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RECOVERY FROM UNEMPLOYMENT IN LATINA WOMEN
AFTER A PLANT CLOSURE*

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Job loss is usually an involuntary and uncontrollable exit from the labor force. Because of its uncontrollable nature, job loss is usually a major life event with major significant short and long-term consequences (Folkman 1984). When the Starkist Tuna Cannery shut down on October 14, 1984, approximately 3,200 workers had lost their jobs after a series of waves of worker lay-offs. Approximately 1,600 of these workers were female and of these, about 970 were Latino women, predominantly of Mexican origin. For decades, the Starkist plant, located in Wilmington, the southern-most part of the city of Los Angeles, had been a major employer of Latino female laborers. This plant was unionized, with the average worker earning over \$7.00 per hour.

Unemployment due to factory shutdowns has emerged as a major social issue in the 1980s. A growing number of U.S. corporations are "strategically" closing down their U.S. plants and are relocating elsewhere, often outside the U.S., in order to capitalize upon cheaper labor in the new location. From 1969 to 1976, shutdowns and industrial relocations are estimated to have eliminated 22 million jobs in the U.S. (Bluestone and Harrison 1980). In California alone, 1,800 plants closed their doors, displacing some 176,000 workers between January 1980 and April 1984 (State of California 1985).

A common assumption about women as laborers made in past unemployment research has been that their participation in the labor force is optional (Schlozman 1979). This assumption suggests that when unemployed, such women should be less susceptible than are males, to personal, familial or social sources of stress (Rundquist and Sletto 1936). Additionally, this view suggests that women, especially Latino women who are accustomed to the role of homemaker, should not object to job loss nor to a return to this role, particularly since they are supported by their husbands (Romero 1986).

METHODS

Participants

The original participants in this study were 114 Latino females who were former employees of the Starkist Tuna Cannery in Wilmington, California. These participants agreed to respond to a psychological survey of their life experiences before, during, and after the plant closure. This survey was administered in Spanish to all subjects. The present analysis is restricted to the responses of 87 of these 114 women who were living with a spouse or live-in partner. All of these women were interviewed approximately 18 months after their job loss.

Based upon a revised listing of eligible Latino women from the list of tuna plant employees, a total of 822 women were eligible for inclusion in the present study. The present sample of 87 Latino females was very similar to Latino females of the total sample in terms of mean age (41.7 years) and mean years working at the tuna plant, 7.4 years ($SD = 5.0$). Additionally, the group of 87 women who participated in the present study ranged in age from 27 to 62. The mean income for these subjects was \$501 to \$800 per month, while average disposable income (available income after bills are paid) was \$0 to \$25 per month. The majority of these 87 women were foreign born. For these foreign born women, the mean number of years residing in the U.S. was 15 years. The mean acculturation scale score for this group of women was 1.69 ($SD = 0.51$), with ranges from 1.0 to 3.22. These scores indicated that this group of women were predominantly of low acculturation: "Spanish speaking/mostly Latino" in cultural orientation. Mean level of education was 5.0 years ($SD = 2.6$) with 95 percent of these women having 0 to 9 years of education. The majority (82 percent) indicated that their lives had not yet returned to normal, and 77 percent remained entirely unemployed. The present sample appeared generally representative of the larger sample of 822 Latino women who were laid off from the Starkist plant.

Instruments

A 20-page survey questionnaire to which the women responded consisted of eleven sections: 1) Employment History, (2) Emotional Reaction to the Plant Closure, (3) Personality of the Worker, (4) Impact Upon the Family, (5) Potential Stressors, (6) Coping Responses, (7) Social Supports, (8) Health Status and Health Habits, (9) Psychological Symptomatology (anxiety, depression, somatization), (10) Social Impact of Job Loss, and (11) Demographic Informa-

tion.

The "potential stressors" section of this questionnaire included items in three domains: family, occupational, and economic stressors which were associated with the plant shut-down. Respondents were asked to rate (1) if the potentially stressful event had occurred since the time of the shutdown, and (2) the perceived stressfulness of the event only if such an event had occurred. Non-occurring events were rated as not eliciting a stress response.

All potential stressors were scored on a Likert scale from "not at all stressful" = 1, to "extremely stressful" = 5. Reliability analyses for the items in these three domains indicated that with each domain, these items had a sufficiently high internal consistency coefficient to be usable as separate scales, i.e., a coefficient alpha greater than .70.

Associated with the potential stressors for the family, occupational and economic domains were two coping style scales, Active Coping and Passive Coping, derived from items asking about what these persons did in response to the potential stressors in each domain.

