

Transforming Parenting to Prevent Toxic Stress: An Analysis of a Family-Focused ACEs Program

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effects of a community-based parenting program on Latino parents, particularly regarding their understanding of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), communication, discipline strategies, and emotional well-being. Data were collected through structured interviews using qualitative methods. This study identified significant changes in family dynamics, including enhanced communication and reduced use of physical punishment. Parents reported transitioning from authoritarian parenting styles to more positive, respectful approaches that foster their children's trust, emotional regulation, and self-esteem. Further, this study investigated the parenting practices and experiences of two cohorts of Latino parents. Using purposive sampling with the Centro La Familia dataset, 15 Latino parents were selected. Five major themes emerged from the analysis: (1) Supportive family and learning environment i.e., participants appreciated the safe, confidential space and culturally sensitive facilitation provided by the program; (2) community resources and educational materials i.e., parents had mixed views on the clarity and accessibility of materials, though many found them valuable; (3) parental communication and discipline i.e., parents shifted to using more empathetic, constructive discipline strategies, promoting better understanding and cooperation with their children; (4) emotional well-being and stress management i.e., parents reported improved emotional regulation and stronger family bonds, reducing their overall stress levels; and (5) transforming parental discipline i.e., parents embraced positive discipline techniques centered on love, respect, and effective communication, resulting in better parent-child relationships. This study highlights the effectiveness of parents' training related to ACEs in fostering trauma-informed parenting and improving family relationships. The findings suggest that culturally relevant, supportive learning environments are crucial for promoting reflective parenting. These results contribute to the existing literature on parenting interventions and advocate for the inclusion of comprehensive resources and ongoing support in similar future programs.

KEYWORDS: Adverse childhood experiences; discipline strategies; family dynamics; Latino parents

The transmission of ACEs is intergenerational and has been highlighted by recent studies, which have demonstrated that parental ACEs are associated with poor mental and physical health and poor developmental outcomes in offspring when both parents are considered, regardless of

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gender (Folger et al., 2018; Lê-Scherban et al., 2018). However, few studies have established this distinction between fathers and mothers; those that do either do not state the number of fathers participating (Schickedanz et al., 2018) or report similar results but are constrained by their small sample size of fathers (Folger et al., 2018).

Almost two-thirds of adult participants in the original ACEs study reported having experienced at least one ACE, with many ACEs occurring alongside other events (Felitti et al., 1998). ACEs are common worldwide. For instance, 66.26% of students in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, and other lower-income Asian countries reported having experienced at least one ACE (Ho et al., 2020). These numbers were significantly higher in lower-income Asian nations, including Tunisia (74.8%) and Vietnam (76%).

The prolonged or excessive activation of stress response systems without a stable safety net or supporting relationships is called toxic stress (Shonkoff et al., 2012). Parents who have experienced trauma are more likely to have children with similar experiences (Narayan et al., 2021; Valentino et al., 2023). Meanwhile, toxic stress and ACEs can exert intergenerational effects on health. Nevertheless, toxic stress in children can be prevented and reduced by strengthening parenting techniques and career skills (MacMillan et al., 2009).

Extensive research has indicated that the developing brain can sustain long-term harm from repeated toxic stress and traumatic events. Due to possible disruptions to the immunological, neurological, and endocrine systems, exposure to ACEs increases the risk of developing chronic illnesses and premature death (Boullier & Blair, 2018).

The effects of toxic stress on families may be exacerbated or mitigated under various circumstances. Therefore, numerous parenting groups and social support programs have been established to lower parental depression and increase self-efficacy; however, social isolation is associated with parental depression.

Family functioning (Zhang et al., 2023), including parental resilience and knowledge about child development (Bethell et al., 2014), are important protective factors. However, these solutions have not been successfully incorporated into current care systems.

Studies have revealed that severe psychological strain and mistreatment throughout childhood can have detrimental effects on adults' conduct and cognitive abilities (Sheridan & McLaughlin, 2014). Unhealthy parental bonding and caregiving can be interrupted by such negative events, thereby prolonging trauma cycles across generations. Consequently, children exposed to high levels of ACEs are at greater risk of various mental disorders, addiction, and medical disorders, which can further weaken parental protective capacities (Van Niel et al., 2014).

Although racial and ethnic differences in ACEs and their impact on health outcomes have been studied, comparative data within Latinx communities, especially comparisons between children of immigrants and non-immigrants, are scarce. The term "Latinx" is used to refer to people who are of Latin American descent or origin without regard to gender. By 2060, Latinx children are expected to comprise 31.9% of all children in the United States. It is difficult to develop effective interventions that tackle and mitigate the consequences of ACEs for everyone when there is insufficient focus on the challenges faced by various communities. This is because gaps exist in critical data regarding childhood adversity (Vespa et al., 2020).

One's cultural context has a major impact on parenting, child development, and well-being. In the Western and Eastern contexts, these influences differ considerably (Lansford et al., 2021; Miyamoto & Ryff, 2022). In Eastern cultures, parenting techniques and practices often diverge from those in the West and are influenced by ideas such as Confucian values, which are prominent in many Asian homes (Lansford et al., 2021). These cultural differences imply that ACEs may have varying effects on emotional health and academic success, depending on culture, calling for more research to examine these relationships.

