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AN EXAMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LATINO CHILDREN'S  
KNOWLEDGE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARDS  
VIOLENCE

An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for Graduation with  
Undergraduate Research Honors  
Georgia State University  
2014

by

Charmaine J. Mora-Ozuna

Committee:

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Dr. Julia Perilla, Honors Thesis Advisor

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Dr. Larry Berman, Honors College Dean

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Date

AN EXAMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LATINO CHILDREN'S  
KNOWLEDGE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARDS  
VIOLENCE

by

CHARMAINE J. MORA-OZUNA

Under the Direction of Julia Perilla PhD

ABSTRACT

The current study is part of a larger program evaluation of Caminar Latino, a community-based organization that works with Latino families affected by domestic violence. The purpose of this study was to explore the effects that community-based programs have on children. We wanted to investigate the relationship between children's knowledge of violence and their attitude towards it. We hypothesized that children who have more educational awareness of violence can better recognize it when it happens, and therefore have better coping skills. Sixteen Latino children were interviewed and results showed that there was no significant relationship between violence knowledge and attitudes. This study found correlations between the number of siblings and attitudes towards violence: The more siblings a child had, the more he/she endorsed "if you are mad at someone you can just ignore them" and the less likely he/she endorsed "you try to talk out a problem instead of fighting". Findings show that it is important to consider siblings when exploring attitudes towards violence. The biggest limitation of this study was that these preliminary data's sample size may have been too small to show effects.

INDEX WORDS: Domestic violence, Latino youth, Community-based programs, Knowledge,  
Attitudes, Intergenerational transmission of violence

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An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Bachelor of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

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By

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December 2014

## DEDICATION

I would like dedicate this Honors Thesis to my biggest fan, my number one supporter, motivator and everyday inspiration - my mother, Jennifer Mora. *It is your unconditional and unfailing love that fills me with the passion and determination to always give my all and strive to reach my goals. It is because of your endless sacrifices that I can proudly stand where I stand today - Gracias mamy, por siempre creer en mi.*



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schedule as a student, teacher, and mother to support me in this intensive process of writing my first honors thesis. *Rebecca – your countless edits, counsel, and guidance has never gone unnoticed or unappreciated, you are truly the backbone of this project. Your influence is far-reaching and has impacted what I believe is attainable in my professional career path henceforth, and for that I am forever grateful.*

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Over the past couple of years, the prevalence of domestic violence (DV) has led communities to agree that it is a major public health issue (Joachim, 2000). Research shows that one in every four women will experience DV in her lifetime (Tjaden, & Thoennes, 2000). Domestic violence does not discriminate based on race, gender, age or even economic status (National Coalition against Violence, 2001). However, the Latino population suffers additional barriers when they experience DV and try to seek assistance (Murdaugh, Hunt, Sowell, & Santana, 2004). For example, many victims may worry about seeking help due to their legal status in the United States (Dutton, Orloff, & Hass, 2000). According to a fact sheet created by Casa de Esperanza (a national Latina organization working on the issue of domestic violence) in 2010, the lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate services adds to the many barriers that Latina victims of violence experience.

Domestic violence has usually been perceived as an individual issue, one that only affects those who experience it. Nevertheless, Perilla (1999) argues that DV is a human rights issue and should be seen as a problem that affects the community at large. Recently, the human rights framework has gained recognition, and many individuals agree that DV is a violation of human rights. Particularly, DV violates the right to safety, personal security, equality, and overall, the right to fundamental freedoms (Colucci & Pryor, 2014). Shifting the perspective from DV as a private issue to a societal issue may help others become more aware, especially in understanding the impact of DV for whole families, not just direct victims. In fact, research shows that DV has a negative impact on children. The following literature review will summarize research on how DV has been found to affect children who witness it.

## 1.1 Domestic Violence & Children

Children are highly affected by domestic violence; studies show that 15.5 million American children are exposed to DV (McDonald, Jouriles, Ramisetty-Mikler, Caetano, & Green, 2006). For the purpose of this study, exposure to DV is when children “see, hear, are directly involved in, or experience the aftermath of physical or sexual assaults that occur between their caregivers” (Evans, Davies, & DiLillo, 2008). Moreover, DV exposure increases the chances for children to have behavioral problems and show physical aggression (Evans et al., 2008). Traumatic childhood exposure to DV can also influence violent adult behaviors (Watt & Scrandis, 2013). The consistency of research to show the negative effects that DV exposure has on children provides strong evidence that this is a significant problem.

