

WISCONSIN 5-COUNTY Latino Needs Assessment Project

WALWORTH COUNTY SUMMARY
May 2004

Shelby J. Maier
Professor
Family Living Educator
University of Wisconsin–Extension
Walworth County
W3929 County Road NN
Elkhorn, WI 53121
262.741.3186



Study Sponsored by:

University of Wisconsin–Cooperative Extension, Office of the Provost and Vice Chancellor
University of Wisconsin–Whitewater, Office of Graduate Studies and Continuing Education
University of Wisconsin–Cooperative Extension Southern District Office
University of Wisconsin–Cooperative Extension Southeastern District Office
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University of Wisconsin–Cooperative Extension, Walworth County

Walworth County, located in southeastern Wisconsin and bordering Illinois, is one of the oldest counties in the state. The diversified topography has rolling hills, forests, prairies, marshes, meadows, and winding streams. It is a perfect square in shape, containing 576 square miles (368,640 acres). Walworth County is primarily rural and has a rich agricultural heritage. Many county residents are employed at area resorts and in light industry. According to the 2000 Census, the population of Walworth County is 93,759. The county grew by 25 percent between 1990 and 2000. Walworth County continues to be one of the fastest growing counties in Wisconsin and ranks third in the state in percentage of population change. The largest communities in the county include Elkhorn, Delavan, Lake Geneva and Whitewater. The University of Wisconsin-Whitewater is located in the northwest corner of the county. Lake Geneva is a resort area that draws tourists from around the area. The Wisconsin School for the Deaf was organized in 1852 and is located in Delavan.

In the past ten years, the number of Latinos living in Wisconsin has increased by 107 percent. Latino population growth has been even more dramatic in Walworth County. The county experienced a 204% increase in the Latino population between 1990 and 2000. Latinos now represent 6.5 percent of the county's total population. Practitioners and policymakers have acknowledged and addressed the impact of the growth of the Latino population within their programs and services. Schools, churches and other organizations offer English as a Second Language classes. Agencies employ bi-lingual staff to deliver services and programs. In addition, resources and signage are often found in both English and Spanish. The Latino/Hispanic Services Center opened in Walworth County in February 2002. The Center, located in Lake Geneva, provides outreach workers to assist the community with interpretation, translation, immigration assistance and information and referrals. The Center operates as a non-profit partnership between the Geneva Lake Development Corporation and Catholic Charities of the Milwaukee Dioceses.

A five-county needs assessment study was conducted in Dane, Dodge, Jefferson, Rock and Walworth Counties in the spring of 2003. Focus group interviews were conducted in each county to identify what services were working, what services needed changing, and what services were missing. Three focus groups were held in each county, which included two groups of Latinos and one group of professional service providers. Seventeen Latinos and ten professionals participated in the focus groups in Walworth County. This report summarizes the data from the Walworth County focus groups. An Executive Summary of the five-county project is available upon request.

WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS THAT LATINOS FACE?

This question draws the largest number and richest responses from all three groups. Latino and community service provider groups emphasize substantial barriers in daily living faced by Latinos in Walworth County (**Table 1**).

Latino Participant Groups. Discrimination/cultural ignorance barriers, language and literacy barriers, and documentation barriers constituted the largest number of responses and the most uniform agreement about barriers faced.

●Discrimination

Discrimination is not only reported as a general theme, but shows up in other specific categories of barriers. Latinos feel they are being taken advantage of because they lack certain rights, are discriminated by professionals, employers and whole communities, and receive unequal treatment in public places. They want to see fewer stereotypes, equal rights on the job, equal treatment in public places, and more resources for people who do not speak English. They note a lack of understanding of law enforcement procedures, difficulties in understanding different cultures, and labor laws as specific barriers.

●Language and literacy

Language and literacy constitute significant barriers for Latinos. A lack of interpreters, lack of training in English, lack of convenient locations for classes in English and a lack of time and initiative to learn English are significant barriers. In addition, a lack of Spanish documents and the lack of bilingual law enforcement personnel compound the problem.

“. . . if for example, this is a store and you are speaking your language, they are disturbed, if you are for example in the job with another language, they are disturbed, and that is not right, it is our language. Now they are disturbed because you don't know how to speak English, that is also another problem, and it should not disturb them because they don't know Spanish either.”