Other scales derived from this questionnaire were personality scales for: Job Satisfaction, Activism (degree of involvement in opposing the plant closure), and Resilience (ability to recover and reorganize after the plant closure). Each of these scales was evaluated for its psychometric properties for the present sample and each was observed to have an alpha reliability coefficient of at least .60.

Procedure

In each data collection session, participants were interviewed individually or as a part of a small group of six or less. Participants were guided through the survey by a team of Spanish speaking students trained in the administration of this structured interview. All sessions were conducted in Spanish and took place in a large meeting hall of the local Catholic church in Wilmington. These data collection sessions varied in length from about one hour to over two and a half hours, depending upon the participant's level of education and literacy. Following completion of the questionnaire, respondents were paid \$5.00.

RESULTS

Stressors Associated With Acculturation Status

Does greater acculturation status bestow an advantage for these women? We conducted a stepwise multiple regression analysis to identify those psychosocial variables which are associated with level of acculturation. Using items from the Family, Occupational, and Economic stress scales, we first identified those items with significant zero-order correlations with the acculturation scale. We then included these items (two items from the Family stress scale and three each from the Occupation and Economic stress scales) in the regression analysis. We also chose to include the Anxiety, Depression, and Somatization scales of the Symptom Checklist 90 (SCL-90), and a Life Satisfaction scale.

Table 1 shows the results of this analysis. Three of these variables met the .05 entry criterion for stepwise inclusion as predictors of Acculturation scale score. These variables were: the stressors of "...had to ask for a loan from a bank or other agency" ($r = .35$), "...lacked the necessary job skills to find the job I want" ($r = .27$), and "Life Satisfaction" ($B = -.20$). These variables in combination accounted for 25 percent of the variance predictive of acculturation status, $F(3,83) = 9.09$, $p < .001$.

Table 1. Predictors of Acculturation Status

Step	Variables	Incremental R	Incremental F	Beta at Final Step
1.	Had to ask for loan from bank	.12	11.91***	+.35
2.	Lack skills to find the job I want	.09	9.23**	-.27
3.	Life satisfaction	.04	4.41*	-.20

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Characteristics Associated With Recovery From Job Loss

Who among these women were able to recover best from this job loss? We then conducted a second stepwise regression analysis to identify characteristics associated with the ability to "bounce back" or to reorganize despite the job loss. We chose 14 variables as possible predictors of Resilience scale scores. These variables were: the scale scores for the Family, Occupational, and Economic Stress scales, scores for the Active Coping and Passive Coping scales, scores for the Job Satisfaction and Activism scales, and scores for the Life Satisfaction, Anxiety, Depression, and Somatization scales.

Table 2 shows the results of this analysis. The variables of Occupational Stress (B = - .21), Job Satisfaction (B = -.30), Acculturation (B = .24), and Family Stress (B = -.23) were the significant predictors of Resilience, F (4,82) = 12.16, p<.001. Among these women, those who were more acculturated, yet who had less job satisfaction and lower occupational and family stress were the ones who reported being most able to recover from this job loss.

Table 2. Predictors of Resilience to Job Loss

Step	Variables	Incremental R	Incremental F	Beta at Final Step
1.	Occupational stressors	.17	17.83**	-.21
2.	Job satisfaction	.12	13.60***	-.30
3.	Acculturation	.04	5.19*	+.24
4.	Family stressors	.04	5.50*	-.23

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

DISCUSSION

Acculturation and Skills Deficits

The chronic unemployment or underemployment experienced by most of these women was based in part on their lack of transferable skills. Previous research has shown that situations or events posing a threat to personal competency appear to be sources of considerable stress (McCrae 1984). The results of the present study draw a complex picture regarding the dilemmas facing these unemployed Latino women. It appears that greater acculturation was associated with lower overall Life Satisfaction. Nonetheless, greater acculturation was associated with having fewer difficulties in finding a job, given that more acculturated persons generally have a larger repertoire of job and English language skills which may facilitate job finding. Regardless, such

persons also become increasingly encumbered with greater financial responsibilities (i.e., having to ask for a bank loan).

Greater acculturation was also associated with a greater ability to recover from the impact of job loss, ostensibly since one is more capable of finding a new job. However, this resilience may well be tempered by the degree to which a person may be affected by family and occupational stressors i.e., concerns over the ability to act as a provider for the family and insecurities over one's capability of finding a new job. In addition, greater job involvement was associated with a greater difficulty in recovering from job loss. Among those women for whom this job provided a significant social network and for whom this job symbolized a valued aspect of the self, the impact of this job loss (despite this being the loss of an unskilled job) was likened to "a death in the family."

The present results suggest that mental health workers and policy makers need to appreciate the intense and chronic stressors which face these and many other low-acculturation Latino women nationwide who are victims of plant closure.

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