The Impact of Disasters among Latinx Undergraduates in California

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Methodology:

• Despite the increasing effects of hurricanes and other hazards on university and college campuses over the past decade, little attention has been paid to the impacts on and disaster-related experiences of Latinx undergraduate students in the United States (Kaiser, Sattler, Bellack, & Dersin, 1996; Ladd, Marziale, & Gill, 2006; Rivera, 2012).

Research Questions:
1. How do Latinx undergraduates in California define and describe the phenomena of disaster?
2. How do Latinx undergraduates in California describe the impact of disaster in higher education?

Research Rationale:

• To the recent increase in disasters such as COVID-19, it has been established by many researchers that there is minimal research on the effects of disasters on college students (Copeland et al., 2021). However, there has not been a great number of disasters that have impacted college students. Thus, our work is to analyze the role that disaster capitalism plays and how does it impact Latinx undergraduate students.

Phenomenological Methodology

• Goal: Understand how participants describe "what" and "how" they experienced a common event, feeling, and/or state of being (Moustakas, 1994).

Participant Eligibility:
1. Identify as a Latinx college student who has experienced a disaster (ex. hurricane, pandemic, earthquake, wildfires)
2. Currently reside in the United States
3. Currently enrolled at an accredited not-for profit institution of higher education in the United States.

Data Collection & Analysis

• Semi-structured interviews ranging from 45 to 60 minutes, allowed respondents to provide factual knowledge and opinions on the phenomena of disaster (Patton, 2002).
• We employed elaborate coding (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003)
• We applied disaster capitalism (Klein, 2007; Bonilla & Lebron, 2019) allowing for theories to be further complicated from disaster and effect.

Preliminary Findings:

• Participants defined disaster as something that affects you and the people you care about mentally, emotionally, and physically.

Q1: (Re)defining disaster beyond resilience

• Participants defined disaster as anything that affects you and the people you care about mentally, emotionally, and physically.

Q2: There were psychosocial, social, and academic development effects discussed in participants. Students were led to experience these effects:
• High levels of stress and depression
• Coping (adaptive/ maladaptive)
• Little to no institutional support
• Peer to peer support
• Major and career choice

Quotes:

• Isset: "I define a disaster as something that can affect you both. I want to say, mentally, but also like I guess, physically, in a sense, because I know there are some disasters that can lead to house loss or financial issues. But I also know certain disasters can affect you mentally as a person."

• Laura: "I don't have that set schedule, and it was just really overwhelming and it's really easy for me to work and be like, I'm don't want to eat, or I don't want to do anything else until this is done. But clearly, there's just a ton of tasks for me to do, then it's like, Okay, well then, when do you get up and eat and do these things? So, I lost like 10 pounds within the first month and got a little bit sick after that, it was then where I was like okay, I need a break. I need to get out of here. Like, I'm physically like I'm losing my mind and getting sick. I literally have lost 10 pounds and I'm tiny like weigh 125 and went down to 115. And I've only been able to gain like three pounds back from that”

• Roman - Dr. Garcia: "Do your professors do anything that you feel like it's working for you or that may be innovative?" Roman - "No." Dr. Garcia - "Nothing you enjoy?” Roman - "I don't want to say like that, but it's just… like I said, I'm not learning. I don't care what I'm learning, sadly anymore. I used to, but now since everything is so focused on a grade. I just want to get my grades.” And I say that because me personally, I feel like I’m hitting the threshold of learning that I'm tired, I'm done.”

Discussion:

As the United States faces a changing demography in which the Latinx population is the largest ethnic group;
• Research in higher education must be compelled to prepare to enroll, retain, and matriculate student population.
• For Latinx communities a rising fear, anxiety, language barriers, limited access to health care, and basic necessities has only widened the educational achievement gap for K-20 educational settings.

Our research argues that disaster is not an isolated process, in fact, for the Latinx population it has historically been an on-going process that illuminates the structural violence of inequities.

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