



**THE ROLE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL AND
SUPPORT FROM ADULTS IN THE ACADEMIC
IDENTITY OF MEXICAN IMMIGRANT YOUTH IN
NEW YORK CITY**

Mexican Immigration in Context

- Most research on Mexican-descent students and education has been conducted in CA, TX, and the Southwest
- Mexican community in New York is recently arrived & there is little empirical work with Mexican-descent students in this context.
- It is also important to consider specific experiences within pan-ethnic groups to avoid over-generalizations, especially in NYC; Large numbers of PR, DR and other Latino groups.

Mexican Immigration in Context

- Between 1990 and 1996 there were 29,000 births to Mexican mothers in NYC.
- In 2003 there were 11,026 Mexican-born students in NYC Public Schools
- This trend continues to the present; In 2005 there were 8,234 births to Mexican mothers in NYC, an increase of 28% from 2000-2005. The most births to any single ethnic group in NYC.

Immigrant Adaptation and Social Capital

Social Capital within Immigrant Families

- Mexicans typically have high rates of two-parent households; emotionally tight-knit families.
- Mexican immigrant parents generally have very positive attitudes towards school.
- Mexican parents generally express high aspirations for their children's academic success.
- Mexican immigrant parents are motivated to do what they can to help their children succeed academically.

Negative Social Capital and Barriers to Social Support

Despite high support for education not all immigrant/Latino families can provide concrete and specific tools for academic success in U.S. context

Barriers include:

- Language and culture
- Lack of supportive individuals/discrimination
- Poorly resourced/segregated institutions
- Legal status

Research Questions

1. What is the social network composition (i.e., family, peer, non-relative adult) and demographics (i.e., linguistic, country of origin/ethnicity, education, and relative vs. non-relative) of Mexican origin youth in New York City?
1. What are the types and amounts of academic social support Mexican origin youth in New York City receive from different members of their social networks?
1. What is the relationship of social support (emotional and academic) to the academic identity in Mexican-descent students in New York City?

Methods: Sample

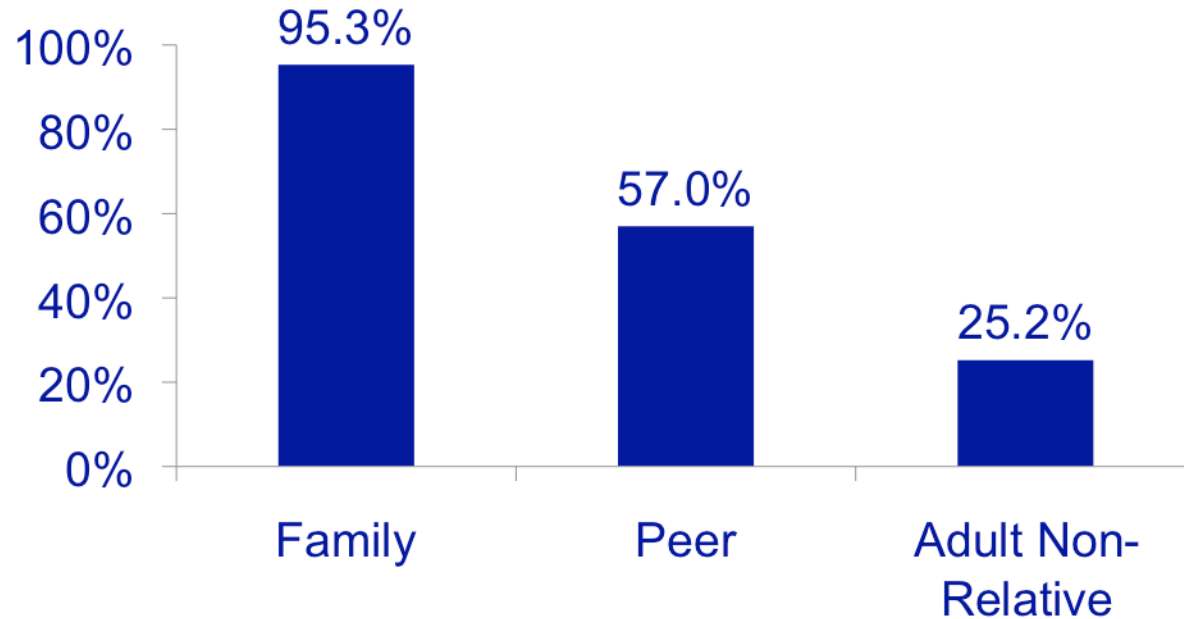
- N=107 New York City public school students
 - (6th to 12th grades)
- Age: 12 to 19 years old (mean=14.81, s.d. =1.80).
- Gender: 49.5% male (N=53) and 50.5% female (N=54)
- Generation:
 - First - 23.4% (N=25)
 - 4 and 17 years in the U.S. (mean= 10.62, s.d. = 3.42)
 - Second - 76.6% (N=82) 4 and 17 years in the U.S. (mean= 10.62, s.d. = 3.42)
 - 6.5% (N=7) Students were born in U.S. but raised in Mexico for periods from 3 to 6 years