~~Latino participant

●Documentation

Not having documentation of citizenship or residency status was perceived to constitute a number of significant barriers such as discrimination and distrust from various agencies, job availability, opportunities for higher education, a general lack of resources, difficult or impossible banking, and housing. Participants perceive a need for information about how to get documents and note that the process of documentation is lengthy and the immigration laws are strict. Several Latino participants commented on the availability of illegal documents as a means of access to services.

●Work and worker's rights

Employment, although recognized as better in the United States, was not without barriers for Latinos. Some of the most consistently and frequently reported barriers were the work-related barriers that include lack of available work, employers fail to honor worker's rights, and discriminate against or exploit Latino employees. There was little information about worker's rights. Most who report these difficulties also report that they knew they were "being treated unfairly because [they] were undocumented." Although most responses indicate there was ample work, there was little job security.

●Healthcare

Healthcare is an issue of enormous proportions throughout the United States and particularly among those who are disenfranchised or disempowered, or groups of

". . . people have to live . . . these obstacles that are there, they're going to continue . . . in other countries there are the laws and . . . there are two ways of living. One is you follow the laws and the other one is the real reality . . . and to an extent that's much closer. [There is difference a] difference between the law and how you live. . . . it's the way things are."

~~Latino participant

". . . they see their bill and they don't go back ever again, unless in an emergency. They take their children . . . only . . . when it's an emergency; otherwise they don't go because . . . the bills are real high."

~~Community service provider

people whose job status does not afford them insurance. Latino participants in this study are no exception when they report barriers that include not having “help with the cost of medical care,” “cheaper healthcare”, “insurance to help pay medical bills,” and “better access to health clinics and dental services.” On a related note, participants report that they need “cheaper insurance” and “more available medical assistance.”

●Housing

Participants also report housing barriers in terms of the need for “help with rent,” “racial discrimination in housing,” “limits to the number of residents in the house,” “the need for a better quality of housing,” and “more affordable housing.”

●Children’s welfare

Participants note that Latino children face multiple barriers. These barriers include being misdiagnosed as having mental disorders for not speaking English well, being rejected by teachers, language barriers in schools, being influenced by the culture of their peers, the absence of programs for Latino youth, having no legal status for continuing education, and having recreational/school sporting activities that are not affordable.

“They ask you for the deposit amount and one month in advance, which many of the people don’t have to give—\$1,200 for example—to enter the apartment. Very difficult. Another thing is that they limit the number of people that live there. And here we have large families . . . when you arrive, a relative has to give you a place to live and you get him in trouble.”

~~Latino participant

“For the adolescents, to have more things like sports, other things so that they could engage when they get out of school instead of being on the streets, doing bad things.”

~~Latino participant

“The schools do offer them [sports] but registration is \$30, \$40, \$50 for each child. Well, that’s what stops us. We want the children involved in some sport, but due to the \$40, \$50 registration, and that’s apart from the uniforms, that is where one backs out because it is a bit expensive.”

~~Latino participant

●Churches

Churches pose barriers in terms of outright discrimination, a lack of funding to attend church, and a lack of support by churches.

●Latino Centers

Participants report as a barrier the absence of information centers throughout the county to provide support, break cultural barriers, and offer funds for activities or inexpensive services. From their reports, it is clear that “center” does not necessarily mean a building, but rather a point person or people who have accurate, up to date, and consistent information about local and statewide services, practices and policies.

●Education

Participants face numerous educational barriers that include not having “childcare for workers who are students or parents,” “more access to basic English classes,” and “more supportive educators.” Perhaps one of the more difficult realizations is the fact that no matter how intelligent or accomplished their children may be, Latinos without documentation would always face access discrimination in higher education.

●Accessing information

Participants note barriers in accessing accurate information. They cite the lack of advertised information services, use of radio shows, need for legal information, and the census as indicating inaccurate information as barriers.

“We have many adolescents, very intelligent, that they are capable to pursue a career, and they have the aspiration, but they can’t.”

~~Community service provider

“What is missing here is information, because I only about 2 years ago became aware of this program that there was a place to learn English. And so what I think is missing is to distribute information in many different places so one becomes aware where one can go and learn...”

