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An outcome and demographic profile of Latina and Non-Latina clients with substance abuse issues in family reunification services

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**An Outcome and Demographic Profile of Latina and
Non-Latina Clients with Substance Abuse Issues
in Family Reunification Services**

by
Carla Gomez

A Special Project
Presented to the Faculty of the
College of Social Work
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Social Work

Dr. Fred Prochaska, Chairperson
Marty Tweed, Faculty Field Advisor
Spring, 1996

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Thanks, Carla

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1. Introduction

This project is a program evaluation conducted at the Santa Cruz County Adult, Family, and Children's Services (AFCS) agency. The study focuses on the Family Reunification/Placement Division, and is an outcome evaluation which examines the provision of services during nearly a two year period. It specifically focuses on the population of women with substance abuse* problems. It is a comparison of two ethnic groups, Latinas and non-Latinas. The evaluation will assess the outcome of reunification with these client groups, and what may have been some of the circumstances that contributed to children being returned.

This type of evaluation is necessary in the field of child welfare today, with an unprecedented number of single-parent families entering the system in the past decade because the mother had an identified substance abuse problem (Azzi-Lessing & Olsen, 1996). It is estimated that substance abuse affects as many as 80 percent of all cases of substantiated abuse and neglect. Moreover, the current child welfare mandate with timelines for decision making become difficult to balance when chemical dependency enters the picture. The cycle of recovery does not always blend with the child's needs or the timelines for decision making. It is hoped that this evaluation will begin to paint a clearer picture of some of the characteristics that contribute to reunification outcomes.

This study focused on different characteristics which influenced children being reunited with their mothers following the reunification services they received. There was a correlation between family support as well as treatment completion, and an outcome of reunification. Less acculturated Latinas (primarily Spanish

* The term "substance abuse" refers to the use of a wide range of substances (including alcohol) whose chemical composition, physiological effects, and legal consequences vary greatly.

speaking) did not fare as well in achieving reunification as their more acculturated counterparts, or the entire group as a whole.

2. Context of Services

Adult, Family, and Children's Services (AFCS) is a division of the Santa Cruz County Human Resources Agency (HRA), a public government agency. AFCS provides services to the elderly, to disabled or dependent adults, and to children and families. Services are provided to clients throughout Santa Cruz County, with offices in Santa Cruz and Watsonville.

Children's Services is a division of AFCS, a County agency which works with children and families when a report of suspected child abuse or neglect is made. The County of Santa Cruz is authorized by State and Federal law to care and provide for children who have been abused, neglected, or who are at risk of being so treated. This program implements these legal mandates.

Children's Services first priority is to try to maintain children safely in their homes, but if that is not possible to provide foster homes until the children can be safely returned to their homes or freed for adoption. The Family Reunification program within Children's Services works to rehabilitate families in which children have been removed from the home, in order to return children in foster care to their homes. The program follows the philosophy set out by the 1980 Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act (PL 96-272). California Senate Bills 14 and 243 defined the guidelines for the state. The act seeks to reduce the number of out of home placements, and limit and monitor the process if it does occur, through the use of time lines and periodic court reviews (Pecora, Whittaker & Maluccio, 1992).

Services for children and families include Child Protective Services, In-Home Family Maintenance Services, Family Preservation Services, Healthy Start,

Foster Care Services, Adoptions, and Licensing of foster family and family day care homes. There are services provided in both north and south county.

The Child Protective Services Emergency Response program is the entry point to Children's Services, when a report of suspected child abuse or neglect is made. An estimated 5,700 children were assessed for possible child abuse or neglect during 1994-95. For 2,750 of these children an in-person investigation was initiated, and an assessment performed to determine the services needed to protect the child. Most of these children received crisis intervention and brief services. For 200 of these children, in-home supervision services were initiated and another 220 children were placed into emergency shelter or out-of-home care (Adult, Family, and Children's Services Division, 1995).

Family Maintenance Services are ongoing services that are available when it is determined that assistance is needed beyond the 30-day Emergency Response period. Family Maintenance assists children at risk of abuse or neglect who remain in their own homes or are returned home from foster care. The goal of this in-home supervision program is to help families overcome the conditions which endangered the child. Services may include specialized counseling, and parenting skills training. They may be voluntarily requested by the family or court ordered. The Family Maintenance caseload for the 1994-95 year was 125 children.

Family Preservation Services are also ongoing, and the program is in its second year of operation. The goal of the program is to avoid out-of-home placement or return children home earlier from foster care, through intensive counseling and support. In 1994-95, approximately 10 families involving 30 children received these services.

The Family Reunification program works to rehabilitate families in order to return children who have been placed in foster care to their homes. Through a

court process, it has been determined that children in out-of-home placements cannot safely remain at home. Problems with caretakers pose a serious risk to the child at the time of intervention/placement. The goal is to offer services to the family to correct the problems that initiated placement, such as counseling, substance abuse treatment, and parent education classes. The children are returned when the issues have been resolved. Periodic court reviews of the family's progress are held at 6, 12, and 18 months. Children may be returned home at any one of these junctures, if the family has demonstrated progress in their service plan, and have corrected the problems that led to the initial placement. If a judicial determination is made that a child cannot be returned home, then the child enters the Permanency Planning program and a permanent placement is found, preferably adoption. An average of 310 children were in foster care each month during 1994-95, 131 (42%) in Family Reunification. This program will be the focus of this study.

AFCS has a central office in Santa Cruz, and a satellite office in Watsonville. The majority of services are offered through the central office, which is in close proximity to other HRA resources. The Children's Services staff is comprised of 40 Social Workers, 6 Supervisors, 1 Public Health Nurse, 1 Agency Trainer, and assorted clerical and administrative staff. Of those with advanced degrees, 16 have MSW's (7 of these LCSW's), 4 have M.A.'s (3 MFCC's), and one is a Ph.D. candidate. There are eight Social Workers, and 2 Supervisors who are Spanish speaking, not including clerical or administrative staff.

AFCS social workers are guided by PL 96-272, the 1980 Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act. PL 96-272 defines current child welfare policy and practice today, including Family Reunification. The goal of the act was to ensure permanence for children lingering in foster care, preferably with their biological families, and to establish time deadlines for time spent in foster care. PL 96-272 established government responsibility to assist families so they do not fail

in their child-rearing function by providing social services that prevent removal, and reunification services and "reasonable efforts" when that removal occurs. The act incorporated a system of federal fiscal incentives and sanctions to induce and help states to change (Samantrai, 1992).

The historical backdrop of this law is that PL 96-272 occurred in the last year of the Carter administration. In the years following its passage during the Reagan administration, attempts were made to repeal it. What ensued was that the new regulations did not specify a minimum standard of service or mechanisms of enforcement. Thus, interpretation and implementation of "reasonable efforts" was left to the states, and thus today varies widely (Samantrai, 1992).

California's interpretation of reasonable efforts is defined in Welfare and Institutions Code, Section 16500 *et seq.* AFCS is expected to operate under these laws and regulations, but it is the California Juvenile Court system that puts the laws into effect. The authority of AFCS over child welfare matters is thus limited to making recommendations to the court.

AFCS must provide services in compliance with state and federal regulations to maintain funding of its programs. The state conducts periodic audits to ensure the county is adhering to California standards. The state collects data from county agencies which is sent to federal agencies to document compliance with PL 96-272 regulations. Information reviewed by the state includes the number and type of referrals reported, the range of services provided to clients, as well as demographic information on the client population.

Demographic information on children residing in out-of-home care is maintained in a state-wide computer database, the "Foster Care Information System" (FCIS), which is accessible to state auditors. AFCS' own system is called "SSRS," which keeps track of cases locally.

A Systems Review Committee exists within AFCS which is comprised of a panel of supervisors and administrators. They review case documentation and other procedures weekly, to ensure the agency is in compliance with state and federal regulations. Their concern is that clients are given proper access to services they are entitled to receive.

AFCS looks to the court system as well, for some degree of accountability. The Juvenile Court Commissioner interprets the laws regulating child welfare. AFCS activity, therefore, is overseen as well by the Superior Court judicial system.