Families with aggressive children have been shown to engage in more forceful and hostile interactions during conflict than families without such children. These conversations frequently turn physical, with yelling or punching serving as a temporary resolution, while reinforcing bad behavior. Furthermore, prosocial behaviors are not as strongly reinforced in these families through pleasant interactions. According to longitudinal research, such coercive tendencies are connected to the development of antisocial behavior, substance abuse, aggression, and depression, all of which are associated with future health problems, according to longitudinal research. Another important element of many social conflicts comprises coercive procedures (Patterson et al., 2018).

To lower newborns' exposure to chronic stress—a major cause of “toxic stress”—healthcare administrators collaborate with community agencies, which is an important element of their responsibility in addressing socioeconomic determinants of health. Because children and their caregivers have a close relationship, it is essential to lessen parental stress to shield children against abuse and other negative outcomes. Screening for early life adversity and connecting families with support programs are crucial initial steps in reducing these stressors. McCrae et al. (2021) conducted a three-year study to examine changes in the healthcare system that involve and assist parents of young children in reducing toxic stress in the early years of life; and conclude that healthcare entities need to “*sustain investments to prevent or mitigate the effects of exposure to toxic stress on young children*” (p.1).

Programs grounded in research effectively encourage good parenting practices, while lowering instances of child abuse and severe punishment. These treatments have been found to reduce psychological and behavioral difficulties that contribute to significant health concerns include cardiovascular diseases and cancer (McCrae et al., 2021). Additionally, research indicates that supportive family situations may stop the inflammatory processes associated with many illnesses. For instance, it was discovered that eight years after the experiment, children enrolled in a family-based program had reduced levels of inflammation. According to Biglan et al. (2017), these initiatives enhance telomere length, a biomarker linked to aging and long-term illness.

Literature Review

Worldwide, ACEs have had a detrimental impact on public health. In a systematic review, Yeo et al. (2023) identified 100 studies with 176 effect sizes appropriate for meta-analysis. Compared with household dysfunction, there were greater correlations between ACEs and abuse, as well as composite indicators. During childhood and adolescence, ACEs have a significantly greater effect on emotional well-being and academic achievement, compared with the periods of emerging or later adulthood. Gender and cultural grouping (Western vs. Eastern) do not significantly alter these correlations. Yeo et al.'s (2023) findings demonstrated the reciprocal links between ACEs and lower academic performance, as well as ACEs' causal role in both.

The physiological effects of ongoing stress are reflected in allostatic load (AL). After filtering out reviews and preliminary research, in a systematic review, Finlay et al. (2022) found 25 relevant studies published until February 1, 2022, that linked ACEs to AL. Their results indicate that health-risk behaviors and social support may impact the association among ACEs, lower adult health, and higher AL. For at-risk individuals, early intervention may help reduce the negative health impacts of AL.

Although ACEs are associated with poor health outcomes, they are rarely used in primary care. Kalmakis and Chandler (2015) systematically analyzed the evidence of ACEs and adult health outcomes to aid nurse practitioners. Using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and meta-analysis criteria, they analyzed 42 English articles published between 2008 and 2013. Their results showed that ACEs were linked to risky behaviors, physical and psychological

problems, interruptions in development, and higher healthcare utilization. However, generalizability was limited because most studies used self-reported indicators of childhood adversity. Because treating these difficulties may improve health outcomes, nurse practitioners are encouraged to integrate assessments of patients' childhood experiences with routine treatments.

Programs for community-based parent education are crucial for enhancing the bond between parents and children and reducing ACEs' detrimental impacts on young children's social-emotional growth. A three-month program based on Dr. Becky Bailey's Conscious Discipline was examined by Giunta et al. (2021). Weekly lessons were attended by parents whose children aged 2–5 years were recognized as being at risk for negative social-emotional outcomes. Regardless of parental ACE levels, there was a discernible improvement in the social-emotional scores of the 33 children evaluated. Their results demonstrate how well the program advances children's social-emotional growth.

Claypool and Moore de Peralta (2021) examined the impact of toxic stress and ACEs during the COVID-19 pandemic on the health and development of Latin American children. Adversity at an early age can have detrimental effects, and the pandemic has exacerbated these problems, particularly in Latinx populations. Their assessment disputes the ACE framework's ability to capture the specific experiences of Latino groups and supports the classification of the pandemic as an ACE. It is interesting to note that first-generation Latino immigrants reported lower ACE rates, which begs the question of whether there are cultural safeguards or restrictions in the framework. Children's development was threatened by aggravating variables such as immigration concerns and discrimination. Their report recommends interventions aimed at fostering resilience, including improved protective services, early ACE screening, and trauma-informed care.