~~Latino participant

●**Law enforcement**

Participants perceive discrimination by law enforcement agencies in terms of tickets and a general lack of trust by law enforcement officials.

●**Other needs**

Less commonly mentioned, but no less necessary, is the need for public transportation and funds for food.

“They also got me one day for speeding and, when I gave him my license, he asked me if I was sure my license was valid...as if saying maybe it was fake. And I told him, ‘Yes, it is good.’ He asked me, ‘Are you sure?’

~~Latino participant

Community Service Provider Groups. Community service providers recognize that Latinos face a number of barriers, and specifically emphasize documentation, discrimination/cultural ignorance, and language and literacy. A lack of accurate information and an understanding of “the system” are significant barriers for Latinos. Participants also recognize the need for work and worker’s rights, education, affordable housing, health care, public transportation and child care. Poverty, teen pregnancy, gangs, and drugs were also listed as barriers for Latinos.

Summary. Latino and community service provider groups frequently and consistently report documentation, discrimination, and language/literacy as major barriers Latinos face. Further, these three issues pervade nearly all of the other barriers Latinos mentioned and a number of the programs and services the community service providers mentioned. Barriers related to work and work-related rights were also of primary concern to both the Latino and the community service provider groups. Each of these barriers also prevents access to education, healthcare, housing, and language and literacy services. Both groups recognize that it is difficult for Latinos to find reliable, coordinated information about services, programs, and policies, thus the need for additional Latino centers throughout Walworth County. Both groups also report that law enforcement is not administered fairly. Many participants concur that Latinos have not been treated with respect, trust, or equity in law enforcement.

Table 1. What Barriers Do Latinos Face?

Latinos From 5 County Study¹	Latinos From Walworth County	Community Service Providers From 5 County Study¹	Community Service Providers From Walworth County
Language and Literacy Barriers	Language and Literacy Barriers	Documentation Barriers	Documentation Barriers
Documentation Barriers	Documentation Barriers	Discrimination/Racism/Ethnocentrism Cultural Ignorance/Oppression	Discrimination/Racism/Ethnocentrism Cultural Ignorance/Oppression
Discrimination/Racism/Ethnocentrism Cultural Ignorance/Oppression	Discrimination/Racism/Ethnocentrism Cultural Ignorance/Oppression	Language and Literacy Barriers	Language & Literacy Barriers
Work & Worker’s Rights Barriers	Work & Worker’s Rights Barriers	Work and Worker’s Rights Barriers	Work and Worker’s Rights Barriers
Healthcare and Insurance Barriers	Healthcare and Insurance Barriers	Educational Barriers	Educational Barriers
Housing Barriers	Housing Barriers	Healthcare and Insurance Barriers	Healthcare and Insurance Barriers
Internal Barriers	Internal Barriers	Internal Barriers	Housing Barriers
Barriers Facing Children	Barriers Facing Children	Church-Related Barriers	Law Enforcement Barriers
Lack of Latino Community Centers	Lack of Latino Community Centers	Transportation Barriers	Transportation Barriers
Information Barriers	Education Barriers	Barriers Facing Children	Childcare
Law Enforcement Barriers	Law Enforcement Barriers	Housing Barriers	
	Church-Related Barriers	Information Barriers	
	Transportation Barriers	Insufficient Food	
	Childcare	Law Enforcement Barriers	
		Lack of Latino Community Centers	

¹ Listed in order of frequency/consistency of response X 5 counties.

WHAT WOULD MAKE YOUR LIFE, YOUR FAMILY'S LIFE, AND THE LIVES OF LATINOS BETTER?

Latino Participant Groups. Latino group participants identify a number of improvements that would make their lives or the lives of their families better. Most of their suggestions follow directly from the reports of barriers Latinos face (**Table 2**).

Participants place frequent and consistent emphases on improvements needed in healthcare (e.g., community clinics, affordable health insurance, dental care, alcohol rehabilitation services) and educational opportunities and access (e.g., increase teacher to student ratio in English classes, more opportunities to learn English, more support for high school students). Latino centers, public transportation, increased access to services without a social security number, help in obtaining drivers licenses, training programs for women, and more bilingual and culturally sensitive personnel were identified as improvements that would make life better.