Methods: Measures

- Demographics:
 - parental education
 - years in U.S.
 - language spoken at home
 - parental employment status
- Networks of Relations (adapted from LISA study):
Student-generated list of significant others
 - ethnic background
 - language background
 - educational background
 - academic support provided
- Open-ended questions: Examining student perceptions about the association between significant relationships and their academic beliefs and behaviors

Results: Social Network Size and Composition

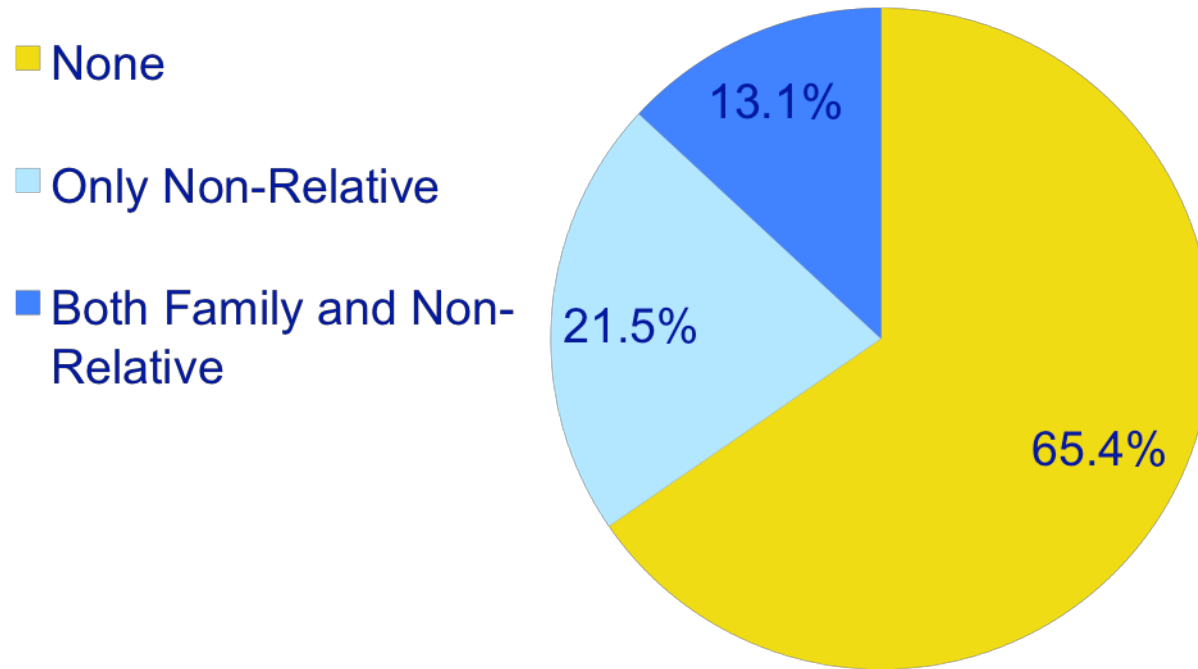
Figure 1. Percentage of Students with Family, Peers, and Non-Relative Adults in Social Network (N=107)



Results: Descriptive Analysis of Students' Social Networks, Education

- Among students:
- 18.7% (n= 20) had mothers who had completed 12 years of schooling
- 11.2% (n= 12) had fathers who had completed 12 years of schooling