The effects of poverty on childhood development and long-term health have been well-documented in the literature, with racial and ethnic minority children bearing a disproportionate share of this burden. Evidence-based parenting interventions in early childhood can help reduce the risk of stress and poverty. These interventions must be affordable and practical for low-income families living in metropolitan settings to reduce racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic inequities in the United States. Dawson-McClure et al. (2017) examined the early stages of ParentCorps, a culturally sensitive parenting program intended for school integration. To engage families and promote behavioral change, ParentCorps integrates the essential elements of successful parenting programs, with a focus on cultural relevance. As this intervention gains momentum in diverse communities, constant enhancements are centered on improving staff training to increase racial consciousness and implementing an operational science framework to assist schools in executing a range of engagement tactics (Dawson-McClure et al., 2017).

ACEs such as abuse, neglect, exposure to violence, and parental mental illness or substance addiction are related to numerous unfavorable life outcomes. It is critical to recognize and address issues such as instability in providing early care and education (ECE) to young children with ACEs. Lipscomb et al. (2019) examined data from 2,466 children from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study to determine the association between early childhood ACEs and instability in ECE. When the children were three years old, parents reported ACE indications, as well as volatility in their children's ECE and disruptions in their work or school resulting from these concerns. More than half the children had at least one ACE, and 12% had three or more ACEs. According to the research, children's ACEs are associated with higher levels of ECE fluctuation and corresponding interruptions in their parents' jobs or educational schedules (Lipscomb et al., 2019).

Graber et al. (2019) investigated the experiences of parents engaged in group well-child care (GWCC) and trauma-informed GWCC (TI-GWCC). Using thematic analysis, they examined the data for recurring themes after conducting three focus groups and design sessions with 17

parents from either the regular GWCC or TI-GWCC. The key themes highlighted were: (1) GWCC empowers parents to recognize toxic stress, (2) parents find methods to model beneficial behaviors for their children, and (3) activities that stimulate reflection on attachment and anger management foster deliberate parenting practices. According to this qualitative research, TI-GWCC reduces the risk of childhood adversity by encouraging parent-child relationships, improving families' comprehension of toxic stress, and imparting stress-reduction techniques.

ACEs can be a product of authoritarian leadership styles within families, society, and school systems. Authoritarian leadership impacts children's behavior and is one of the reasons for toxic stress among children. Authoritarian leadership is recognized as strict control, less freedom, and a lack of responsiveness to individual needs (Mounk, 2018). The rise of authoritarian leaders in society reflects these dynamics in families and school settings. Authoritarian governance prioritizes stability and control, often by sacrificing dissent and critical thinking.

Mounk (2018) argued that such a climate of authoritativeness brings a culture of fear and vulnerability among citizens. This mirrors the experience of children in an authoritarian educational and familial environment. Like, in family settings, some authoritarian parents usually pressure their children to be obedient and make them follow a certain kind of discipline by using punitive measures, which, as a result, hinders their emotional and social development.

Li et al. (2024) identified that authoritarian parenting styles, characterized by high demands and low responsiveness, have a similar effect on children's development. It leads to low self-esteem, increased anxiety, and difficulties in social interactions among children (Muraco et al., 2020). In contrast, those parents who practice balancing high expectations with emotional support have been shown to promote better social development of children (Cchiaro, 2021). Some studies indicate that authoritative parenting has a positive influence on the academic performance of children due to high expectations, but it leads to stress and burnout. Children perform well out of fear rather than intrinsic motivation (Salat & Cherogony, 2024).

Salat and Cherogony (2024) highlighted in their study that authoritative parents often limit their children's decision-making and critical thinking abilities and refute their independence. As a result, this fosters rebellious and resentful behavior in their children as they grow older. Some studies propose that authoritarian leadership, whether in a family setting or a school system, may create short-term discipline and improve academic performance among children due to strict rules. Some other researchers have highlighted its long-term negative effects. Like, it decreases children's motivation and engagement by limiting their freedom and input (Maurice, 2019; Teachers Institute, 2023).

Research indicates that school regulation under authoritarian leaders often limits creativity and reduces children's engagement resulting in behavioral issues (Teachers Institute, 2023). Children in authoritarian environments struggle with peer interactions. One study highlighted that children raised under authoritarian parenting are more prone to social impairments, lack social initiative, and have difficulty forming close friendships (Li et al., 2024).

Specifically discussing Latino Families, it is evident from existing literature that Latino families face unique challenges related to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) due to their deep cultural dynamics and systemic barriers. Latino children face a significantly higher risk of ACEs as compared to their white peers due to multiple cultural reasons. Various researchers identified that familism and collective identity are core cultural values in Latino families. Latino families emphasize familism, which includes family unity, loyalty, and support. There is a mixed opinion among various researchers on this matter (Bravo et al., 2021).

Some emphasize that familism works as a protective factor against the effects of ACEs. Whereas others highlighted that this may also lead families to underreport or internalize stressors to maintain familial harmony (Bravo et al., 2021). Many Latino families face stressors like

migration trauma, language barriers, and socioeconomic instability, which can exacerbate ACEs. Children often act as cultural brokers for their parents, creating role reversals that increase stress (Camacho & Henderson, 2022). Studies also explored that the majority of Latino parents regulate an authoritative parenting style to deal with their children, leading to an overly strict environment and triggering ACEs in children (Bravo et al., 2021).