Furthermore, knowledge about violence can influence the attitude people have towards violence (Avery-Leaf, Cascardi, O’Leary, & Cano, 1997). Knowledge about violence can either have a negative or a positive effect on children, depending on how they learn about it. Unfortunately, many children’s knowledge about violence is derived from their direct exposure to violence. One study’s findings show that children who are exposed to violence are more likely to have attitudes that favor violent behaviors (Funk, Elliott, Urman, Flores, & Mock, 1999). Additionally, another study found that exposure to DV is a stronger predictor of encountering adverse attitudes towards violence than school and neighborhood violence (Slovak, Carlson, & Helm, 2007). Specifically, this study demonstrates that the relationship between DV and unhealthy attitudes towards violence is a risk factor for future violent behaviors. Children’s attitudes after witnessing violence becomes unclear and they may begin to learn that violence is a normal way to deal with conflict. For example, in her research, Perilla (1999) found that men

who battered also indicated that they had witnessed violence as children. Previous research thus provides evidence that violence may be a repeating cycle.

## **1.2 Intergenerational Transmission of Violence**

The intergenerational transmission of violence (IGT) theory states that there is a direct link between the history in the family of origin and the violence enacted in the following generations (Black, Sussman, & Unger, 2010). Existing theory supports the idea that violence is a socially learned behavior. For example, Albert Bandura's social learning theory of aggression states that people model violent behavior to which they have been directly or indirectly exposed (Bandura, 1978). Also, Fehringer and Hindin (2009) found that witnessing interparental violence was a strong predictor of using violence or being a victim in their relationship. Furthermore, data also show that family violence is most likely transmitted in same-sex linkages (Carroll, 1977). Compared to women, males are more likely to imitate their father's violent acts; therefore, the sons are most likely to be perpetrators of violence (Alexander, Moore, & Alexander, 1991). Results from a longitudinal study show that 45% of females and 50% of males reported having witnessed their parents physically hurt one another during their childhood (Fehringer & Hindin, 2009). Moreover, the repetitive intimate partner victimization model suggests that witnesses and victims of violence are at an increased risk to be re-victimized (Cochran, Sellers, Wiesbrock, & Palacios, 2011). Evidently, since a large amount of the population is exposed to violence, there is an increased risk for them to be re-victimized and continue the intergenerational transmission of violence. Since the IGT theory states that domestic violence is a cycle, it is important to target the children and try to help them avoid continuing the cycle. Research shows that knowledge about violence is derived from experience; therefore curricular interventions can serve as the educational experience for teens (Hausman, Spivak, & Prothrow-Stith, 1994).



### **1.3 Community-based programs**

Previous literature provides promising results from community-based programs devoted to victims, perpetrators and witness of violence. Findings from a community-based program on psychological distress and victim safety in women exposed to domestic violence found that women had decreased distress levels and greater readiness to leave abusive relationships (DePrince, Labus, Belknap, Buckingham, & Gover, 2012). In another study, men and women participated in two focus groups and described their thoughts on domestic violence. Results from this study helped create a pilot book, “Hitting is Bad, So Talk When You’re Mad”, which helps teach children that there are alternatives to hitting (Mattson, & Ruiz, 2005). Data also show that a prevention program helped decrease the attitudes of justifying dating violence (Avery-Leaf, Cascardi, O’Leary, & Cano, 1997). Overall, previous findings show that community-based programs can have a positive influence on individuals exposed to violence. However, there is a lack of research on the effects that community-based programs have on Latino children exposed to DV, perhaps because there are very few programs that target Latino children exposed to DV. The little research that exists on DV programs for children focus mainly on European and African American populations; therefore, the findings can’t be attributed to other minority populations (Becker, Mathis, Mueller, Issari, & Atta, 2009).