Results: Descriptive Analysis of Students' Social Networks, Education



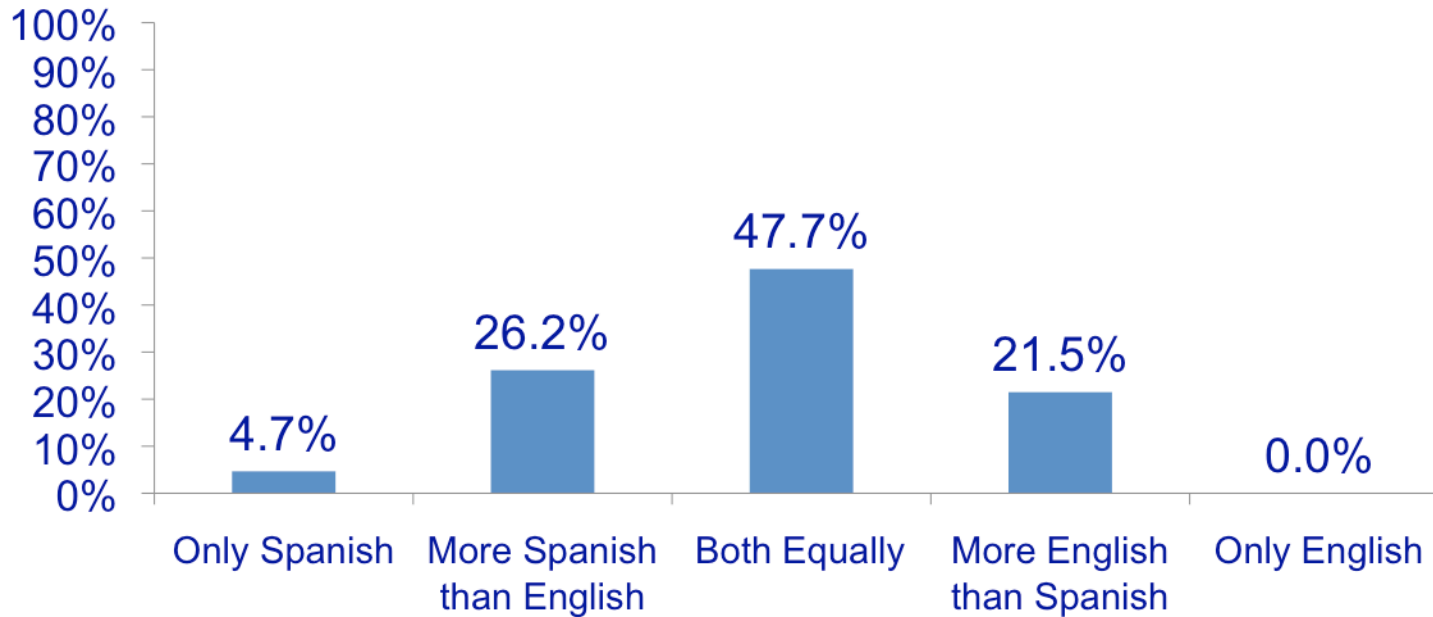
Percentage of Students with At Least 1 College Educated Network Member in Selected Categories

Results: Descriptive Analysis of Students' Social Networks, Ethnicity

- 50.5% (n= 54) of students reported having only Mexican individuals in their social networks
- 71% (n= 76) of students reported having only Latino individuals in their social networks

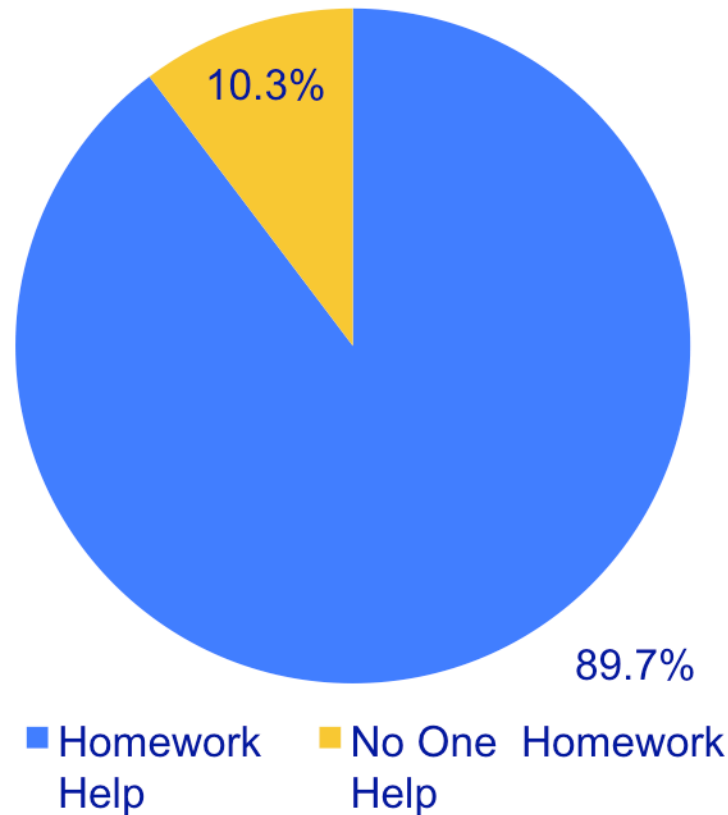
Results: Descriptive Analysis of Students' Social Networks, Language