Theoretical Perspective

Two theoretical frameworks were relevant to the present investigation: Social learning theory and transformative learning theory.

Social Learning Theory

According to Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, people, especially young people, learn about attitudes, behaviors, and emotional reactions through imitation, training, and observation. Children watch role models and mimic actions depending on perceived rewards or punishments. Therefore, key processes: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation are necessary for this type of learning to occur. This idea is important when discussing ACEs because it explains how children who witness harmful behaviors such as neglect or domestic abuse may grow up to accept them as the norm, which can lead to cycles of adversity. Conversely, positive role models can provide resilient alternatives, highlighting the need for social support to end trauma cycles and promote healthier coping mechanisms.

Transformative Learning Theory

According to Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory, people can change both personally and socially by critically examining their assumptions, values, and beliefs. The concept of frames of reference that influence how individuals understand their experiences is crucial. A confusing problem or experience that contradicts pre-existing beliefs, such as trauma or adversity, is frequently the catalyst for transformative learning. These problems could be related to the abuse, neglect, or instability of those who have experienced ACEs, which would make them re-evaluate their sense of safety, trust, and value. People can investigate alternative perspectives and build resilience by privately reflecting and discussing them.

Research Question

- How do family interventions tailored to Latino families' impact parenting practices, knowledge, and the prevention of ACEs, along with the role cultural beliefs play in shaping these outcomes?

Objectives

The following are a few basic objectives of the present study:

- Examine parents' discipline methods, strategies, and tools at home to analyze positive and negative discipline.
- Taking socioeconomic and cultural aspects into account, determine ACE exposure and outcomes.

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- Evaluate the performance of parental education programs in minimizing ACE consequences and enhancing parent-child relationships
- After the session, parents were given input to learn about their experiences and the success of the intervention.
- Analysis of suggestions for other parents regarding this program to lower the incidence of ACEs in the community.

Scope of the Study

The present study is an extension of the quantitative research carried out by Barrera and Sharma (2024) to raise awareness of ACEs and encourage healthy parenting among Spanish-speaking Latino parents, investigating the “Strikeout Toxic Stress!” program. Although ACEs are becoming more widely known, there are few effective preventative measures for Latinos. Based on the results of the APQ and modified ACE questionnaires, the program demonstrated a noteworthy enhancement in parenting behaviors. Targeted treatments are essential for reducing long-term consequences because Latino populations exhibit a higher incidence of ACEs. To improve children’s well-being, parents must be educated about ACEs.

This review dives into Latino communities, concentrating on parental education programs’ impact on parent-child relationships, especially in households where ACEs have occurred. This study emphasizes how these families’ issues and responses are shaped by cultural settings. After the workshop, parents were asked to learn more about how it assisted them in addressing their ACEs and lessening the toxic dynamics in their relationships with their children. By focusing on cultural factors, this research clarifies how targeted interventions adapted to the needs and values of Latinx families can successfully reduce ACEs’ negative impacts.

Investigating how parental ACEs, particularly among women, can have long-term intergenerational effects on children’s physical, mental, and behavioral health is one of the major contributions of the present study. This study’s findings, which demonstrated the necessity of trauma-informed methods in parental education, linked ACE experiences to adverse developmental outcomes in their offspring. It also fills a gap in the literature by evaluating how parents’ traits, perspectives, and cultural influences impact their children’s encounters with ACEs. The directional impact of cultural elements on parenting treatment has not been examined by previous studies. Considering these factors, the present study provides new insights into how programs may be more effectively and relevantly adapted to particular ethnic groups.

Additionally, parents shared the concepts they learned in class and highlighted how attending the program could improve their connections with their children. They were able to express the methods of child discipline that worked best for them, identifying the differences between positive and negative approaches. These findings are critical for improving the program’s curriculum, particularly for making it more informed about trauma to better meet the unique needs of families coping with ACEs’ aftermath. To ensure that future versions of the program is not just culturally appropriate but also better equipped to meet participants’ trauma-related needs, parents’ recommendations for curriculum improvement are crucial.

Method

Research Design

This study aimed to investigate parental education on parental attitudes toward an understanding of ACEs. Structured interviews were conducted using a qualitative research design to record the parents' experiences and any changes in their perspectives, whether beneficial or detrimental. Additionally, the qualitative method enabled a more thorough comprehension of cultural variance in the responses, illuminating how varying backgrounds may influence the effectiveness of the intervention. This approach facilitated a more thorough evaluation of the program's efficacy in reducing ACEs' long-term harm to children's well-being.

Sampling

The present study evaluated the parenting practices and experiences of two cohorts of Latino parents with ACEs, aiming to provide important insights into Latino parents' experiences. The second cohort, comprising 15 participants, was chosen through purposeful sampling from the Centro La Familia dataset. This strategy was adopted to investigate the social and cultural elements that influence parenting practices, as well as to evaluate treatments' efficacy in reducing ACEs in this community.