### **1.4 Current Study**

The aim of this study was to show how community-based domestic violence programs like Caminar Latino, can help end the cycle of violence. More specifically, we hypothesized that children who can identify violence or violent behaviors would be less likely to endorse violent behaviors as an acceptable outcome to conflict. For the purpose of this study, domestic violence

is not only limited to violence from a husband to a wife, but to “any abuse of women and children by men in a present or previous close relationships with them” (McGee, 2000).

Knowledge about violence is defined as the extent to which individuals can identify violent situations or behaviors. Further, attitude towards violence is defined as the degree to which children and adolescents find violence acceptable in various situations. This study hopes to add to the existing literature and show that there is a relationship between a child’s knowledge of violence and their attitude towards it. Moreover, our goal is to show how community-based outreach program, specifically *Caminar Latino*, can serve as the educational experience that will help increase children’s knowledge of violence and thereby reduce their attitudes towards the acceptability of violence.

## 2 METHODS

The current study is a part of a larger program evaluation measuring the efficacy of *Caminar Latino* (*Latino Journey*), a community-based intervention program located in Atlanta, GA. *Caminar Latino* offers services to Latino families, including: women survivors of domestic violence, their children who witness it, and the male perpetrators/ ex-perpetrators of violence. The correlational design includes youth participants recruited in the fall of 2014.

### 2.1 Procedure

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Georgia State University approved the larger study. Participants were recruited from *Caminar Latino*. For the larger study, women, men and their children were recruited. Female and male participants first heard about the evaluation through a staff member from *Caminar Latino* in their corresponding group. It is important to note that the female, male, and youth staff members only invited the individuals to participate;

members from the evaluation team obtained the consent forms and administered the survey. All participants who agreed to be in the study were provided consent forms. All consent forms and surveys were administered orally, to avoid the assumption that participants were literate. Parents provided consent for their children and children also provided assent. Researchers emphasized to potential participants that declining their participation in the study would not affect their opportunity to receive services from Caminar Latino. The surveys were de-identified by replacing the participants' names with identification numbers.

## **2.2 Participants**

Participants in this sub-study of the larger, ongoing evaluation included sixteen children between the ages of eight and seventeen years old. The majority (n=11) of the children were born in the United States, while the rest were born in Mexico. Half of the children (n= 8) were equally comfortable speaking English or Spanish, while the other half preferred to speak English. Eight students were male and eight students were female and participants reported having an average of three siblings (mode = 4).

## **2.3 Survey measures**

The larger study included eight different sections composed of questions and scales regarding the following: demographics, group climate, family violence responsibility, coping, emotional awareness, attitude toward conflict, knowledge of violence, safety, and qualitative strengths about Caminar Latino. A mean substitution was used for one missing data point (Hawthorne & Elliott, 2005).

### **2.3.1 Knowledge of Violence (KVG).**

Two survey measures were analyzed to examine the relationship between children's knowledge of violence and their attitude towards conflict. The knowledge scale was developed for the larger study and included sixteen scenarios in which the children had to decide if there was any violence being committed (e.g., "If you slap, push or shove your friend"). Children could respond yes, no or I don't know (IDK) for each question. To construct a scale score for each participant in this study, correctly labeled scenarios were summed across the sixteen items. Children either knew a scenario was violent or they didn't; therefore, only correctly identified scenarios added points to the total score.

### **2.3.2 Attitude toward Conflict (ATC).**

The Attitude toward Conflict (Lam, 1989) scale measured how children would act in different scenarios involving conflict by asking children eight questions about how true the statement was about him/her. Children would respond on a scale from 0-4. In this measure: 0 would mean that the scenario was not at all true about him/her; 1 represented the statement was a little true about him/her, while 4 represented the statement was very true about him/her. For example, "You try to talk out a problem instead of fighting". In this sample, four items from the ATC scale together demonstrated fair reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .61). These four scenarios involved attitudes towards engaging or avoiding violence, and were: (1) if you are mad at someone you can just ignore them, (2) even if other kids would think you were weird you would try to stop a fight, (3) when your friends fight you try to get them to stop, (4) there are better ways to solve problems than fighting.

### 3 Results

A Pearson and Spearman correlational matrix was run in order to explore the relationship between violence knowledge and attitudes, as well as relationships with other background characteristics. As shown in Table 1, the ATC and KVG scales were unrelated and did not correlate. There were also no significant correlations between violence knowledge and age, gender, or number of siblings. However, through this analysis, other findings were discovered.