Home Language of Students in Sample

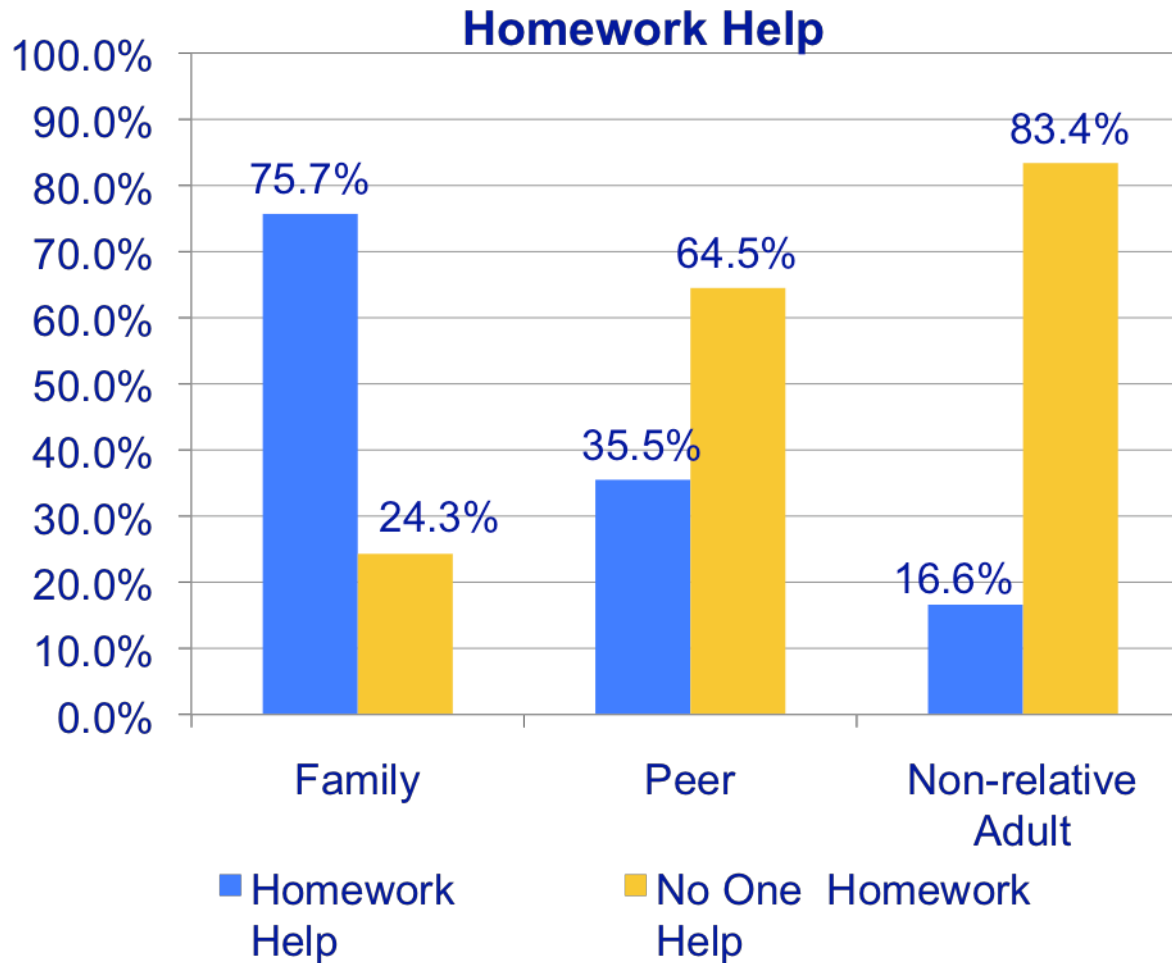


Results: Academic Support Provided by Family, Non-Relative Adults, and Peers

Homework Help: Any Source

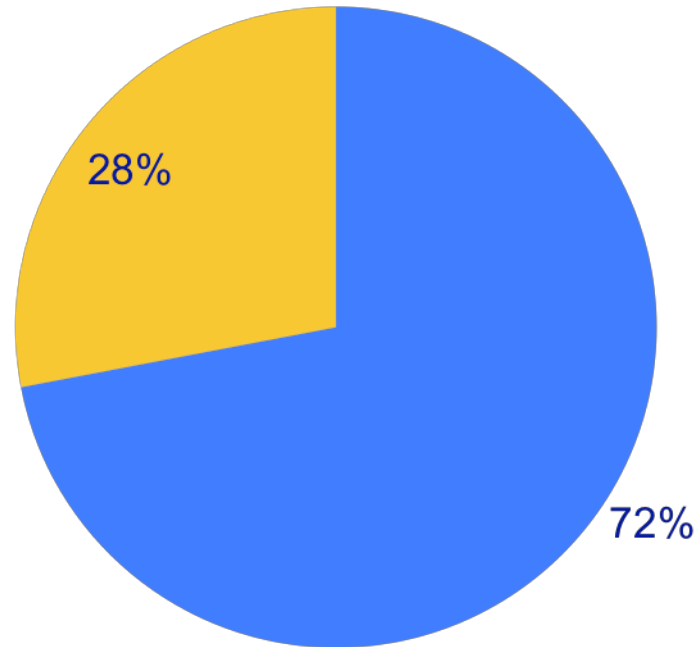