Recruitment

A more comprehensive qualitative analysis was conducted on the 15 participants in the second cohort. These individuals completed assessments using the APQ-Parent Form and a modified version of the ACE questionnaire from the Centro La Familia dataset.

Informed Consent

To obtain informed consent for this study, which included Latino parents, it was necessary to fully describe the study's aim, which was to examine how a parental education program affected participants' knowledge and attitudes toward ACEs. The protocols for the structured interviews were explained to the participants.

Tool/Data Collection

A self-constructed questionnaire consisting of 18 items was used to collect data for this qualitative study through semi-structured interviews. Expert feedback helped enhance the questionnaire, which was based on a literature review. Additionally, it was translated from Spanish into English and examined by linguists to guarantee clarity and eliminate ambiguity. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data, and thematic analysis was employed to discover significant themes, including stress management, resilience, and community support, among Spanish-speaking families throughout the pandemic.

Procedure

Participants with "Strikeout Toxic Stress!" intervention program, which featured two cohorts of Spanish-speaking parents from different parts of Fresno City (second cohort), were

chosen for the study. The interviews took place in a confidential and friendly environment and lasted for approximately 30–35 minutes. For accuracy, each interview was recorded with the participant's consent. A digital voice recorder was used to record and comprehensively capture the interview specifics. Extensive notes were taken before and after each interview to document participants' first impressions and nonverbal communication.

Analysis

A thematic analysis was used to examine the qualitative data provided by the respondents to identify themes and patterns in their answers. To do this, it was necessary to code important ideas and arrange them into connecting themes that represented the participants' perceptions of ACEs and their experiences with the parental education program. Codes and categories were created using NVIVO software to identify major themes, which provided a better understanding of the contextual and cultural elements that affect parenting behaviors in the Latino population. Table 1 illustrates the generation of codes, subthemes, and themes.

Table 1
Generation of Codes, Subthemes, and Themes

Major theme	Sub-theme	Codes		
Supportive family and learning environment within a cultural context	Supportive system	• Supportive facilitators • Comfort and confidentiality • Positive interpersonal relationships • Engaging atmosphere • Enjoyment of learning		
	Learning's positive impact on family dynamics	• Enhanced understanding and knowledge • Behavioral changes in parenting • Practical application of skills • Cultural adaptation and personal growth		
Community resources and educational materials	Strengthened family relationships and improved communication	• Enhanced listening and understanding • Positive behavioral changes • Improved communication skills • Quality time and attention • Emotional growth and harmony		
Parental communication and discipline	Availability of community resource information	• Sufficient examples and clarity • Effective learning tools • Challenges in understanding • Timing and interaction issues		
	Essential tools for effective child discipline	• Respect for individuality and space • Affection, encouragement, and love • Openness and active listening • Balance between protection and independence		
Emotional well-being and stress management	Increased communication and affection	• More open communication • Showing more affection • Encouraging new activities • Effective communication		
Encouraging parental discipline through positive strategies and community sharing	Increased communication and affection	• Communication as a central strategy • Respect in discipline • Encouragement and building self-esteem • Love and affection as a foundation		
Transforming parental and breaking the rule of violence	Improved self-esteem	• Physical punishment as a primary disciplining tool • Verbal abuse and humiliation • Authorization and abusive parent	Physical abuse and humiliation Lack of affection and emotional support Exceptions and balanced	Physical punishment Abuse and humiliation Authoritarian and abusive parenting
	Eliminating violence	• Improved self-esteem • Emotional regulation	Eliminating violence Points on inspection	Eliminating violence Eliminating violence

Findings

Most respondents reported a positive impact on family dynamics, with enhanced communication, parenting behavior, and family emotional growth. Moreover, the results identified the critical importance of community resources and educational materials, as well as the challenges participants faced in understanding these resources in certain contexts. Participants also shared

their shifts in communication and disciplinary strategies, replacing physical punishment with positive techniques to enhance trust, emotional regulation, and self-esteem. The data also discussed the parents' improved stress management and emotional well-being.

Theme 1: Supportive Family and Learning Environment within a Cultural Context

This theme encapsulates the overall sentiments of participants, as they share feelings of being welcomed and supported in parenting classes. The findings identified various key factors that contribute to a supportive learning environment. Participants shared that they felt it safe to express themselves because of the supportive facilitators who created a comfortable and confidential space for them.

One participant expressed her views: "The facilitators were very kind and attentive." Another added: "I felt comfortable, there was confidence to talk. Everything was confidential, so I felt free to share and I felt familiar."

Overall, the respondents expressed satisfaction with their classes. Most felt that the atmosphere helped foster positive interpersonal relationships and was engaging, and that they enjoyed learning from these classes. One respondent shared: "I felt good because of the atmosphere and the explanations they gave." However, some participants highlighted areas for improvement, particularly regarding the pacing and depth of the sessions. According to one participant, "The time was so limited that we did not get much time to know each other or for any kind of interpersonal interactions."

Participants also reported their learning experiences in these classes, which helped them enhance their understanding and knowledge of behavioral changes in parenting. One mother shared her experience as follows: "We are from Mexico and the culture and traditions are different. This training helped me change my behavior toward my family and children like, now I ask questions to my daughters instead of scolding them. Before I used to be wild and now I am not. I feel happy about this change in me."

