwest



- ▶ This presentation is based on a previously published article.
- ▶ Valdivia, C. and Dannerbeck, A. 2009. Moving around to get by and try to get ahead: Immigration experiences in new settlement communities of the midwest. *Professional Development The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education*, 12, 3, 29–41.



# Research Question

- ▶ What are the mechanisms that impact the upward mobility of Latino immigrants in new settlement communities?
- ▶ What mechanisms are of particular relevance for Latinas?



# Methods

- ▶ Case studies to capture breadth of experience
- ▶ Interviewees are representative of Latino settlers in the Midwest
- ▶ Community gatekeepers assisted in recruitment
- ▶ Interviews conducted in Spanish at home or in a community center



# Note about social and political climate of the time

- ▶ Immigration debate emerged at the national, state, and local level around the time of the interviews
- ▶ Increased the sense of insecurity among potential interviewees
- ▶ Required more time in becoming acquainted before talking about study topics



# Analytic Strategy

- ▶ Interviews were transcribed and translated
- ▶ Coded for primary factors regarding labor mobility
- ▶ Secondary analysis to identify mechanisms that facilitate and impede mobility
- ▶ Labor mobility includes: movement between communities, jobs, and positions within a job locale



# Participant Status at Arrival in US

Marital status	Age	Education	Documentation
Married	24	HS	Unauthorized
Single	22	HS	Unauthorized
Single	26	HS	Authorized
Married	39	Univ	Authorized
Married	44	Univ	Unauthorized
Married	25	Tech	Unauthorized
Single	14	Primary	Authorized
Married	29	Primary	Unauthorized

# How we arrived

- ▶ Family Networks
- ▶ Motivated to 'seek a better life'
  - Better wages (higher and more steady)
  - More work opportunities
  - Safer community
  - Family reunification
  - More resources for children



# Moving in and settling down

- ▶ The moving process
  - An event for some
  - Staged migration for most
    - Staged for individuals
    - Staged for family members
- ▶ Settling
  - The job search
  - Overcoming the challenges of cultural isolation and small town atmosphere
  - The decision to stay



# Settling– The Job Search

- ▶ The facilitators
  - Contractors, family and social networks
  - ICE raids and labor demand
- ▶ The challenges
  - The ‘bad’ season
  - English ability



# Settling The Challenges

- ▶ Cultural Isolation
  - Being the only one
  - Lack of time and energy to develop networks
  - Limited English and accent
  - Documentation status
- ▶ Small town atmosphere
  - Quiet and safe, yes, but too many busybodies
  - *All Latinos are Mexican*
  - Documentation and risk of detection



# Settling

## Overcoming the Challenges

- ▶ Overcoming isolation
  - Marry a local
  - Improve English, sometimes thru work
- ▶ Adjusting to a small town
  - Relying on a similar middle class background
  - Experience benefits for children



# Getting by

- ▶ The ability to acquire the necessities of life
- ▶ Strategies
  - Co-residential housing arrangements
  - Leave part of family in country of origin
  - Eating rice and beans



# Settling is hard– barriers to getting ahead

- ▶ Lack of employment opportunities– seasonality
- ▶ Language limitations
- ▶ Lack of educational opportunities
- ▶ Work environment/risk of injury
- ▶ Lack of community organization w/i Latino community
- ▶ Remittance obligations



# Coping strategies

- ▶ Day/night shift to avoid child care costs
- ▶ Unemployment benefits
- ▶ Work more hours
- ▶ Choosing job security over higher wages
- ▶ Strong work ethic
- ▶ Use social networks– informal and formal



# Getting ahead

- ▶ Success – Moving beyond just the basics (homes, cars, businesses)
- ▶ Through the acquisition of more material goods but also....
  - United family
  - Steady stream of employment
  - Safe community



# Mobility

- ▶ In the past, moving around provided opportunity
- ▶ Now it is an impediment to the ultimate indicator of getting ahead– an improved sense of well-being



# DOCUMENTATION

- ▶ Tends to vary within a family
- ▶ Associated fear of family separation, especially involving children
- ▶ Even one member without good documentation impedes family ability to get ahead
  - Increases isolation
  - Creates reluctance to expand local community networks
  - Impedes access to community institutions like banks



# Isolation

- ▶ Not driven by a hostile context of reception
- ▶ Impacted by women's own perceptions
  - Fear of detection (documentation)
  - Feel English abilities are lacking
  - Or accent too heavy



# Surprises

- ▶ Many of the women had been in US for years but not well integrated
- ▶ Even those who had long employment history at one company had not advanced much in pay or responsibility (10 yrs, 35 cents)



# Conclusions

- ▶ Settlers not immigrants or true newcomers
- ▶ Staying in place, no longer extremely mobile
- ▶ Getting ahead about more than money