Results: Academic Support Provided by Family, Non-Relative Adults, and Peers



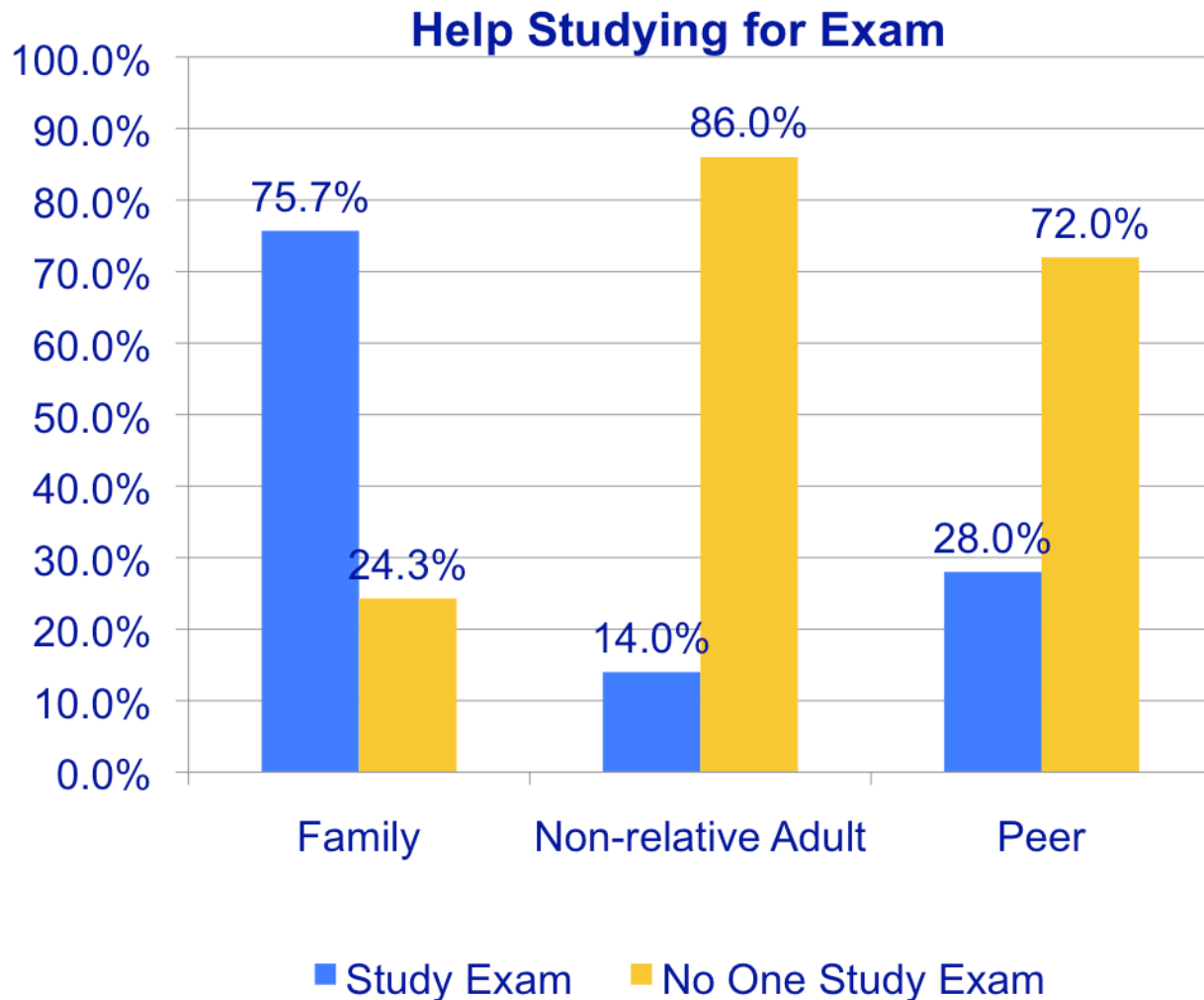
Results: Academic Support Provided by Family, Non-Relative Adults, and Peers