The respondents also explained that the practical application of skills in this training was beneficial for cultural adaptation and personal growth. Most felt that the training not only affected the parents but also positively influenced family dynamics, with better communication. One respondent expressed: "It has improved my family life; I learned to understand my family better." Another participant added the following:

I feel my family life has improved, now I prefer to communicate more with my children, and I pay more attention to the words I say to them. My relationship with my children is much stronger now, thanks to this training.

Most participants highlighted that one of the major outcomes of this training was improved communication skills within the family. The parents mentioned that they encountered positive behavioral changes that enhanced their listening and understanding skills. One woman shared the following: "My communication skills have been improved now. It helped me remove a communication gap between me and my older daughter, now I try to listen and understand her more with patience."

Participants shared that after attending this training, they tried to pay more attention to their children and pay importance to quality time, which leads to emotional harmony and growth within the family. Overall, the findings indicated that parenting classes led to significant improvements in family life and relationships, highlighting enhanced communication and positive changes in behavior.

Theme 2: Community Resources and Educational Materials

Although most participants positively acknowledged the information offered about community resources, few noted a lack of information provided in specific areas. Most claimed that the examples and materials were sufficient.

One respondent said the following: “My questions were also answered, and drawings/pictures were provided for me to understand better.” Another one added: “Although the topic was very clear the questionnaire was a bit confusing.” These mixed opinions suggest the need for more comprehensive community resource integration in future programs. Most parents stated that the educational material was sufficient and clear. Still, the most appreciative thing was the effective learning tools, such as real-life examples that trainers gave in training to draw attention and make participants learn more interactively. In contrast, a few shared difficulty in understanding certain concepts because of limited time and interaction issues in the sessions. One participant claimed: “It was swift, and we almost did not have time to get to know each other better.”

Theme 3: Parental Communication and Discipline

Many parents reported transformative changes they experienced in their parenting approach, especially in terms of understanding and increased patience. Self-awareness, as a key factor, is a product of personal growth, facilitating a change in family dynamics, particularly regarding the shift towards healthier parenting practices from traditional authoritative parenting practices. One female parent confessed:

These classes opened my eyes and taught me to listen and understand my children much more than before. My daughter recently shared a harrowing experience that she experienced as a child. I felt guilty for a long time. [Because] I did not understand, I criticized her and judged her. With these classes, I understood many things. The other day we talked like never before.

Another person added: “I am being more patient with my family now, I used to lose my temper so quickly but now I try to understand things with more patience. This training has boosted my self-esteem.”

Almost all the respondents emphasized the value of effective communication, love, and affection as crucial elements of effective discipline. The most essential tool pointed out by respondents was respect for and consideration of the child’s individuality. Additionally, the parents reinforced the significance of building self-esteem and encouraging their children. One father stated the following:

Motivation and encouragement [comprise] the most valuable tool for raising children. I used a little bit of both previously. However, now, I recognize the importance of motivating and offering them support, love, and emotional support to overcome any obstacles in life.

The findings also revealed the participants’ opinions about the value of these tools in nurturing their relationships with their children and creating a positive home environment. One participant gave the following feedback:

Thanks to this course I am changing 99% of my parenting methods. Now I use a lot of communication, love, and respect to raise my children’s self-esteem. I can see how my children are more receptive and [respond positively] to me.

Another person stated: “There is 100% probability. Thanks to this class I have reflected on how to modify my parenting style.” Moreover, one parent said: “Actually, it is tough for me, but I am trying my level best to change my parenting style for my children’s good.”

Almost all participants shared that these classes inspired them to use more respectful methods to discipline their children, which resulted in healthier family dynamics and stronger relationships with their children. One respondent shared their experience:

In the past, I used physical punishments to discipline my children but now I realize it was a mistake and now, I do not use physical punishment. I try to talk and communicate my limits regarding their behavior and grades. I feel that this has improved our relationship since we started speaking with more respect and showing affection and consideration.

Another participant stated the following: “Now I understand that respect and protection are more effective than physical punishment.”

Theme 4: Emotional Well-being and Stress Management

Parents reported that using the new tools helped reduce stress, which positively impacted their parenting practices. They expressed a significant shift toward more respectful and affectionate communication with their children, resulting in more composed relationship ties and less tension.

One parent stated the following: “I have started feeling that after attending this training, our relationship is growing better. Now we communicate more effectively. I remind them that they are very important to me and that I love them.”

Another parent related the following: “I am being more patient now. I try to utilize effective communication so that my kids and grandchildren can grow without toxic stress and trauma.”

Overall, the findings showed that the training brought about a positive change in parents’ attitudes, becoming more mindful and considerate of their children’s feelings by fostering respectful and affectionate relationships. Parents proposed that they now consider communication and encouragement as the primary tools for improving their interaction with and monitoring their children. Most participants stated that they now aim to become more involved in their children’s academic and personal growth by focusing on encouragement rather than control or punishment.