AFCS serves all residents of Santa Cruz County. Santa Cruz County extends along a portion of the Pacific Ocean between Monterey and San Francisco. It is the second smallest in area of California's 58 counties, and ranks twenty-third in the state according to population. Total persons in the county are 229,734, and the total number of families are 53,752 (United Way, 1995). Santa Cruz is the largest municipality in the county, with a population of 49,040. Watsonville is the second largest with 31,099 residents. Sixty-one percent of the county's Latinos reside in Watsonville (1990 Census).

The 1990 Census reports the ethnic makeup of the entire county as follows: 74.5 percent Caucasian, 20.4 percent Latino, 3.3 percent Asian, 1 percent African American, .6 percent Native American, and .2 percent Other. The ethnic makeup of AFCS clientele is: 66.8 percent Caucasian, 26.8 percent Latino, 3.7 percent African American, and 1.4 percent Filipino.

For the fiscal year ending June, 1995, 312 children in Santa Cruz County were in out of home placements. Fifty-two percent of these were male, and forty-eight percent were female. The ethnicity of these children in placement are as follows: 54 percent Caucasian (Not Latino), 38 percent Latino, 5 percent African American (Not Latino), .09 percent American Indian or Alaskan Native, and .09 percent Filipino (State of California Health and Welfare Agency, 1996).

The following presenting problems are those which initiated placement of these children: 46 percent involved caretaker absence or incapacity, 26 percent concerned severe or general neglect, 11 percent related to physical abuse, 8 percent concerned sexual abuse, 7 percent were through voluntary placements, 1 percent due to relinquishment, while emotional abuse, exploitation, and child disability or handicap were less than 1 percent of all cases (State of California Health and Welfare Agency, 1996).

3. Theoretical Foundations and Literature Review

The literature review for this project focuses on the area of Family Reunification Services within Child Welfare, as well as the issue of substance abuse among women and Latinas.

Each year in the United States an estimated 100,000 (56%) of children placed in family foster care, group homes, or residential treatment centers are reunited with their families (Werrbach, 1993). Werrbach states,

The family reunification process involves a commitment to ecologically oriented and family-centered values that guide the practitioner through the assessment of the family's readiness to reunify, and provides a framework to the planning, development, implementation, and maintenance of a reunification plan, and ultimately, termination of placement (p. 556).

The ultimate goal of the Family Reunification program is to reunify families. As Werrbach explains above, this process involves the practitioner's accurate assessment of the family's problems that initiated placement, and plans for resolution of those problems with the eventual reunification of the family being the desired outcome.

Hess, Folaron, and Jefferson (1992) examined the effectiveness of Family Reunification Services, and cited the high proportion (29 to 33 percent) of children reentering the child welfare placement system as an outcome failure. They found that the most frequent contributor to placement reentry was the non resolution of

parent problems that warranted the placement to begin with. According to Hess et al. (1992), service delivery problems such as high caseloads and high staff turnover undermined the effectiveness of reunification. Neither state or local policy fully defined the minimum required to accomplish reunification.

Lindsey (1992) examined various client variables which contributed to the placement of children. For example, it was more than twice as likely that a child would be placed if legal sources referred, as opposed to the parent. Parents with drug or alcohol problems reached the foster care system primarily by child or professional referrals. When examining for race, there appeared to be a minimal association between that and placement. Data also showed that dependency and drug or alcohol problems were the main reasons for removal of children from non intact families (biological or adoptive father and mother did not live together). Employment status was the variable most likely to determine placement of children. Part-time employment in non intact families resulted in placement three times as often as full-time employment. Children from families with less stable sources of income such as alimony, and income from family and friends, were over 120 times more likely to be placed than if the family's income was from self-support.

Presently, there is an absence of literature in the area of substance abuse among Latinos, its extent in communities, causal factors, and prevention and treatment approaches (Sanchez Mayers & Kail, 1993). Gilbert and Cervantes (1986) believe that the research on alcohol has generated no empirical, only descriptive data, and has not tested hypotheses or examined relationships between alcohol use and other variables. Moreover, the use of the term "Hispanic" creates many problems for researchers, as it refers to all of these people and often ignores intracultural variations.

Research shows significant differences and higher levels of alcohol consumption among U.S. born, than among immigrant Mexican-American women.

Drinking also appears to increase with income and education (Sanchez Mayers & Kail, 1993). Level of *acculturation* is positively associated with alcohol problems. This is more so for Latino women than it is for men. Acculturation is defined by leading researcher Caetano (1987) as, "The various degrees of changes in Hispanics' cultural orientation which result from adaptation to U.S. society" (p. 789). He further explains:

Madsen describes the 'alcoholic agringado,' the Mexican-American whose alcoholism stems both from his attempt to adopt Anglo-cultural patterns without being accepted by his new culture of orientation, and from having been rejected by his own ethnic group because of this attempt at acculturation. Graves also proposes that acculturation together with inaccessibility of the new cultural and economic goals being sought results in a high rate of drinking and deviant behavior among Mexican-Americans (p. 789).

The relationship between acculturation and increased drinking is thus explained as a result of Mexican-Americans being caught between two worlds, facing *oppression*, and trying to maintain their roots. This tension has led to greater alcohol consumption. Acculturation is also shown to be independent of other factors such as age, education, work status and generational group (Caetano, 1987).

Until recently Latinas were not believed to have had problems with alcohol. Researcher Mora (1990) explains, despite the growing evidence to the contrary, the lack of research emphasis on these women is partially due to a disagreement in the alcohol field that they have a problem. This belief can be attributed, it seems, to a lack of awareness of the cultural differences within U.S. born as opposed to immigrant women.

Researchers and health care professionals recommend caution in the interpretation of self-report data as well, as there may be serious under reporting of actual use by all women. Given the cultural sanctions against Latina drinking, they may be especially reluctant to report (Mora, 1990). Latinas are perhaps more afraid of revealing their drinking than of drinking itself (Castro, 1982).

Authors Mora and Gilbert (1991) state that Mexican-American women are a particular high-risk group for alcohol related problems due to their lower socioeconomic levels and having children at younger ages. Mexican-American women also have lower educational levels and are over represented among those women who are single heads of household. Mora and Gilbert (1991) state, "These conditions, combined with issues of language differences, substandard and overcrowded housing, immigration status and discrimination, compound the stresses created by alcohol abuse within the family" (p. 43). One author speculates that it may have to do with their particular experience of oppression that they drink: "Minority women have more than their share of reasons to seek relief in alcohol. Doubly oppressed by their race or ethnic background as well as their sex, nowhere are they accepted as equals" (Sandmaier, 1980).

Theories of causality fall into two theoretical approaches, the stress model and the acculturation model. Gilbert and Cervantes (1986) analyzed two empirical research studies done following acculturative stress, and found that problematic drinking occurred when a Mexican-American identified with the norms of the larger society, but was unable economically to achieve the life style associated with those norms. This situation alienated the individual from cultural traditions but did not allow them to integrate into the mainstream. Alcohol abuse was seen as a response to the experience of cultural marginalization. A small emerging area of investigation is Family Stress Theory, which attempts to identify those aspects of both the environment and the family which produce negative mental health outcomes, including substance abuse (Cervantes, 1993). This theory suggests that a family's 'vulnerability' to stress and its 'regenerative' power are a function of: family influence, positional influence, family integration, and the family's adaptability. This is particularly relevant for Latinos, as family life and

cohesiveness are very important and integral parts of their culture, and thus may be more acutely affected by familial discord.

There is a dearth of literature in regard to Latino substance abuse, its extent, causal factors, prevention and treatment approaches. National household surveys suggest marijuana is the most commonly used illicit drug with much smaller percentages using stimulants, tranquilizers, inhalants, cocaine and heroin (Sanchez Mayers & Kail, 1993). Among Latinos 12 to 17 years old the rate of cocaine use exceeded that of their White and Black counterparts. Marijuana and cocaine use is also higher among Latinos who are more acculturated (Kail, 1993). However, Latinos are less likely to report the use of those drugs than the use of inhalants, uppers, and psychedelic drugs. Kail (1993) speculates that the impact of discrimination, limited opportunities and poverty is more evident among those who engage in heroin use.