Help Studying for Exam: Any Source



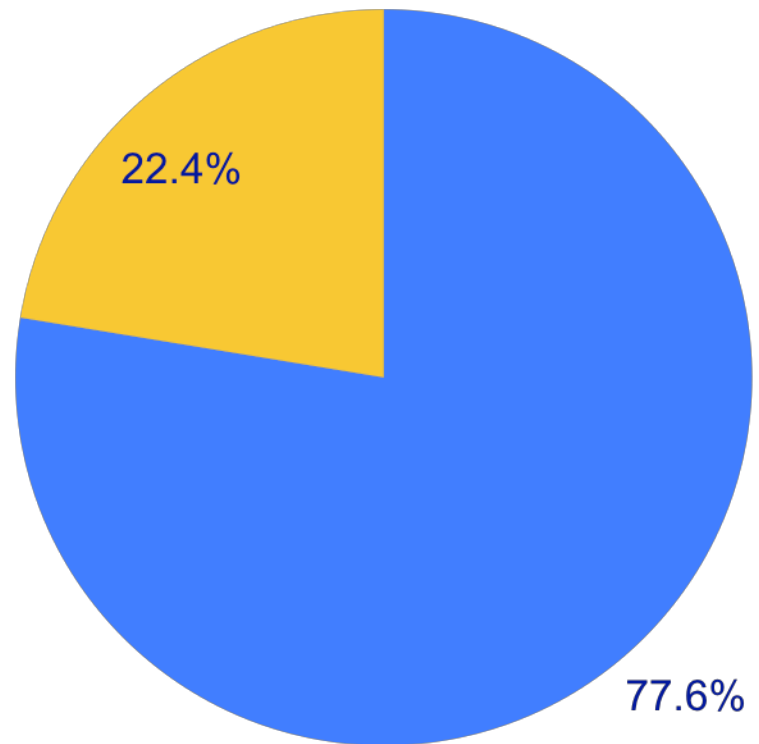
■ Study Exam ■ No One Study Exam

Results: Academic Support Provided by Family, Non-Relative Adults, and Peers



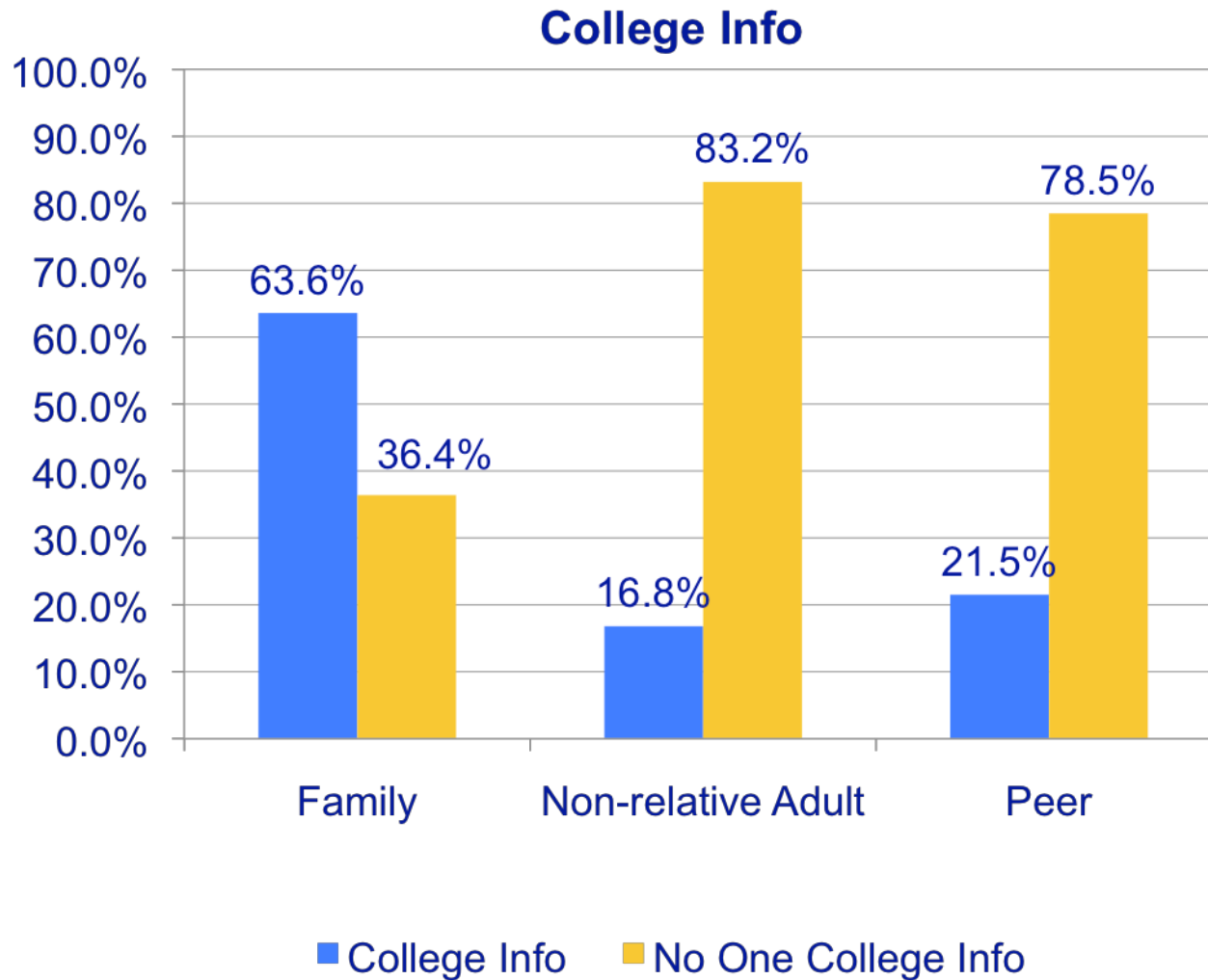
Results: Academic Support Provided by Family, Non-Relative Adults, and Peers