The participants shared that through this training, they learned how to manage their stress levels. Managing stress levels, whether moderate or mild, helped improve their patience. This increases their receptivity and ability to set positive limits for their children.

Theme 5: Transforming Parental Discipline through Positive Strategies and Community Sharing

During the training sessions, participants were asked about their experiences related to parental discipline methods, childhood experiences, and the discipline strategies they used on their children to maintain discipline. Some parents shared that, due to their own childhood experiences, they learned that to show their authoritarian role, it is mandatory to impose physical punishment and sometimes verbal abuse. Therefore, they are typically used as a primary discipline in parenting. However, after this training, many of them shifted to more positive disciplinary strategies by recognizing the detrimental effects of previous authoritarian methods.

One respondent said: “My parents used to give physical punishments to discipline us. Before I was a bit like that; however, [in the last] couple of years, I have changed.”

Almost all participants were very satisfied with the “Punching Toxic Stress” class and highly recommended the method. Parents appreciated the learning strategies they learned in the class, such as effective communication, respect for discipline, love, and affection.

One participant shared his views as follows: “I think effective communication, respect in discipline, and love and affection are the foundation of healthy parenting.” Another one added: “I have learned that love is the best method to solve any family problem.” One woman highlighted the following: “I have identified that communication and setting clear rules for your children is the best strategy to avoid toxic stress.”

Overall, most parents responded positively to these sessions and highly recommended the “Punching Toxic Stress” class to other parents. They cited its broad impact on parenting practices and valuable lessons for promoting emotional well-being and healthy family relationships. One respondent claimed: “I would highly recommend the class because it helps us to reflect on the importance of working on values when parenting so that children do not have emotional problems in the future.” Another one stated: “It is very useful to learn different parenting styles and improve the relationship with children.” Additionally, parents expressed that they would love to share their personal experiences with other parents to build trust and reduce their fear of changing their disciplinary methods.

Theme 6: Psychological empowerment and breaking the rule of violence

The findings of the present study highlighted some important revelations regarding preventing children from violence and increasing the psychological health and self-esteem among children. Almost all the participants confessed that this training opened their eyes about how much psychological harm they were causing to their children while using traditional authoritative parenting methods and punishment strategies to discipline their children. One mother shared her feeling of embarrassment “I always maintained a strict environment at my home to regulate my children's behavior this much that my elder daughter used to shiver due to fear of punishment whenever she did something wrong intentionally or unintentionally but this training made me realized how violent I was behaving and it was affecting the overall mental health of my children and shattering their self-esteem”.

Another parent added: “This training helped me control my behavior of being violent at times, now I prefer my children's psychological health over forceful discipline. I prefer to have more discussions with my children instead of ordering and scolding them. I have seen a positive change in their self-esteem and I am happy”. Participants highlighted that recognizing the psychological harm caused by traditional methods of discipline motivated them to adopt more empathetic and supportive parenting strategies.

Parents also expressed that adopting positive disciplinary methods transformed their relationships with their children by creating an environment of mutual respect, love, and trust. This training not only developed self-esteem in their children but also alleviated the psychological effects of violence that many had experienced in their own childhoods.

Discussion

This study identified parental education’s transformative effects on Latino parents, particularly regarding their understanding of ACEs and their impact on parenting practices. It revealed the significant role of supporting the family and learning environment by emphasizing the influence of supportive facilitators, confidentiality, and positive interpersonal relationships on learning experiences.

Moreover, the results revealed that supportive facilitators and a confidential, welcoming environment significantly positively impacted participants' learning experiences and their relationships with their families. These findings align with prior research on community-based parent education, which emphasizes that supportive environments play a crucial role in enhancing parent-child relationships and reducing ACEs' negative effects. For instance, Giunta et al. (2021) highlighted how parenting programs can promote positive behavioral changes and improve family dynamics regardless of parental ACE levels, demonstrating that a nurturing environment facilitates personal growth and cultural adaptation.

Participants in the current study also described a shift in parenting behaviors, noting improvements in communication, emotional regulation, and discipline. These findings echo those of Kalmakis and Chandler (2015), who found that early interventions and supportive learning environments led to better health outcomes and family functioning. By creating a non-judgmental space, facilitators in the current study empowered parents to embrace new parenting approaches, which were further reinforced by positive peer interactions during the sessions.

Mixed feedback regarding the clarity of educational materials and the integration of community resources points to a gap that has been highlighted in the literature. As Lipscomb et al. (2019) noted, instability and disruptions in early care environments are often exacerbated by a lack of comprehensive resources. While most participants in this study appreciated the visual aids and real-life examples provided, some reported difficulties in understanding complex concepts due to time constraints and limited opportunities for interpersonal interactions. This suggests that future interventions should provide more tailored and in-depth support to ensure that all parents benefit fully from these resources.