Community Service Provider Group. Community service provider responses are similar to those of the Latino group participants. Responses fall into categories related to healthcare and insurance, improvements in education access, language and literacy, documentation, service centers, transportation, jobs, legal services, housing, and increased media efforts.

Summary. Both Latino and community service provider groups report similar major areas for improvements that include affordable and improved access to healthcare, language and literacy education, and documentation policies and practices. The need for Latino centers, public transportation, training programs for women, and support for youth were identified as additional areas for improvement.

“When they started more openly as a center, as a place for people to come together, they had a greater potential for success because their program initiative came from the people. It came from what the people coming in the door wanted to have happen. Maybe the emphasis was on jobs and day care, and not so much on literacy, but the point is they had a center. They had a place to go, and they had a place to say what it is they wanted.”

~~Community service provider from Walworth county

Table 2. What Improvements Are Needed To Make Life Better?

Latinos From 5 County Study¹	Latinos From Walworth County	Community Service Providers From 5 County Study¹	Community Service Providers From Walworth County
Healthcare and Insurance	Healthcare and Insurance	Language and Literacy Education	Language and Literacy Education
Educational Opportunities	Educational Opportunities	Healthcare and Insurance	Healthcare and Insurance
Language and Literacy Programs	Language and Literacy Programs	Cultural Appreciation	Legal Services
Documentation	Documentation	Documentation	Documentation
Better Work Opportunities and Worker's Rights Information	Legal Assistance	Children's Programs	Access to Information
Latino Community Centers	Latino Community Centers	Transportation	Transportation
Childcare	Cost of Services	Housing	Housing
Transportation	Transportation	Community Organizing	Latino Community Centers
Children's Programs	Youth Programs	Latino Community Centers	Work
Cultural Appreciation	Housing	Work	
Housing			

¹ Listed in order of frequency/consistency of response X 5 counties.

CONSOLIDATION RESPONSES. After the study questions were explored and answered, each group was asked to identify what they perceived to be the most important ideas they had generated during the interviews (**Table 3**). There is considerable overlap between responses of the Latino participant groups and the community service provider groups and some noteworthy disparities. Participant responses from all three groups identify healthcare, literacy, housing, documentation, Latino centers, transportation, housing, legal services, and the availability of work as the most important issues raised. Latino participants identify labor rights, youth programs, and access to post-secondary education for youth as priority issues. Community service providers report the access to information as one of the most important issues raised in the discussion.

Summary. The most striking difference in the response priorities given by the groups was the importance placed by the Latino participant groups on discrimination and the complete absence of this in the list of priorities developed by the community service providers. Not being aware of or acknowledging discrimination as among the priorities for Latinos could certainly compromise the effectiveness of services and programs intended to help Latinos.

“I think we need to create opportunities for that people who finish high school with good grades and be able to start the university, not minding the immigration status.”

~~Community Service Provider

“. . . we gave [an award] out in May so we did the presentation for the family in Spanish and English because in some cases we know the parents don't know English and if they do, it's not very well. Yes, some of them know English, but . . . I was criticized for having done it in Spanish and English. This is in a university setting by people who are administrators; people who are professors. I was criticized: why did I have to waste people's time by doing it in Spanish?”

~~Community service provider

Table 3. What Were The Most Important Issues Discussed?

Latinos From 5 County Study¹	Latinos From Walworth County	Community Service Providers From 5 County Study¹	Community Service Providers From Walworth County
Healthcare and Insurance	Healthcare and Insurance	Language and Literacy	Healthcare
Documentation	Worker's Rights	Healthcare and Insurance	Documentation
Language and Literacy	Documentation	Documentation	Latino Community Centers
Worker's Rights	Discrimination	Latino Community Centers	Literacy
Latino Community Centers	Latino Community Centers	Cultural Sensitivity	Access to Information
Work	Mental Health	Organizational Improvements	Transportation
Youth Programs	Work	Youth Programs	Work
Transportation	After School Youth Programs	Worker's Rights	Housing
Discrimination/Racism/Ethnocentrism Cultural Ignorance/Oppression	Transportation	Transportation	Legal Services
Childcare	Post Secondary Education	Spirituality	
	Early Childhood Interventions	Housing	
	Housing	Work	

¹ Listed in order of frequency/consistency of response X 5 counties.