College Info: Any Source



■ College Info ■ No One College Info

Results: Academic Support Provided by Family, Non-Relative Adults, and Peers



Qualitative Findings Regarding Academic Support

- **Encouraging Academics**
 - Academic Support from Family
 - Academic Support from Teachers
 - Academic Support from Peers
- **Self-Reliance**

Qualitative Findings Regarding Academic Support

- Encouraging Academics: Family
 - Yes, my mom tells me to be hard working, 'cause she don't want me to be like her. She wants me to have a good job and she don't want me to be, to see me in that cleaning stuff. She wants to see me in the office.
 - ...she told me like, I brought you to this country for you could have more opportunities, *oportunidades*. Because when she was in Mexico she didn't finish, I think, school. She needed to work because my family was poor in Mexico.

Qualitative Findings Regarding Academic Support

- **Encouraging Academics: Teachers**

- Student: So this teacher I had for freshman, sophomore and junior year. So last year he told me, he knows I like math and that I'm good at it. So he told me to take [calculus] as an elective. And he's like, I'm sure you're going to do well. It's complicated at the beginning because you're not used to it, but as time goes you're going to get it. It's going to get easier for you. And AP Psychology is the same teacher.
- FRANK: THE MATH TEACHER AND THE PSYCHOLOGY TEACHER?
- Student: Yeah, he is very smart. And, um, he told me, I'm also going to teach psychology, so if you want to participate. He takes his time to teach us. Like if we're behind, he's like we could stay after school, or you can come on Saturday and we can make it up or we could practice a little bit more.

Qualitative Findings Regarding Academic Support

- Encouraging Academics: Teachers

A sixteen-year-old female noted her feeling that she could not easily go to teachers for help when she did not understand the work:

...when teachers give the class, I don't understand or I struggle and I have to learn it myself because the teachers said, "I already said this. I'm not repeating myself." I have to do it myself.

Qualitative Findings Regarding Academic Support

- Encouraging Academics: Peers

A sixteen year-old female states:

My friends are freshman and they encourage me because they should be juniors like me. They tell me, 'Don't be like me.' My cousins encourage me. I thought I would be like that, cutting, but I didn't end up like that.

Similarly, a fifteen-year-old male student describes a friend:

My friend...is a father, so he encourages me not to be a bum. He's not in school. He doesn't have a good job. He doesn't have a good apartment. He says, 'Don't be like me.'

Qualitative Findings Regarding Academic Support

- **Self-Reliance**

- FRANK: ARE THERE PEOPLE THAT INFLUENCE YOU TO BE A CERTAIN TYPE OF STUDENT?
- Student: No. It's just me, myself, and I.

Qualitative Findings Regarding Academic Identity

DO YOU EVER THINK ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MEXICAN STUDENT, OR ARE THERE OTHER MEXICAN STUDENTS AT YOUR SCHOOL?

I was the only one there.

SO HOW DO YOU THINK OF YOURSELF? IF SOMEONE WERE TO ASK WHAT YOUR BACKGROUND IS?

I would say Mexican straight up. I would never say Mexican-American, I would just say Mexican.

SO YOU WOULDN'T SAY LATINO, HISPANO, OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT?

I would just say Mexican. I am not embarrassed of saying it.

DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'VE HEARD OF PEOPLE WHO ARE EMBARRASSED, LIKE MAYBE THEY THINK...