One theme highlighted the transformative changes that participants experienced in communication and disciplinary strategies, moving away from authoritarian approaches to more respectful and positive techniques. This shift is consistent with findings from the literature on trauma-informed parenting programs. For example, Graber et al. (2019) demonstrated that group-based parenting programs encourage reflective parenting practices and foster healthier parent-child relationships, particularly when parents are exposed to new models of discipline that emphasize love, respect, and emotional support. Furthermore, this study endorsed the previous study by McDonald (n.d.) stated that parents with a balanced approach of high expectations with emotional support have seen better social development of their children.

The feedback from parents in this study supports the effectiveness of these positive strategies, with many reporting that they no longer used physical punishment and instead focused on motivation, encouragement, and open communication. This feedback from parents justified the study by Bravo et al. (2021), indicating that the majority of Latino parents regulate an authoritative parenting style to deal with their children, leading to an overly strict environment including physical punishments, which, as a result, triggers ACEs in children.

These outcomes are similar to those reported by Dawson-McClure et al. (2017), who found that culturally relevant interventions could help parents shift their approach to discipline and improve their children's emotional regulation.

The findings of this study revealed that participants who engaged in training experienced improved emotional well-being and stress management. Parents shared that they felt more patient and composed, leading to healthier family relationships. This is consistent with the findings of Finlay et al. (2022), who found that managing stress and reducing AL can mitigate ACEs' long-term health consequences. By learning stress reduction techniques and applying positive discipline strategies, parents can create more emotionally stable home environments, which would benefit their children's development.

A focus on communication, respect, and patience is a hallmark of successful parenting programs, as highlighted by Claypool and Moore de Peralta (2021). The findings of this study support the argument that providing parents with tools to manage their stress can have a cascading effect on family dynamics, creating a more nurturing and resilient environment for their children.

The emphasis of training on replacing physical punishment with positive disciplinary strategies mirrors findings from studies such as those conducted by Yeo et al. (2023). The study highlights the importance of shifting away from punitive measures, often linked to ACEs, and adopting approaches that promote children's emotional well-being, trust, and self-esteem. The parents in this study overwhelmingly endorsed the value of positive discipline, noting how it strengthened their relationships with their children and improved their family lives.

The findings also revealed that the training was transformative for parents, it made them recognize the psychological harm caused by traditional authoritative parenting methods and motivated them to adopt empathetic, non-violent approaches. Parents reported improved relationships with their children as well as observed significant enhancements in their children's psychological health and self-esteem. Additionally, the training helped break the cycles of violence by addressing the psychological impacts of parents' own childhood experiences.

Moreover, parents' willingness to share their experiences and recommend the program to others underscores the importance of community support in creating long-term behavioral changes. This aligns with the conclusions drawn by Dawson-McClure et al. (2017), who emphasized that community-based interventions are essential for promoting resilience and reducing the intergenerational transmission of ACE-related risks.

Recommendations:

The findings of this study highlighted some gaps in existing studies and proposed some recommendations for future studies as well as parent training community programs while dealing with ACEs:

1. Future programs should extend the reach of parenting classes to indigenous communities to address inequalities in access to education.
2. Programs should develop culturally specific and linguistically friendly materials for diverse populations to enhance understanding and engagement.
3. Conducting longitudinal studies will be beneficial to evaluate the sustained impact of parenting education on family dynamics and child outcomes.
4. There is a dire need for further studies on Latino families' parenting strategies and toxic stress in their children. For this purpose, more trained educators are needed who can recognize the strengths of Latino parenting and integrate cultural values like *familism* and *respeto* (respect) into early education.
5. Moreover, organizing workshops on different levels like preschool, elementary, junior, and high can be more beneficial.
6. For example on the preschool level, creating bilingual parenting workshops to encourage collaboration and provide resources on ACEs and positive discipline can be helpful.
7. On the elementary school level, promoting parent-teacher meetings with translators due to language issues can be a plus. Providing materials in Spanish, English, and other languages where needed, to ensure accessibility and understanding.
8. Other than that, on the high school level it will be beneficial to advocate mentorship programs connecting Latino students with role models from their community to ensure positive behavior and reduce the cultural gaps.
9. More parenting workshops specifically to acknowledge Latino cultural strength.

10. With parents' training, it is also important to train teachers and staff according to cultural competency.
11. Adding resources in Spanish/English like newsletters, academic support tips, and behavioral management strategies to facilitate Latino parents will be a positive move.
12. It is also recommended to use the real-life examples, video interviews and visual aids of those parents who attended these trainings previously, to help and attract Latino parents as well as parents belonging to diverse cultures to attend these kinds of trainings in future to bring a positive change to cope with ACEs.
13. Incorporate cultural sensitivity into the training to accommodate diverse backgrounds.
14. Add more feedback sessions within the workshop

Conclusion

This study identified an increasing need to support the efficacy of parenting interventions in mitigating ACEs' negative effects. By offering parents—specifically, Latino parents—a supportive and culturally relevant environment, this program fostered positive changes in parenting behavior, stress management, and family communication. These outcomes are consistent with the literature highlighting the critical role of early interventions, supportive environments, and community resources in improving family dynamics and reducing ACEs' long-term impact on public health. In conclusion, the “Strikeout Toxic Stress!” program is a novel and effective approach for enhancing positive parenting practices while learning about ACEs' effects.

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