**Table 1** *Correlation Matrix*

	Siblings	Age	Gender	KVG	ATC	Ignore them	OK to hit
Siblings		.414	.042	-.283	.666**	.691**	.177
Age			-.142	.121	.126	.333	.179
Gender				.289	.260	-.127	.571*
KVG					-.175	-.113	.441
ATC.						.748**	.380
Ignore them							.119
OK to hit							

*Note.* \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .0$

As noted above (see Table 1), there was a significant correlation between the ATC four-item scale and the number of siblings that each child had ( $r = .666, p = .005$ ). Significant relationships were also found at the item level of the ATC scale. Specifically, the analysis showed that the more siblings a child had, the more they endorsed the item “If you are mad at

someone you can just ignore them” ( $r = .691, p = .003$ ). Also, children with more siblings were *less* likely to endorse talking out a problem instead of fighting ( $r = -.510, p = .043$ ). In order to explore the relationship between siblings and ATC further, a Chi square test was run. As seen below in table 2, these two variables were dummy coded into low and high number of siblings (0 = 2 siblings or less and 1 = 3 or more siblings).

**Table Chi Square Matrix**

Siblings	ATC Scores		Total
	Low	High	
$\leq 2$	6 (1.7)	0 (-1.7)	6
$\geq 2$	2 (-1.3)	8 (1.3)	10

*Note.* Standard Residuals appear in parenthesis, next to the number of children.

#### 4 DISCUSSION

This study sought to test whether children who can identify violence or violent behaviors are less likely to endorse violent behaviors as an acceptable outcome to conflict, and found instead that there were no significant relationships between knowledge and attitudes regarding violence. Children given the option to say “I don’t know” to knowledge scenarios may have produced a greater uncertainty about violent scenarios.

Analysis for these data found that children with higher ATC scores were more likely to have more siblings. Having more siblings might influence children to become frustrated faster and develop an automatic hitting response, instead of trying to talk it out. However, it also gives children more opportunity to practice copings skills. Since the sample size was very small, the

overlap of related siblings in the study might have influenced the significant relationship between number of siblings and high ATC scores.

#### **4.1 Limitations**

There were several limitations in this study that should be noted. The biggest limitation of the current study is the small sample size. It is important to consider that since a preliminary analysis was conducted, the sample might be too small to detect effects. Additionally, prospective participants were only recruited during Caminar Latino sessions on Wednesday nights from 7:00pm to 9:00pm, and attendance varied every week. Adults had to be recruited and consented before recruiting any children, and not every adult brought a child that met the required qualifications for the study. Many participants were related to each other which could have also influenced the data analysis. The small sample size also affected statistical power. Insufficient power decreases the chances of detecting a true effect, while increasing the chances of Type II error. Reliability coefficient of the ATC scale was lower than expected, which is possibly due to the low sample size as well.

#### **4.2 Future Direction**

It is imperative that, moving forward, this study should be repeated once all the data for the larger program evaluation, is collected. Repeating this study with a larger sample can provide different results, which might provide a larger reliability coefficient. Since the number of siblings had a significant correlation with the ATC four-item scale and individual ATC items, it might be beneficial to investigate whether having more siblings who attend Caminar Latino affects their ATC scores and how many of a child's siblings also take the survey. Studies should also seek to further develop the KVG scale and improve its reliability.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A

Attitude toward Conflict (ATC): Lam, 1989

*(Continue with same NOTE CARD)*

Do you believe that...

Tu crees que...