Entry into drug abuse among Mexican Americans have two unique aspects, the role of familial drug use, and acculturation. Within the Mexican American community there is a direct relationship between acculturation and substance abuse. Those who are more acculturated are more likely to abuse drugs. Acculturation increases the likelihood of having drug using friends, and when combined with low education and income greatly enhances the likelihood of drug use (Sanchez Mayers & Kail, 1993). Interestingly, unlike alcohol, acculturation *accompanied by inclusion in the mainstream economy* decreases the probability of use. Kail (1993) reports that poverty, limited school and employment opportunities and discrimination all contribute to a propensity toward drug abuse. Poverty in general is also associated with greater substance abuse, regardless of ethnicity.

Latino addicts are particularly likely to be involved in drug dealing and violent crime, and thus differ than White and Black addicts. When not involved in narcotic use, crime among Latinos and Whites drops. Author Kail (1993) reports

that Whites are more likely to report a "legitimate" source of funds compared to Mexican Americans and Blacks.

Two themes emerge related to etiology: stress and familial discord/disruption, especially those associated with immigration and acculturation. A third is the influence of the peer group. The role of stress and its relationship to substance abuse suggests that the lack of English-speaking ability, lack of job skills, living in poor neighborhoods with high crime rates, and concerns over liberal family beliefs of the larger Anglo society, are contributors to stress which lead to substance abuse. Differential rates of acculturation among family members also creates stress and causes greater drug use (Sanchez Mayers & Kail, 1993).

Familial stress and disruption as a primary contributor to substance abuse is another causal explanation. Family disruption such as parental illness, absence, or drinking, leaving friends and relatives when immigrating are such events that relate to higher levels of emotional distress among Mexican Americans sampled (Sanchez Mayers & Kail, 1993).

Within the Latino community, peer use of drugs remains a consistent predictor of drug use. Friends' use is the strongest single factor influencing initiation and continued drug use (Kail, 1993). Within Puerto Rican, Mexican American, and Cuban American communities, the peer group typically introduces the young person to drugs and provides instructions on drug use (Sanchez Mayers & Kail, 1993).

The literature around family and drug use is characterized by three themes. First, the presence of both mother and father and an extended family decreases the probability of drug use. Second, discord in the family is conducive to drug use, possibly because of different rates of acculturation (described above). Last, use by family members is conducive to drug use and when combined with peer use has an even greater effect on self use (Kail, 1993). Furthermore, within the Latino

community support from and involvement with proximate and extended family is associated with lower levels of stress and substance abuse. Alternately, strong familial ties may also permit the maintenance of an addiction as Latino families are likely to protect members who have substance abuse problems.

According to Sanchez Mayers and Kail (1993), treatment appears to be less effective among Latinos. Latinas in particular, are also more likely to resume drug use and criminal activity after treatment.

According to the literature, a distinctive characteristic of Latino culture is the importance of family. Problems are to be handled and kept within the family as much as possible so as not to dishonor the family name. Preventive and treatment efforts, therefore, need to include the family as a whole whenever possible.

4. Design of Evaluation Study

What is the rate of success for Latina clients in the Family Reunification program of AFCS? How does this compare with non-Latina clients? Success is defined as whether or not at least one child was returned to these women at any time during the 18 month period of Reunification Services. Moreover, what are the desired outcomes to achieve Family Reunification and in what areas did these women succeed and fail? What are the demographics and characteristics of these two groups such as age, type of substance used, previous history with CPS, familial substance abuse, referral source, employment status, family composition, educational attainment, family support, treatment sought, and acculturation level (monolingual Spanish speaking or immigration status)?

The focus of this evaluation is a records review of 35 cases of women with substance abuse issues that have gone through Family Reunification Services. Specifically, they are all the records of women with substance abuse issues that have been closed by the agency in this program between May, 1994 and March,

1996. The sample is divided into two groups, 17 Latinas (8 Spanish speaking), and 18 Non-Latinas. Those women with additional mental health issues including mental retardation were excluded from this study. The goal of Family Reunification Services is to reunify children with their families (outcome). The success of FR Services for purposes of this study, is how often this was achieved. Reunification, therefore, is the dependent variable. Family Reunification Services is the major independent variable.

The goal of FR Services, to reunify children with their families, is a program objective. However, a "serendipitous outcome" as Smith (1990) describes, may be possible outcomes that were not originally conceived when services were originally implemented. In this case these unexpected consequences may be the reunification of children with absent or previously uninvolved parents (fathers), or relatives. Though not part of FR services primary objective (reunification with the mother from whom the child was originally removed), establishing ties with other relatives may be the next best placement for a child. Moreover, families often strengthen their bonds and meet the challenge of raising these children, sometimes under very trying circumstances.

Ethnicity was classified into Latina and non-Latina groups. Latina was defined as persons whose families originate from Latin American, Puerto Rican, or Cuban descent. The majority of Latinas in this study, 17 in all, were assumed to be of primarily Mexican descent, as the majority of Latinos living in Santa Cruz County are members of this group. It is beyond the scope of this study to differentiate among particular Latino groups. The non-Latinas are comprised of 18 in all, 14 Caucasians, 3 African-Americans, and 1 Native American. In some instances further differentiation was noted in the findings among the non-Latina group, making distinctions between Caucasian, African-American, and Native American clients. This information was obtained from the court case file.

The age of the client collected in this study was the age of the client at the time of the agency's initial involvement, or investigation of the report that led to the placement of their children. Because of the variation between the length of time of the agency's involvement in each case (6, 12, 18 and in one case 24 months), the point of entry offered the most consistency. The age of the client was collected from the court case files and SSRS agency database.

The number of children was the total number of children these women had. This total number may not be the same as the number of children in placement. Sometimes not every child was removed from the family, as was sometimes the case with older children. There were also children who had already been permanently removed by the agency at an earlier juncture, living elsewhere, or born during the period reunification services were being offered. However, the total number of children gives a more holistic picture of these women in relation to their involvement with the agency, and overall life circumstances. The number of children was collected from the agency's SSRS system database, as well as the court case file.

Type of substance used was the main or primary substance abuse issue for these women. Heroin, cocaine/crack, methamphetamines, and alcohol are the main substance problems identified in this study. However, when it was found through the review of the case that there was not any one particular substance used over another, and there was documentation (self report, allegation, or police report) of multiple substance usage, then the category "multiple" was employed to categorize multiple substance abuse issues. Use of both cocaine and alcohol, for example, was an instance in which the category "multiple" was used. Cases where type of substance was not identified, with mere reference to "substance abuse," a classification of "unspecified" was used. Court case record review was the method used to collect this data.

History with CPS meant the client had previous involvement with AFCS, or a CPS agency in another county. Involvement was not limited simply to previous referrals on the client, but was characterized by the client's ongoing relationship with the agency whether through voluntary or involuntary (court ordered) means. This involvement could have been in any one of the programs CPS agency's offer such as Family Preservation, Family Maintenance, or Family Reunification. It could, but does not necessarily mean that the client had these or other children in placement at an earlier point.

Familial use was identified through social worker reports in the case file, regarding any substance abuse problems the client mentioned in her family. Inability to place children in relative care as opposed to foster care due to substance abuse was an identifying factor, for example. Further exploration, such as client contact, was beyond the scope of this study.

Referral source identified how the case was brought to the attention of the agency. Categories were designated as follows: Law Enforcement, Professional, School, Relative, Friend/Neighbor, Self, or Not Available. Referrals made to the agency as a result of an arrest or contact with law enforcement were identified as a Law Enforcement referral. Referrals that were made by other agency professionals, therapists, or doctors were identified as Professional. Referrals made by a school that led to the children's subsequent placement were identified as School. Those referrals made to the agency by a family member of the client were designated as Relative. Friends or neighbors of the client who made referrals to the agency were categorized as Friend/Neighbor. Those cases where the referral source was not identified in the case file itself, were designated in the category Not Available. All information regarding initiating referral source was obtained from the court case file.

Employment status designated whether or not the client was working at the time of the agency's intervention, or subsequently during the time FR services were provided. It was noted if any change occurred during the period FR services were provided. Definitions of this status were classified as either Employed Part-Time or Full-Time, or Unemployed/AFDC recipient. This information was obtained from the case file.

Family composition described whether the client was a member of a one or two-parent household, as well as any changes that occurred during the time of the agency's FR services intervention. A one-parent household included clients who were single, divorced or separated, or involved in a relationship. Two-parent households included clients who were married, or cohabiting with the child(ren)'s father at the time of placement. All information regarding family composition was obtained from the court case file.

Education was classified according to the number of years the client had spent in school. The terms were defined as: 1) Less Than High School, includes no school, and grade school to junior high; 2) Some High School to High School Graduate; and 3) Some College and College Graduate. The highest grade completed was used to determine in which category the client was placed. Information regarding the client's education was obtained from the social history of the client in the court case file.

Family support was whether or not there were family members who had supported the client through the Family Reunification process. Terms were classified High, Medium, and Low, to delineate the amount of support that was received. A "high" classification of family support was when a relative took care and custody of a child in placement. "Medium" family support meant the child had contact with relatives while in placement, or there was a relative willing to have a child placed with them, but they were not approved for placement. "Low" family

support meant there was no contact with relatives, and/or no relatives available to have children placed with them, or no one was willing to have children placed with them. Information regarding family support was obtained from the court case file.

Level of acculturation was an input that basically distinguished immigrant Latinas from non-immigrant Latinas. Non-Latinas were not part of this evaluation. The use of language determined the level of acculturation. Those Latinas who identified Spanish as their primary language were distinguished from the overall Latina group, and findings were shown for both groups. Illegal immigration status was also identified. Information regarding primary language use and immigration status was obtained from court case files.

One of the program inputs that was reviewed in this study was drug and alcohol treatment. For clients with substance abuse issues this is a routine part of the Family Reunification "Service Plan." For purposes of this study, only those clients who successfully completed programs were counted among those who received treatment. Partial or incomplete treatment subjects were grouped among the non-participants. An independent variable was if the client had previously attended other treatment programs. Another variable was whether it was an in-patient or out-patient treatment program that they attended. Those clients that completed treatment services were compared to those who did not. This input was measured through a review of the court case file.

Outcome in Family Reunification was the eventual outcome following the end of these services. Possible outcomes were: 1) Reunification; 2) Relative Placement; or 3) Adoption, Guardianship, or Long-Term Foster Care. Reunification meant that at least one child was returned to the mother from whom he/she had originally been removed. Relative Placement included any of the alternative outcomes such as Adoption, Long-Term Foster Care, or Guardianship, but was differentiated by the fact that the child was living with another family

member. Adoption meant the client's parental rights would or had been terminated, and the child would be freed for adoption, or had been adopted by a non-family member. Long-Term Foster Care meant the child was not available for Adoption and was in a long-term foster care situation which was not a relative placement. Guardianship meant that a guardian was appointed to care for the child, and that person was not a relative. The last two outcomes happen most often with older children. It is most often young children who are adopted. This information was gathered from the court case file, or from the current social worker if the case was still in Permanency Planning. Some of the outcomes, such as those in the Permanency Planning stage, may have been anticipated final outcomes as some of the cases were still ongoing. However, since Family Reunification services had ended in all of the cases, those children who had or had not been returned to their mothers was known.

The design was a retrospective review of case records, and thus an outcome evaluation. It was also exploratory, and descriptive research of the female client characteristics within the Family Reunification Program, and therefore, a method of program monitoring. Smith (1990) explains that program monitoring reviews currently existing program data to determine the kind of service that is being provided. It also reviews basic facts about the program such as the types of clients and service. Ages of the clients in this study were anticipated to range anywhere from 18 to 40 years old, as this is the typical age range of child-rearing mothers. The number of children these women had was another characteristic of the group. Cultural variations were anticipated to be found in examining the Latina and non-Latina groups.

Independent variables such as client characteristics, could cause a change in whether children were returned. Client characteristics such as level of education, work history, chronicity of the substance abuse problem identified

through previous CPS involvement, and family support, could be contributing factors to the client's ability to complete her service plan. Another factor, family composition, could be a contributing factor as well, depending on the level of involvement and support given in the relationship.

Secondary methods of data collection were used for this study. The agency's court case file was the method of data collection. The court case file is differentiated here from the service file, which is the social worker's personal file with case notes, as well as miscellaneous day to day documents. The court file contains basically, all of the court reports written by the social worker, court orders, police reports, CASA reports, and occasionally letters for the court. The court file is a condensed version of the service file. These records were located in the offices of AFCS.

The sample used in this study was the entire population of women with substance abuse problems, that participated in Family Reunification Services between May, 1994 and March, 1996. It was a purposive, non-probability sampling as it specifically identified women with substance abuse problems, excluding those with mental health issues.

In November, the Placement Unit supervisor provided the author with a list of the children of Latina and non-Latina mothers, who he believed had issues with substance abuse, and had been through placement in recent years. Through December, case numbers were obtained for each child using the agency's SSRS computer tracking system. Sibling groups had the same case number, as cases in the system are tracked through the use of the mother's name. Each child, or sibling group, was assigned a number. The total number of children for each client was verified using SSRS. Sometimes, not all of the client's children were on the original list as not every child had been through placement at that time.

The case was tracked to its current location using the case number and SSRS. The case was either found to be closed, or still open in other agency programs such as Family Maintenance or Permanency Planning/Adoptions. Some of the cases were still in Family Reunification, and in the process of terminating at the time of this review. If the case was still open, the social worker currently assigned to the case was contacted to confirm if there had been substance abuse issues involved. It was also determined if the case was nearing the end of FR services. Those that were not (3 to 6 months away from the end of FR) were excluded from this study. Closed cases were reviewed to determine if there had been substance abuse issues involved.

A data base was established with the following fields to classify information: number, ethnicity, age, number of children, substance used (primarily), history with CPS, familial use, referral source, employment status, marital status, education, family support, primary language and immigration status, treatment program, outcome, and domestic violence found.

No potential risks to subjects was anticipated. There was no direct client contact using only existing case records to obtain data. The client pool was coded with the use of numbers to maintain anonymity with individual client files. No client names were used. Permission to review files and contact social workers regarding substance abuse issues was obtained from the Agency Trainer. Approval was also sought and received from the SJSU Graduate Studies Human Subjects Review Board.

5. Results

There were 35 women reviewed in this study, 17 Latinas and 18 non-Latinas. Two of these cases did not have mutually exclusive outcomes of the three that were possible, these being 1) Reunification; 2) Relative Placement; and 3)

Adoption, Guardianship, or Long-Term Foster Care. Seven of the Latinas (41%), and 8 of the non-Latinas (44%) succeeded in having at least one child returned to them during the period of FR Services. Spanish-speaking (SS) Latinas were less successful overall, achieving reunification only 25% of the time. Placement with relatives as an outcome was slightly higher among non-Latinas, with 28% of these children being placed in relative homes compared to 23% among Latinas. None of the children in the SS Latina group were placed with relatives. The outcome when SS Latinas did not reunify was Adoption, Guardianship, or Long-Term Foster Care. Eventual outcomes of Adoption, Guardianship, or Long-Term Foster Care were higher among the Latina group (47%), compared to the non-Latina group (28%), due to the higher numbers of SS Latinas who had this eventual outcome.

