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

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BACKGROUND

- There are more than half a million immigrants in Colorado, making up 10% of the population. 40% are Mexican, 30% are unaccompanied children (CBSA, 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 (CBSA, ACS 2018).
- Nationally, Latin American 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 (Goytia 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 and concerns, (2) promote critical dialogue through group discussion of photographs, and (3) ultimately reach policy makers to advocate 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 change.

Method utilizes photography to identify local issues seen through the perspective of community members. The goals of Photovoice are to (1) record community strength and concerns, (2) promote critical dialogue through group discussion of photographs, and (3) ultimately reach policy makers to advocate change.

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 immigrants and low-income/ethnic youth to youth. Soon after, she transitioned to her family, and her participants became empowered to teach others to swim. Since then, ViVe has expanded and taught 100+ children and their families to swim, enrolled 300 children in Play After School programs, and helped 100+ youth to participate in diathraps 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 their cameras during the COVID-19 pandemic and used WhatsApp to share select images with the group. Sessions 2-6 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 on the theme 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 PHOTOVEICE

"I took a photo of a little toad… I kept looking at it and thinking about what is happening with this little toad… We ask ourselves what will happen to it, what will it do. But really, we are reflecting about what they are going to do or where they are going to be. It’s the opposite. The opposite is the fact that a human being is contradicting it’s that an animal, that the animal is not concerned with where they will be.”

-Laura (adult)

"This tennis court is very miseducated and not used. It got me thinking of how this is a Hispanic dominant park where the tennis courts are, but if you were to go a more white dominant park the tennis court is more taken care of it’s used it would probably be a lot. So it just got me thinking of how as a Hispanic community don’t have the resources or how don’t have the encouragement to take up the sports or golf or like other outdoor sports. I think that it’s unfair cuz Hispanic 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)

Table 3. Themes unique to adolescent participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Adolescent photos</th>
<th>Adult photos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>(12%)</td>
<td>(16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diet</td>
<td>(12%)</td>
<td>(28%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>(14%)</td>
<td>(28%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>(23%)</td>
<td>(47%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>(15%)</td>
<td>(25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ViVe</td>
<td>(23%)</td>
<td>(52%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 and just talk about it.

- Evi Jane (adolescent)

- "Yo no quiero todas ver la vida muy diferente. Esto no puede ver a través de las fotos… podemos ver no solamente a través de los fotos, sino visto en sus pantallas en el mundo de las personas.

- Jennifer (adult)

RESULTS CONTINUED

Table 2. Themes unique to adult participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Adult photos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>(30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of space</td>
<td>(16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of resources</td>
<td>(23%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 to a camera.

CONCLUSIONS

- ViVe has the benefits of ViVe’s community model are needed.
- Short sessions due to scheduling restrictions.
- Adolescent age range – 13-year-old participants are developmentally different from 17-year-old participants.
- Half of the adolescents do not believe that COVID-19 is real and attribute the virus to the president’s reaction 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 the camera.
- We are currently developing photo books 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.

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