**from 1-4 how true is this about you? (¿de 1-4, qué tan cierto es para ti?)**

	Not at all (para nada)	Yes (si)			
		A little (un poco)			A lot (mucho)
1. If you are mad at someone you can just ignore them? (Si estás enojado con alguien, simplemente la/lo ignoras.)	0	1	2	3	4
2. Even if other kids would think that you were weird you would try to stop a fight? (Aunque otr@s niñ@s pensaran que eres extrañ@, tu intentarías detener una pelea.)	0	1	2	3	4
3. It's O.K. for you to hit someone to get them to do what you want. (Está bien pegarle a alguien para que haga lo que tú quieres.)	0	1	2	3	4
4. Sometimes a person just has to fight. (A veces una persona tiene que (necesita) pelear.)	0	1	2	3	4
5. When your friends fight you try to get them to stop. (Cuando tus amigos pelean tu intentas detenerlos.)	0	1	2	3	4
6. There are better ways to solve problems than fighting. (Hay mejores maneras de solucionar problemas que peleando.)	0	1	2	3	4
7. You try to talk out a problem instead of fighting. (Tú intentas hablar acerca del problema en vez de pelear.)	0	1	2	3	4

8. If people do something to make you really mad, they deserve to be beaten up. (Si la gente hace algo que te enoja demasiado, se merecen que les pegues.)	0	1	2	3	4
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## Appendix B

### Knowledge of Violence General (KVG): VRA, 2011

Tell me if there is violence in this situation. You can say yes or no. You can also say I don't know.

Dime si hay violencia en esta situación. Puedes decir sí ó no. También puedes decir que no sabes.

	No	Yes (si)	don't know (no se)
1. If someone yells at you (Si alguien te grita)	0	1	888
2. If someone comforts you when you're sad. (Si alguien te consuela cuando estás triste.)	0	1	888
3. If you push someone. (Si empujas a alguien.)	0	1	888
4. If your brother/sister calls you stupid. (Si tu herman@ te llama estúpido@.)	0	1	888
5. If your brother/sister plays with your toys without asking. (Si tu herman@ juega con tus juguetes sin pedirte permiso.)	0	1	888
6. If you scratch your brother/sister. (Si rasguñas a tu hermano/hermana.)	0	1	888
7. If a kid in your class tells lies about you to others. (Si un niño en tu clase le dice mentiras a los demás acerca de ti.)	0	1	888
8. If you slap, push or shove your friend. (Si golpeas o empujas a tu amigo@.)	0	1	888
9. If someone throws your stuff out the window (Si alguien avienta tus cosas por la ventana.)	0	1	888
10. If another kid teases you. (Si otro@ niño@ se burla de tí.)	0	1	888
11. If someone breaks or destroys your things [e.g. cell phone, toys, etc.] (Si alguien rompe o destruye tus cosas [p.e. el celular, un juguete, etc.]	0	1	888
12. If someone puts you down and calls you mean names. (Si alguien te humilla y te insulta.)	0	1	888
13. If someone slams a door on purpose. (Si alguien cierra la puerta de golpe a propósito.)	0	1	888
14. If someone hits something close to you [e.g. punching a wall near you]. (Si alguien golpea algo cerca de tí [p.e. la pared]	0	1	888
15. If someone talks bad about you on facebook or sends mean texts. (Si alguien habla mal de tí en Facebook o manda textos malos)	0	1	888
16. If someone constantly texts you when you don't like it. (Si alguien te manda textos constantemente cuando a tú no quieres	0	1	888

que lo haga.)			
 Questions below are for youth 12 years and older 			
17. If someone acts like they own you. (Si alguien actúa como si tú le pertenecieras.)	0	1	888
18. If someone wants to be in charge of everything that goes on. (Si alguien quiere estar a cargo de todo lo que pasa.)	0	1	888
19. If someone “keys”(scratches) your car. (Si alguien raya tu carro.)	0	1	888
20. If someone wants you to spend all of your time with them and drop other friends. (Si alguien quiere que tu pases todo tu tiempo con el/ella y que dejes a un lado a otr@s amig@s.)	0	1	888
21. If someone accepts your opinions. (Si alguien acepta tus opiniones.)	0	1	888
22. If someone drives fast to scare you. (Si alguien conduce el carro velozmente para asustarte.)	0	1	888
23. If someone pressures you to dress a certain way. (Si alguien quiere que te vistas de cierta manera.)	0	1	888
24. If someone is OK with you choosing to spend time alone or with your family. (Si alguien acepta tu decisión de pasar tiempo sol@ o con tu familia.)	0	1	888
25. If someone controls you. (Si alguien te controla.)	0	1	888
26. If someone says they will commit suicide if you break up. (Si alguien dice que va a suicidarse si ya no están junt@s).	0	1	888