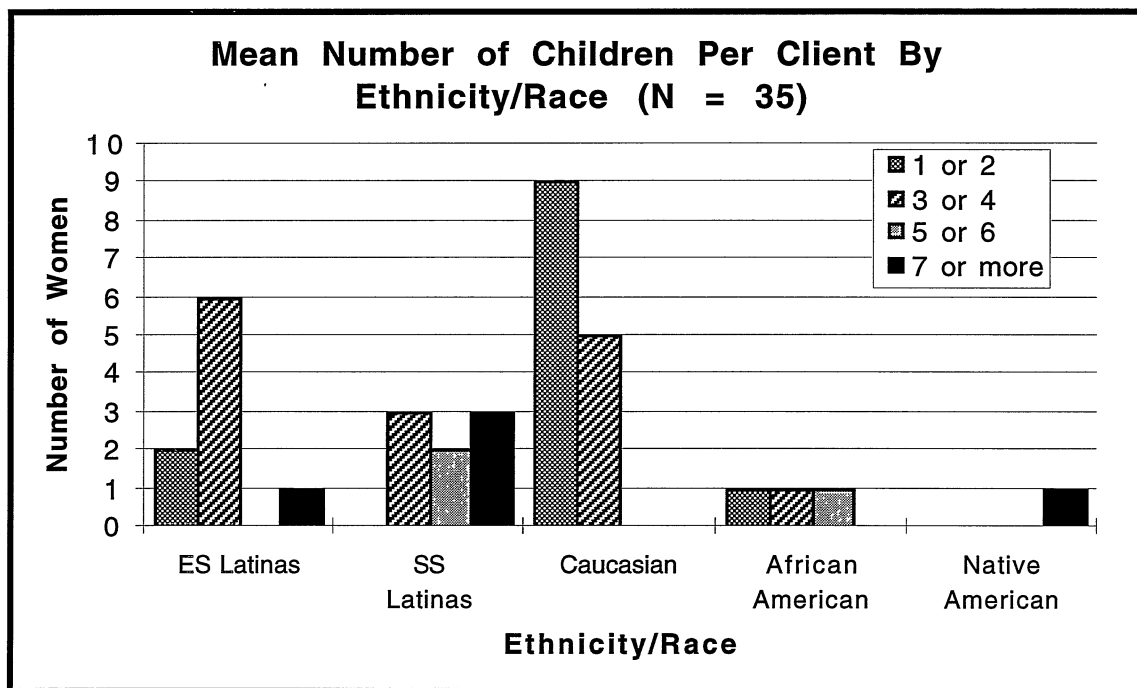
There were 8 Latinas with a low level of acculturation, being monolingual Spanish speakers. They represented 47% of the Latinas reviewed in this study. Additionally, 4 among this group were reported to have illegal immigration status.

The average age of the clients in this study was 28 years old. There was a very slight variation among the Latina and non-Latina groups, 28.11 and 28.38 average years old, respectively. The youngest client was 16 years of age, and the oldest was 44.

There were marked differences in the numbers of children between the Latina and non-Latina groups. Latina clients had an average of 4.52 children, whereas non-Latinas had an average of 2.77 children. Differences within the Latina group itself were noticed as well. SS Latinas had on the average greater numbers of children than those who were English-speaking (ES), 5.62 compared to 3.55 children, respectively. The ES Latinas, therefore, were closer in numbers on average to their non-Latina counterparts than the SS Latina group as a whole. When differentiating among the non-Latina group, Caucasians had a lower average overall, with 2.35 children per client among them.

More detailed findings as to the exact numbers of children for each group, rather than a report of mere averages are described as follows, and also shown in Figure 1: 1-2 Children, ES Latinas-2, Caucasians-9, African-Americans-1; 3-4 Children, ES Latinas-6, SS Latinas-3, Caucasians-5, African-Americans-1; 5-6 Children, SS Latinas-2, African-Americans-1; 7 or more Children, ES Latinas-1, SS Latinas-3, Native-Americans-1.

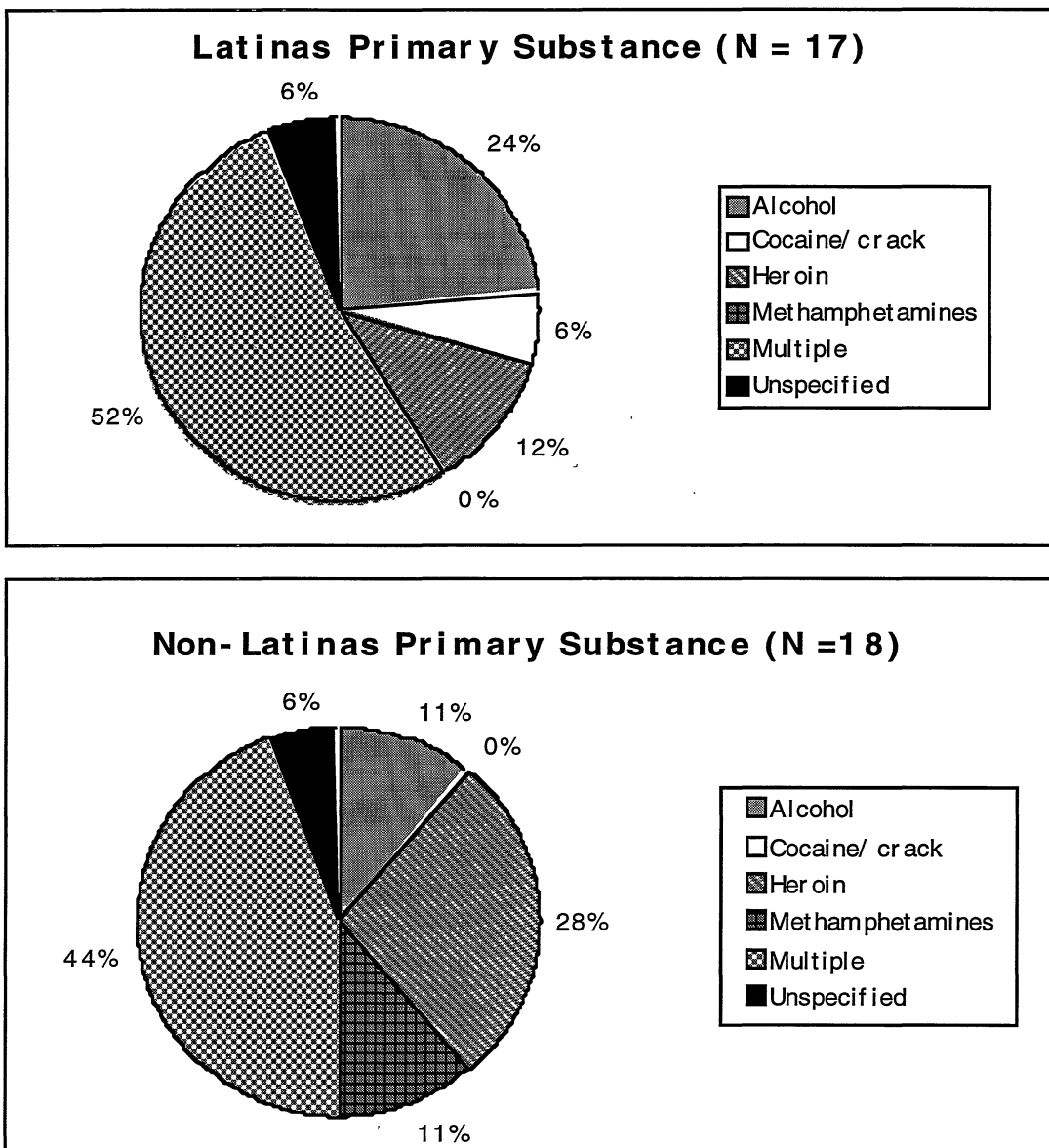
Figure 1



As shown in Figure 1, none of the Caucasians had more than 4 children. Only 2 of them had 4 children. The majority of these women were in the 1-2 Children group, with 9 falling into this category. Only 2 of the Latinas were in the 1-2 Children category, both of whom were ES Latinas. Of all the women in the 5-6 Children and 7 or more Children groups, 6 of them were Latinas (5 SS), 1 was African-American, and 1 Native-American.