I've heard stories, but...Like some people would say that they're just Hispanic or Puerto Rican or Dominican or stuff like that...they would lie about their own heritage.

DO YOU FEEL LIKE IN ANY WAY THAT THAT AFFECTS WHO YOU ARE AS A STUDENT? LIKE SOME PEOPLE THINK, OH, WELL MEXICAN STUDENTS DON'T DO GOOD IN SCHOOL.

No.

Qualitative Findings Regarding Academic Identity

DOES ANYBODY ELSE INFLUENCE YOU OR HELP YOU OUT IN TERMS OF THINKING OF YOURSELF AS A STUDENT.

Some Deans at my school, they encourage me to keep working and not have to what like other Mexicans are doing, like working in construction or like factories and stuff like that.

DO THEY ACTUALLY MENTION THAT... LIKE MEXICAN STUDENTS?

Yeah. Because like in my school there's been like a lot of gang problems. They don't want me to end up like that.

OK. IS THERE A BIG PROBLEM WITH MEXICAN GANGS AT YOUR SCHOOL?

Yeah.

THERE IS. SO DO THEY FIGHT WITH EACH OTHER? DO THEY NOT GO TO SCHOOL?

They don't go to school. They drop out or they end up pregnant.

IS THAT MEXICAN STUDENTS IN PARTICULAR, OR A LOT OF DIFFERENT TYPES?

A lot of different types of students.

SO IT'S NOT JUST THE MEXICAN STUDENTS. OK.

Qualitative Findings Regarding Academic Identity

...maestros, miran malo por los mexicanos, y cuando miran a un grupo por alla, dicen mexicanos, no dicen estudiantes, ya los conocen, como son, cortando clases, ...pero mientras, es por decir esa maestra no conoce a mi, solo tiene un idea sobre los mexicanos. Si un mexicano mata or roba o que sea, estan incluyendo a todos los mexicanos, como todos los mexicanos son lo mismo. ¿me entiende? Entonces...todas las personas piensan eso...por ejemplo, un puertorriqueño mira a un mexicano en la calle que está tirado, tomado, va a decir todos los mexicanos son iguales.

Teachers look down on Mexicans. When they see a group there, they don't say students, they say Mexicans, as if they already know them, how they are, cutting classes...but at the same time that teacher doesn't know me, she only has an idea about Mexicans. If a Mexican person robs or kills or whatever, they think of all Mexicans as the same. You know what I mean? So, everyone thinks that...for example, if a Puerto Rican sees a Mexican in the street all trashed and drunk, he is going to say that all Mexicans are the same.

Qualitative Findings Regarding Academic Identity

- *I would say like I try my best always. My mom always encourage me to do better every time. If I accomplish something, she tells me to go beyond of that. And I would describe myself too, kinda different from other people, because one, they tell me that I'm the only Mexican that, I like to study, but like I am more interested in like politics and the economy. And for music I like rock. And I don't like soccer. They tell me I'm weird because only because I'm Mexican, I need to like soccer. [laughter]*
- AND WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER STUFF LIKE POLITICS AND ECONOMICS? DO PEOPLE THINK THAT'S WEIRD TOO BECAUSE YOU'RE MEXICAN?
- *Sometimes, but they like, I like those. Sometimes they say that's kind of weird because they've never seen like that.*

Discussion

- Social Networks of this NYC sample of Mexican-descent youth were comprised mostly of family members and peers.
- Family was the most frequently cited source of academic support.
- Peers were also a large source of academic support.
- Non-relative adults were relatively small sources of academic support.
- Family and peer support belies their low levels of education/low familiarity with the U.S. educational system

Discussion

- Qualitative data shows that family and peer support consisted largely of encouragement/motivation.
- Family and peers used themselves as counter-examples; “Don’t be like me.”
- Family and peers did not provide concrete support (how to study for SAT, how to write an essay, etc.)
- Students related experiences of discrimination and lack of support from teachers
- Poor academic identity was equated with Mexican identity in many cases
- Complex messages from family and non-family about the congruence of being Mexican and a good student

Discussion

- Teacher and non-relative adult support was rare, but powerful:
 - Discriminatory messages left students with poor self-concept with regards to their ethnic identities and academic identities
 - Lack of support gave students few places to encounter help with school work
 - Classrooms and teachers were generally not engaging-did not meet students where they were at

Implications

- Lack of teacher support is a missed opportunity
- Programming aimed at maintaining high quality & concrete academic support, such as through mentoring, can be particularly beneficial for the academic development of Mexican-descent immigrant youth.
- This support needs to be provided in way that fosters positive cultural identity in addition to a focus on academics
- Parental support of education must be capitalized upon, bringing them in as partners in the education of their children