Visualizing the resilience of immigrant women in Denver, Colorado during the COVID-19 pandemic through Photovoice

Alaní M. Estrella BS[1] and Silvia Cunto-Amesty MD, MPH, MSEd[1,2]
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[1]Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University, New York, New York
[2]Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University, New York, New York

BACKGROUND

- There are more than half a million immigrants in Colorado, making up 10% of the population. 40% are Mexican. 39% are undocumented (Census Bureau, ACS 2018).

- Immigrants make up 12% of labor force largely in jobs on the "frontline" including construction accommodation and food services, health care and social assistance, manufacturing, and retail trade (Census Bureau, ACS 2018).

- Nationally, Latinx Americans are hospitalized for COVID-19 at 4x the rate of white Americans (CDC, COVID-NET 2020).

- Hispanic children are more likely to be infected with COVID-19 when compared to non-Hispanic white children (Goyal et al., 2020)

PHOTOVOICE

In the 1990s, Caroline Wang and colleagues developed Photovoice from Kurt Lewin's "Action Research," Paulo Freire's theory of Critical Consciousness, and Feminist theory. This Community-Based Research Method utilizes photography to identify local issues seen through the perspective of community members. The goals of Photovoice are to (1) record community strength's and concerns, (2) promote critical dialogue through group discussion of photographs, and (3) to ultimately reach policy makers to stimulate change.

In the last 30 years, Photovoice has emerged as a powerful tool in public and global health. Issues addressed include disability rights, gun violence, and food insecurity. Outcomes have included program implementation for people who are unstably housed, clinic development in a town in rural Kenya, and political action via testimonies for U.S. Congress.

VIVE WELLNESS

ViVe Wellness is a Community-Based Organization (CBO) in Denver, Colorado that works to improve health equity through exercise and wellness programming. ViVe's founder, Yoli Casas, began teaching immigrant and low-socioeconomic youth to swim. Soon after, she transitioned to their families, and her participants became empowered to teach others to swim. Since then, ViVe has expanded and taught 1000+ children and their families to swim, enrolled 300+ children in Play After School programs, and helped 100+ youth to participate in duathlons and triathlons.

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic ViVe was unable to operate normally. To meet the needs of their community, the organization began online exercise classes and providing food assistance to families in need. Prior to starting the study, ViVe transitioned to outdoor activities for all ages.

METHODS

Recruitment: With the help of ViVe, we recruited 9 immigrant women (ages 30-55) and 10 immigrant or first-generation adolescent girls (ages 13-17) to participate in this study. 6 women and 10 adolescents completed the study.

Methodology: Participants were separated in two separate groups (women, adolescents) for 6 sessions in a park over the course of three weeks. The first session consisted of a 1.5-hour training in Photovoice methodology, which included visual literacy, communication via images, ethics while taking photography, and the purpose of the study (Wang & Burris, 1997). Participants then used smartphones to take photographs with of their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and used WhatsApp to share select images with the group. Sessions 2-5 were used to discuss images, while the final session served to debrief on the project. All group interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Adult sessions were conducted exclusively in Spanish, whereas the adolescent sessions were conducted largely in English.

Data Analysis: Participants critically reflected on their experiences through contextualizing images during interviews. We codified issues, themes, and theories using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) Participants organized images based off the themes that arose and reflected on their experiences in the study.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the experiences and needs of immigrant women in Denver, Colorado during the COVID-19 pandemic?

RESULTS – EXAMPLES OF PHOTOVOICE

"Bueno, yo tomé una foto de un sapito… me quedé viéndolo y pensando en lo que ahorita está pasando… me quedaba pensando en qué pensarán, qué harán, pero realmente, es no preocuparse de lo que van a comer o dónde van a estar. Es lo contrario…. Lo contrario sea el hecho de lo contradictorio de un ser humano a lo de un animal, sea que no se preocupa el animal que suscriba con donde van a andar."

"Well, I took a photo of a little toad… I kept looking at it and thinking about what is happening right now… I kept thinking about what they will think, what they do, but really, it is not worrying about what they are going to eat or where they are going to be. It's the opposite… The opposite is the fact that a human being is contradictory to that of an animal, that the animal is not concerned with where they will be."

- Laura (adult)

"This tennis court is very mistreated and is not used. It got me thinking of how this is a Hispanic dominant park where the tennis court is, but if you were to go to a more white dominant park the tennis court is more taken care of, it's used, and it would probably be more full. So it just got me thinking of how a lot of Hispanics don't have the resources or how they don't have the encouragement to take up sports like tennis or golf like more richer sports… I think that it's unfair cuz Hispanics are seen as a poor community. I think that's unfair because they don't have the resources. It's a sport like everyone should be able to play it. Everyone should have that opportunity."