The type of substance used is reported as follows, as well as shown in Figure 2. Latinas reported a higher use of alcohol than non-Latinas, 4 and 2 respectively. SS Latinas represented 3 of the 4 who manifested alcohol problems. One SS Latina, and none of the non-Latinas used Crack/Cocaine. Heroin was found to be the primary substance used among 2 of the ES Latinas, and 5 of the non-Latinas. Methamphetamine use was reported in 2 of the non-Latina clients. Methamphetamine use was reported in 2 of the non-Latina clients.

Figure 2



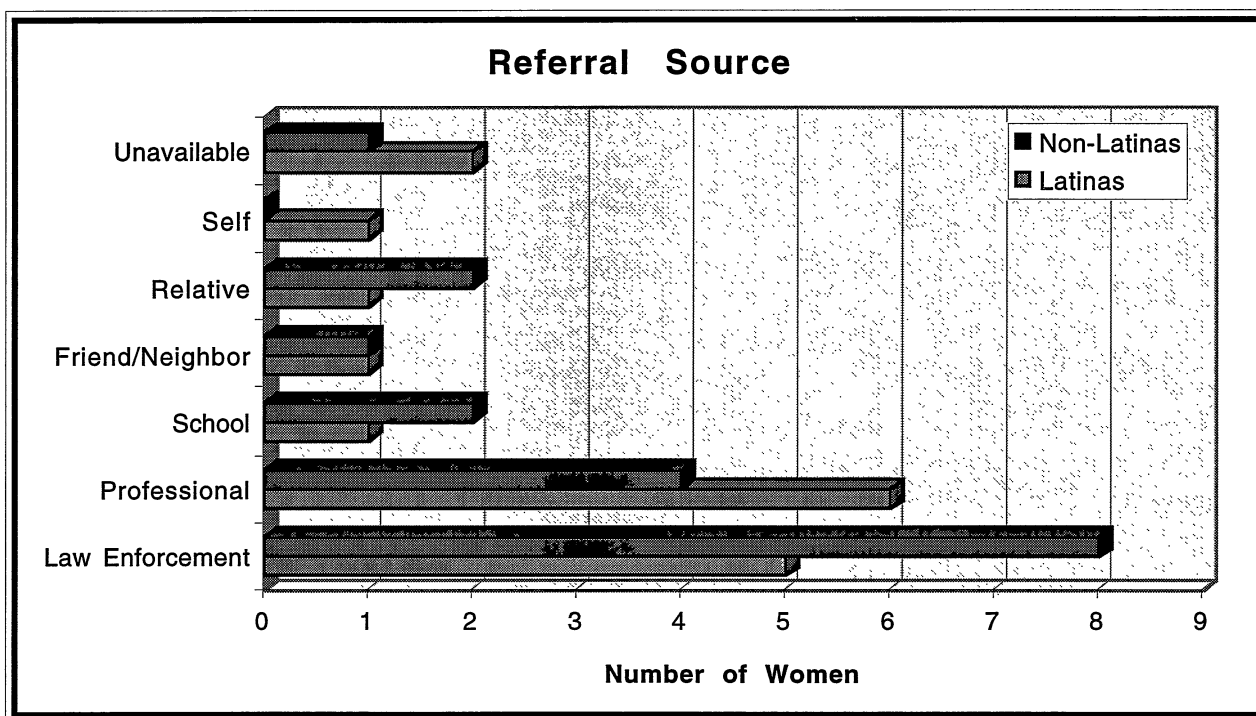
As shown in Figure 2, multiple substance usage was the problem cited most often in both groups, 9 in the Latina group (3 SS), and 8 in the non-Latina group. One SS Latina and one non-Latina subject were not specified in their substance usage.

There were 16 women who were found to have had previous involvement with this or another CPS agency. This is 46% of the total number of women in this study (35). When examining for ethnicity/race the percentage of previous involvement was 41% for Latinas, and 50% for non-Latinas. In terms of outcomes, women with prior CPS involvement fared somewhat less on average than those with no prior involvement. Women with prior involvement reunified with their children 38% of the time, whereas those with no prior involvement reunified 47% of the time. As a whole, 43% of the women in this study reunified with their children. Women with prior CPS involvement also had a greater number of children (50%) whose eventual placement was in Adoption, Guardianship, and Long-Term Foster Care, whereas women with no prior involvement this outcome was 26%. Relative placement was the eventual outcome for 19% of the women with prior involvement, and 32% for those with no prior involvement. Four of the women in this study had been in foster care themselves as children. One of them reunified with her children.

Non-Latinas were significantly more likely than Latinas to report familial substance abuse problems. Latinas reported familial use in 3 cases, 18% of the time, whereas non-Latinas reported familial use in 9 cases, 50% of the time. It should be noted that the only SS Latina who reported familial substance use, had stated that her parents attended AA meetings in Mexico.

The referral source was in most cases law enforcement, with the client either being arrested or being involved in some type of domestic disturbance. Latinas were referred by this source in 5 of the cases, 29% of the time (N = 17), and non-Latinas in 8 cases, 44% of the time (N = 18). See Figure 3.

Figure 3



As seen in Figure 3, professionals were another group likely to refer, the majority of these being medical personnel. These referrals were most often as a result of an infant's and/or mother's positive toxicology screening for drugs at the time of birth. Latinas were referred by professionals more often, 35% of the time, than from other sources. Non-Latinas were referred by professionals 22% of the time. School personnel, friends or neighbors, and relatives were those least likely to make referrals. One SS Latina referred herself.

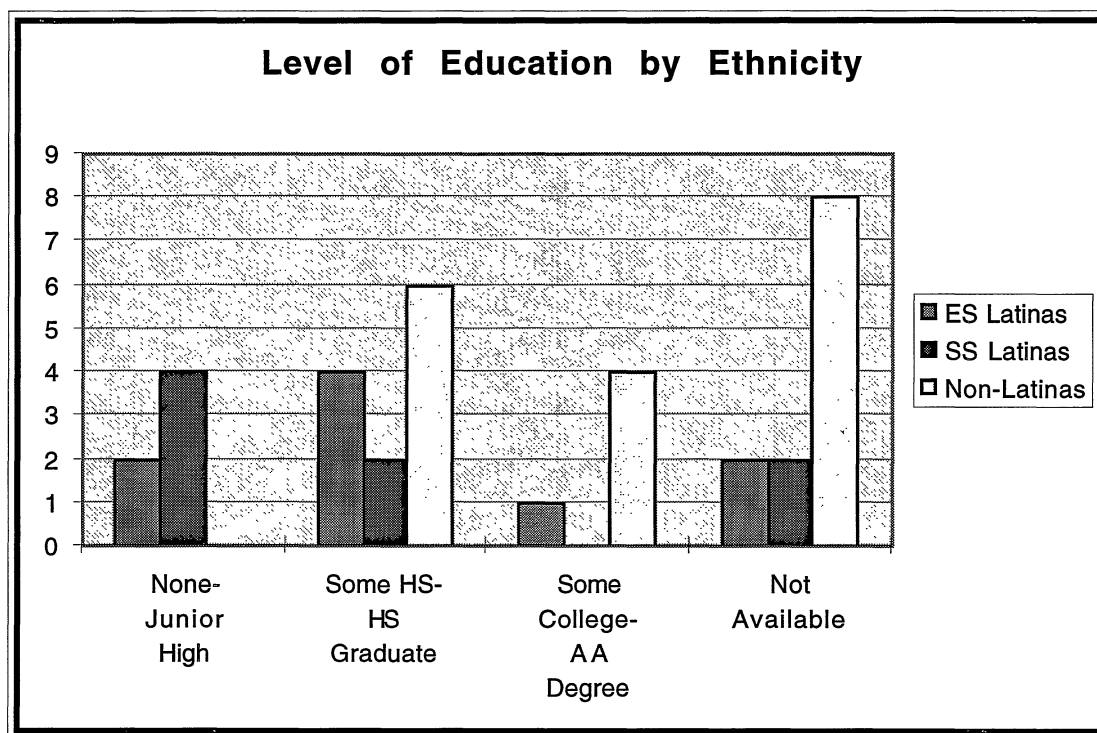
Employment status revealed that the majority of women in Family Reunification are unemployed and/or are receiving public assistance (AFDC). Eighteen of the women (51%) reported to have been unemployed or receiving AFDC at the time of the agency's initial involvement with them. Eleven among this group were Latinas, and 7 non-Latinas. Of those who reported to be employed, all were Caucasian. Two reported to be working Part-Time, and 1 Full-Time. This group did not include women who also reported to be involved in prostitution.

There were a significant number of women (13) where information was unavailable regarding employment. Nine of the women in this study (26%), subsequently entered employment as a result of the agency's involvement with them. It is unknown whether this employment continued beyond the time of the agency's involvement.

Family composition revealed that the majority of the women in this study (69%), were members of one-parent households, 13 among the Latina group and 11 in the non-Latina. Thirty-one percent of the women belonged to two-parent households, 4 in the Latina group and 7 in the non-Latina. One of the Latinas was married during the period of the agency's involvement. Two of the non-Latinas subsequently became separated or divorced, due to added domestic violence problems in the relationship.

Latinas were less educated overall than the non-Latina group. See Figure 4 below. Of the Latinas who reported going to school, 6 (35%) reported attending less than to the High School level (N =17). Four among these were SS Latinas. Additionally, there was one SS Latina who reported never having attended school. None of the non-Latinas reported less than a High School level of education. There were an equal number of Latinas and non-Latinas (6), who reported having attended at least some High School to having graduated from High School. However, though not shown in the figure below, both of those who reported having graduated from High School were among the non-Latina group. Among the women who reported having had some college to having graduated college, 1 among these was in the Latina group, and 4 in the non-Latina. The only woman who reported to have a College degree (AA) was in the non-Latina group.

Figure 4

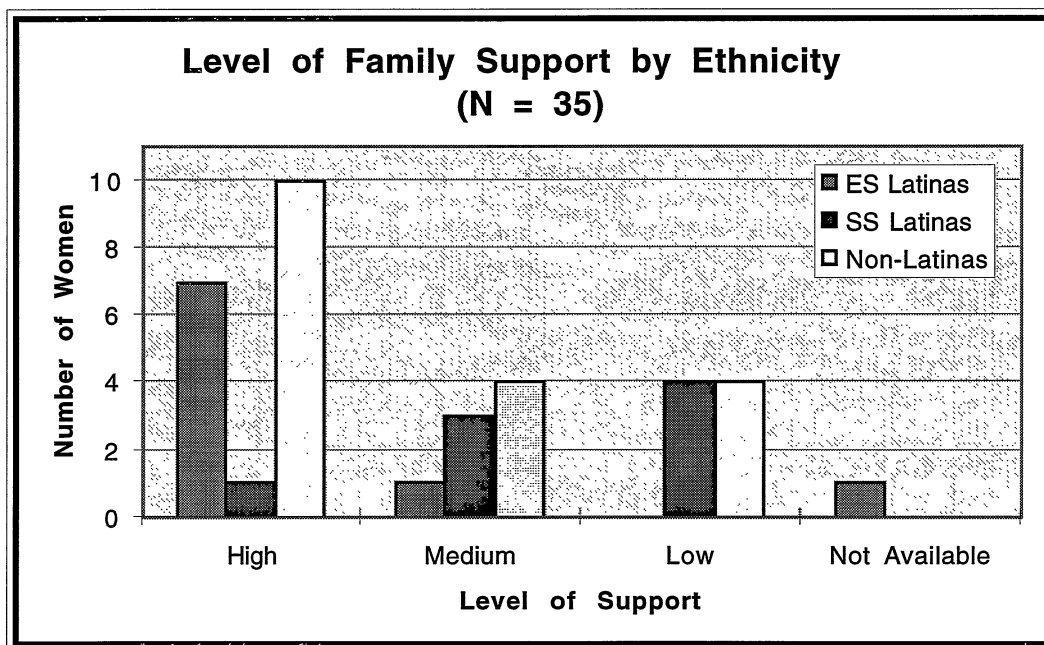


As shown in Figure 4, there were a significant number of women where information regarding their educational attainment was unavailable from the court file, 4 in the Latina group, and 8 in the non-Latina. The information presented here, therefore, could show significant changes. Educational attainment did not appear to have any relationship to eventual outcome.

Family support showed that all the women in the study experienced similar levels of family support, with the exception of SS Latinas who experienced less overall. See Figure 5 below. Among Latinas, 47% of them experienced a high level of family support, compared to 55% of the non-Latinas. Among those with medium and low levels of support, the numbers (4 in each category) were equal for both Latinas and non-Latinas. It should be noted, however, that SS Latinas represented all of the 4 Latinas with low levels of family support, and 3 of the 4 with medium levels of support. There was one SS Latina who had a high level of family

support. Moreover, of the 4 SS Latinas with illegal immigration status, 3 of the 4 experienced a low level of family support, and 1 a medium level.

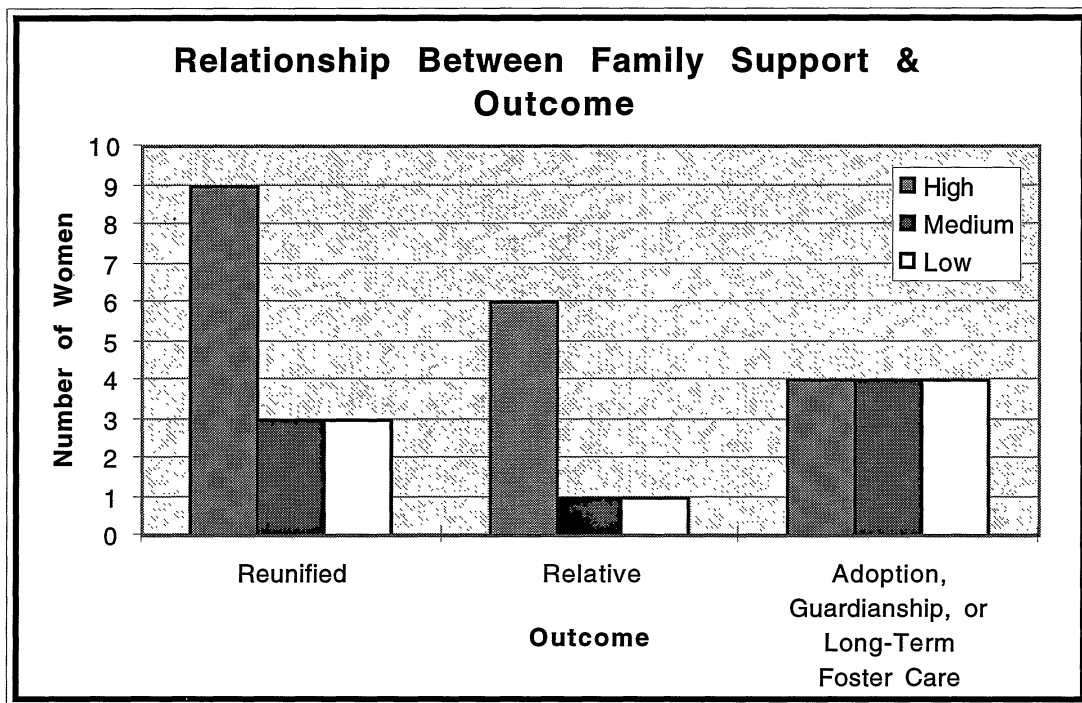
Figure 5



There was one additional case where information was not available in regards to family support.

When comparing family support with FR outcomes and reunification, a correlation is seen between a high level of family support and an outcome of reunification. See Figure 6. Of the 15 women who reunified with their children, 9 of them (60%) had a high level of family support (N = 35). Relative placement was also a more likely outcome for children in families with high levels of family support. Seven of the 9 relative placement outcomes (78%) occurred in families with high levels of family support.

Figure 6



As shown in Figure 6, there was no correlation among those children whose eventual placement was Adoption, Guardianship, or Long-Term Foster Care, and family support. They had equal numbers in the high, medium, and low family support categories. The majority of the placements (9), in this category were adoption outcomes.

Women who participated successfully in drug and alcohol treatment had a greater chance of reuniting with their children (54%), when compared to those who were reunified overall (43%). Those women who failed to participate in or complete treatment programs, 20% overall, did not reunify in any of the cases. Significant differences in treatment participation were not found between the Latina, SS Latina, and non-Latina groups. All of the women who participated in previous treatment programs (8 total), were treatment participants during this intervention. Previous treatment participants were also characterized by substance

abuse problems with heroin and alcohol primarily, 6 and 2 respectively. Women who participated in both residential (in-patient) and out-patient treatment were less likely to reunify (33%), than those who only participated in one or the other of these programs exclusively.

An additional, unanticipated finding was the prevalence of domestic violence among this group of women. Forty-six percent had experienced some type of domestic violence with current or previous partners. Among Latinas this was 41%, and non-Latinas 50%. Those women whose substance abuse problem was primarily alcohol were experiencing domestic violence in 5 of the 6 of these cases (83%). Women with multiple and heroin substance abuse problems were also identified in this group.

6. Discussion

If Santa Cruz County is consistent with the literature findings regarding the rate of reunification success in the U.S. as a whole (56%), women with substance abuse issues in this study, achieved this less often. A limitation of the design used to document outcomes and "success," is that it does not always tell the whole story. In working within a time-limited framework to achieve reunification, social workers must sometimes find creative ways to achieve this. For example, among one of the cases reviewed, a recommendation was made at the end of FR for a plan of Long-Term Foster Care, but with the intention of eventually reunifying with the mother (within three months). Older adolescent children sometimes runaway and return to their mothers, despite court orders saying they should be placed elsewhere.

For the women in this study, a high level of family support, or those families willing and able to have children placed in their homes, fared better on the whole by reunifying more often than those who had less family support. This seemed to influence the less acculturated Latinas in particular, who had less family support

and did not achieve reunification as often. Family support as a positive influence is supported by the literature which states support and involvement with proximate and extended family in the Latino community is associated with lower levels of stress and substance abuse.

As involuntary clients working under court ordered service plans, it is possible that immigrant women experience a greater feeling of disaffection from government intervention. This may be even more so for those who are in this country illegally. It would be misleading to speculate too much as to why less reunification occurred absent any follow up contact with these women, and the social worker. However, it may be useful for social workers to address a lack of family support, and possible feelings of alienation with them. It might also be helpful for this type of discussion to occur in treatment or individual therapy.

This study showed that nearly half of the time, women with substance abuse issues were reentering the child welfare system. No distinctions were made, however, between women whose children had been placed previously (Family Reunification), and women who had been involved in in-home support services such as Family Maintenance. Thus, it is unknown whether the problems were at a point of escalation, or had never been fully resolved to begin with. The nature of addiction sometimes involves relapse, however, so it is not surprising that recurrent agency involvement would be found. For example, one of the cases where reunification had occurred is now in the process of reinvestigation due to reports of the mother's continued substance use. This brings one to the question of whether the current system can adequately address the problem of substance abusing mothers under the current mandate, or if more is needed to help this group in particular.

The lack of available research regarding substance abuse among Latinas due to misconceptions about the extent of their problems, is a major setback for

those in the field who are attempting to work with this population. Latinas represent a significant portion of the families in placement with AFCS that are dealing with substance abuse.

The type of drugs used was consistent with the literature findings that illicit drug use is more common among more acculturated Latinos. Spanish-speaking Latinas were less likely than English-speaking Latinas to use illicit substances. None were reported to use Heroin or Methamphetamines, for example. However, the numbers of data collected are small, and method of obtaining the information less precise than a formal intake screening regarding substance use.

Kail's (1993) research that poverty, limited school and employment opportunities contribute to a propensity toward drug abuse among Latinos supports the demographic information presented here. Latinas were less educated than non-Latinas, and none were employed at the time of the agency's initial involvement. Poverty in general as a contributor to greater substance abuse among all ethnic/racial groups was found to be true as well. A small number of non-Latinas reported to be employed, and the majority were either unemployed or receiving AFDC.

A small percentage of Latinas reported substance abuse in their families of origin, compared to non-Latinas who reported it three times as often. This appears to correspond with literature findings that state problems in Latino families are to be handled and kept within the family as much as possible, so as not to dishonor the family name. In addition, though not part of the formal data collected "social histories" revealed many of these women were raised in single-parent households. This is consistent with the literature regarding Latino families, which states that the presence of both parents and an extended family decreases the probability of drug use.

It would have been useful to include women with mental health issues as part of this study. Future studies of this kind should make it a point to include this high-risk population.

The use of a secondary method of data collection, court case file record review, was useful, interesting, and informative. The "social history" of the client in particular, provided a lot of the information that was presented here. Unfortunately, sometimes they were not available. Social histories are a valuable and necessary component of the record, for future analyses of this kind.

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San José State University College of Social Work

Field Agency's Approval of Research Project Prospectus

Instructions: This form must be completed by all students participating in university related research projects, including S.W. 298 projects. The form should be completed and submitted to the student's S.W. 298 instructor or faculty sponsor. All students are expected to advise their agencies of the content of their research projects as well as plans related to their proposed methodology, data collection, and data analysis activities. Completion of this form does not remove the obligations of students to complete other college, university, or agency research review and approval procedures/policies.

If significant changes are made in the project a new form must be completed and submitted. All S.W. 298 students must complete and submit this form prior to commencing their actual research work with data collection or clients; and in any event before the end of their first semester of study.

The field instructor's or other agency representative's signature certifies that the student has discussed and shared their plans with the agency, and that the agency is not in opposition to the project. The S.W. 298 instructor and/or other college officials should be contacted if there are any concerns, questions, or objections.

Name of Student Carla Gomez Name of Agency HRA - AFC

Field Instructor's Name Frances Orland F.I.'s Telephone # 454-4405

SJSU Instructor's Name Dr. Peter Lee Semester(s) Fall

Proposed Topic Program Evaluation Comparing Success Rate of Latina + Non-Latina Clients in Family Reunification

Brief Description of Project - Including Timelines, Sample/Subjects, and Methodology:

outcome evaluation of Family Reunification Services during a one year period. Will examine approximately 60 client case records of Latina + non-Latina clients, comparing the outcomes of the two groups + what factors contributed to their success in FR. Will also examine client variables such as age, level of acculturation, family support, education + income.

Signature of Student Carla Gomez Date 12/11/95

Signature of Field Inst./Agency Rep. [Signature] Date 12/12/95


Signature of 298 Instructor/College Rep. [Signature] Date 2/10/96

→ If I talk to any social workers regarding this project in the future I will obtain secondary approval from the agency. A copy of my completed project will be provided to the agency.



Office of the Academic Vice President • Associate Academic Vice President • Graduate Studies and Research
One Washington Square • San Jose, California 95192-0025 • 408/924-2480

TO: Carla Gomez
740 30th Ave., #75
Santa Cruz, CA 95062

FROM: Serena W. Stanford 
AAVP, Graduate Studies & Research

DATE: January 21, 1996

The Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board has approved your request to use human subjects in the study entitled:

"A Program Evaluation of Latina and Non-Latina Clients
with Substance Abuse Issues in Family Reunification"

This approval is contingent upon the subjects participating in your research project being appropriately protected from risk. This includes the protection of the anonymity of the subjects' identity when they participate in your research project, and with regard to any and all data that may be collected from the subjects. The Board's approval includes continued monitoring of your research by the Board to assure that the subjects are being adequately and properly protected from such risks. If at any time a subject becomes injured or complains of injury, you must notify Serena Stanford, Ph.D., immediately. Injury includes but is not limited to bodily harm, psychological trauma and release of potentially damaging personal information.

Please also be advised that each subject needs to be fully informed and aware that their participation in your research project is voluntary, and that he or she may withdraw from the project at any time. Further, a subject's participation, refusal to participate, or withdrawal will not affect any services the subject is receiving or will receive at the institution in which the research is being conducted.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (408) 924-2480.