- Rachel (adolescent)
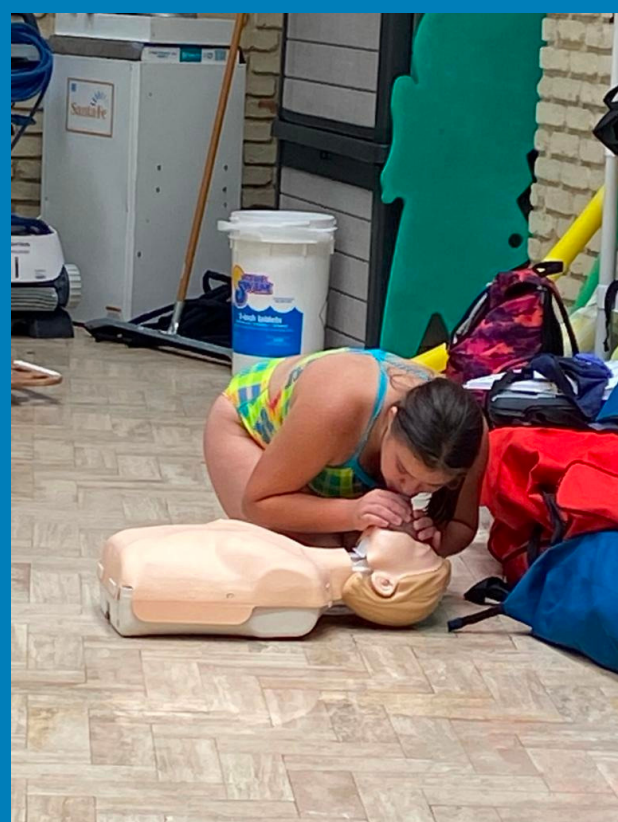
"Este fin de semana, [mi niña] y yo hicimos certificación para salva vidas… lo de natación, casi no podría hacerlo. Para mí fue un reto bien grande. Poder presentar un examen escrito en ingles. Para mí no hablo mucho inglés, verdad? Y más satisfacción fue cuando yo terminé mi examen y me saqué el 100 por ciento… Fue en línea y fue presencial. Lo que no explicaba la maestra era que no se pueden hacer ejercicios así como practicando uno con otras de cara a cara. Pero tratamos de hacer todo lo mejor posible con esto de la pandemia. Le dije a Yoli, 'pero yo no hablo Inglés.' 'Y si tu puedes.' Yo sé que si puedo. Bueno le digo a Yoli que voy a intentarlo."

"This weekend, [my daughter] and I did a certification to save lives… the swimming thing, I could hardly do it. For me it was a very big challenge. To be able to take a written exam in English. I don't speak much English, right? I got more satisfaction when I finished my exam and I got 100 percent. It was online and it was in person. What the teacher did not explain was that you cannot do exercises as well as practicing one with others face to face. But we try to do the best we can during this pandemic. I told Yoli, 'but I don't speak English.' 'And yes you can.' I know I can. Well I tell Yoli that I'm going to try."

- Sandra (adult)

PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS

"I really liked [Photovoice] because we got to see the story of a picture we really liked. We got to show a picture and say our opinions on it and just talk about it."

- Erika (adolescent)

"Yo creo que todas vemos la vida muy diferente. Esto lo pude ver a través de las fotos… podemos verlo no solamente a través de las fotos, sino otra vez en ponerme en el lugar de otras personas."

"I think we all see life differently. I could see this through the photos… we can see it not only through the photos, but again in putting myself in other people's shoes."

- Jennifer (adult)

RESULTS CONTINUED

Table 1. Common themes identified by participants

Theme	Adult photos	Adolescent photos
Family	11 (30%)	6 (13%)
Environment	6 (16%)	5 (11%)
Safety	4 (11%)	4 (9%)
Education/school	2 (5%)	1 (2%)
Technology	2 (5%)	5 (11%)
ViVe	2 (5%)	1 (2%)

Table 2. Themes unique to adult participants

Theme	Adult photos
Work	2 (5%)
Information	2 (5%)
Fear	2 (5%)
Diet	2 (5%)
Mental health	2 (5%)

Table 3. Themes unique to adolescent participants

Theme	Adolescent photos
Connection	10 (21%)
Time	6 (13%)
Lack of resources	4 (9%)
Lack of space	3 (6%)
Restrictions	2 (4%)

n=37 adult, 47 adolescent photos; green = positive; orange = negative

LIMITATIONS

- Short sessions due to scheduling restrictions.

- Adolescent age range – 13-year-old participants are developmentally different from 17-year-old participants.

- For photography, relationship to smartphone is different than that to a camera,

CONCLUSIONS

- Adults and adolescents differed in their perceived difficulties during the pandemic and identified common themes important to their resilience.

- While the pandemic has improved the adults' comfort with technology, they are worried that they will not be able to fill the holes in education and their children will fall behind in school.

- Half of the adolescents do not believe that COVID-19 is real and attribute the virus to the president's reelection campaign.

- ViVe was important to the community for continuing to be active and remaining in contact, especially when there were no outdoor activities.

- Participants identified Photovoice as an effective method for groups to view their surroundings through a new lens.

- We are currently developing photobooks to be used by participants, ViVe, and others to advocate for the community.

- Further studies on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on immigrant communities are needed, and the benefits of ViVe's community model are needed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS