

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

Contributing Factor for DACA Recipients to Pursue Higher Education

A graduate project in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Social Work

By

Rhina Marcella Paniagua

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The graduate project of Rhina Marcella Paniagua is approved:

Wendy Ashley, Psy.D, LCSW

Date

Allen Lipscomb, Psy.D, LCSW

Date

Park Hyun-Sun, Ph.D., MSW , Chair

Date

California State University Northridge

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Table of Contents

Copyright	ii
Signature Page	iii
Acknowledgment	iv
Abstract	vi
Chapter 1: Problem Statement & Research Question	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review	4
Chapter 3: Methods	8
Research Design	8
Sample	8
Data Collection	9
Measurement	9
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings	10
Descriptive Analysis	10
Bivariate Correlations	11
Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Limitations	13
Discussion	13
Implications	14
Limitations	15
Conclusion	16
References	17
Appendix A: Measurement Instrument	19
Appendix B: Table 1-4	20

Abstract

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This study focuses on the factors that motivate DACA recipients to pursue higher education. A survey was used to identify the strongest motivator amongst this population. This study found the highest motivator for DACA students to pursue higher education is: wanting to earn a better income with a college degree, closely followed by needing a college degree to achieve their career goal and, wanting to help their families after finishing college. The implications for social work practice this study can contribute to, include: the advocacy for policies such as DACA which provide resources and means to succeed and thrive for undocumented minors which benefits them and the country's economy.

Keywords: DACA, students, higher education, *familismo*, undocumented, immigration, protective parenting, achievement, motivational theory

Chapter 1: Problem Statement and Research Question

The process of immigration and acculturation is a challenging one. Youth who immigrated to the U.S. as teenagers are more prone to lower educational outcomes than native-born youth of foreign parents (Portes & Rivas, 2011). This is attributed to what is called the “second generation advantage” through this, teens are able to have more opportunities if they are able to make use of the two cultures and their networks. However, pursuing higher education for minorities has its challenges, according to Portes and Rivas (2011), parental educational status before the migration process has effects on ambition and performance when deciding to pursue higher education.

The remaining culture that the family brings from the home country is maintained through their contact with their community, through this association the drive to succeed increases and supports the upward movement of the youth. Portes and Rivas (2011), stress how important it is for teens to aspire some sort of achievement, without it, academic achievement is less likely to happen. Another obstacle Portes and Rivas (2011) talk about is the English monolingualism of the teens in contrast with their parents’ foreign monolingualism, the inability to dialogue about the experiences of the new culture serves as an obstacle in the support to be academically driven to succeed. This experience has been found to create dissonant acculturation in immigrant teens.

According to McGlynn (2012) research, the five major areas that promote Latino student success are a campus climate that values and validates Latino culture, academic programs that promote collaboration, clear procedures to simplify the transfer process, a well-articulated pathway to a degree and strong faculty advising to help students make connections between degrees and careers. In addition, the parenting style in Latino families

is categorized as 'protective parenting' (Domenech et al., 2009). Due to this and the immigration experience, specifically acculturation, parents tend to be overprotective of their children. When Defer Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) passed in 2012 by president Obama, many parents did not trust it to be true (Barros, 2017). Some of the stories in the study conducted by Barros (2017), expressed how parents believed that the program DACA was a scam, and that its purpose was to get all the personal information from immigrant families in order to deport them. Due to this belief, it was hard for some teens to educate their parents on what the purpose and benefits of DACA were and for parents to allow and support their teens in the application process. As immigrant parents, the future of their children did not involve pursuing higher education. For some, it was a matter of gender stereotypes and for others it was the misconceptions of what could be achieved in a foreign country without a legal status. Safety was a big factor that stood on the way of many to begin the DACA paperwork process. The purpose of this study is to determine contributing factors that motivate DACA recipients to pursue higher education (Barros,2017). This research aims to answer what the strongest motivator for DACA recipients into pursuing higher education is.

In addition, the significance of this study to the social work field is to help better understand why some particular immigrant groups are disproportionately likely to enter the American post-secondary educational system and what their motivation is. This study will increase our knowledge of the obstacles that this population has when pursuing higher education. As well, we can explore the role parental motivation has on immigrant teens, after they were given the opportunity to be academically successful in a foreign country through the DACA program and its benefits. Additionally, the resiliency of the youth can

be taken into account when providing services to this population and increase the competency among providers.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Educational disparities are the result of structural, social, cultural, and individual factors. In the United States the rate of Latino students' motivation to pursue higher education while in high school is much lower than Whites (Glick, & White, 2003). The reasons for this sometimes include paternal expectations, parental styles and cultural norms. In the case of DACA students, it has to be taken into account their acculturation experience, they all migrated to the U.S. before age 16. However, some experienced the American school system for more years than others, depending on their age of arrival (Bui, 2002). These are some of the factors missed in some studies that have researched this topic. The effect of having merged into the culture at an earlier age could have an impact by decreasing the acculturation effects on the family dynamics. (Gonzales, Terriquez, Rusczyk, Vaquera, & Aranda, 2014). DACA recipients are usually part of mixed-status families (Niehaus & Kumpiene, 2014). This created mistrust from the parents when the DACA program came into effect (Barros, 2017). Having their own immigration status at risk, triggered the protective parenting style, common amongst Latino families (Domenech et al., 2009). Parental support has been studied in the past as a factor that influences the pursuit of higher education (Gonzales et al. 2014). This includes, financial and emotional help, some factors that are important to talk about is that even when the parents could have been supportive their inability to navigate the American systems either by language barriers or by the lack of information was one of the greatest obstacles for DACA recipients (Portes & Rivas, 2011). There is a lack of information if birth order has any effect on the motivation DACA recipients have in pursuing higher education. There is also little research on those

who were in the process or had obtained higher educational degrees prior to DACA and did not qualify for the program due to the age restrictions (Gonzales et al., 2014).

To understand different reasons that could motivate a person, McClelland's learned needs theory of motivation will be used to further explore DACA recipient's motivation to pursue higher education. According to McClelland's human beings possess different characteristics depending on their dominant motivator. These motivators are learned and regardless of gender, race, culture or age, everyone is motivated by one of three: First, achievement, this is characterized by a person who has a strong sense for accomplishing goals, who takes calculated risks, likes to receive feedback and often likes to work alone. Second, affiliation, characterized by a person who wants to belong to a group, wants to be liked and agrees to what the group says, likes to favor collaboration instead of competition and does not like high risk or uncertainty. Third, power characterized by a person who wants to control and influence others, likes to win arguments, enjoys: competition, winning, status and recognition (Petty, 2014). A person with this dominant motivator can be driven by achieving personal power, controlling others or institutional power in which the goal is for an institution to obtain their ultimate goals. As Maslow's hierarchy of needs explains, humans are driven by the need to satisfy their basic needs (Maslow, 1954). However, motivation is hard to obtain, especially for students that are going through many challenges (Martin, 2009). According to McClelland, if the need is powerful enough it can drive a person to behave in a way by which their needs will be satisfied (Petty, 2014). McClellan further divides humans into those who regardless of facing many adversities and challenges develop a mindset that overcomes those challenges to achieve success and those who do not have any worries nor a need to overcome any challenges (Petty, 2014).

Some of the motivational factors that have been found to influence the decision of DACA recipients are family, money, friend's influences, the search for independence, and their future families (Petty, 2014). According to Harrell, Stahl, & Campbell (1981) in addition to the three dominant motivators that McClelland states, the behavior and situation that a person is in also influences their decisions. Research also suggests that gender roles also influenced these motivators, due to the importance of family and the respect children must have towards them (Turcios-Cotto et al., 2013). Some studies mention gender as a factor that needs to be studied more in depth when it comes to motivation for achievement. They talked about women's expectations to have families and care for their children as opposed to pursuing a degree (Gonzales et al., 2014). Despite the lack of information on some of these factors, studies have been able to collect data from this population through the help of organizations such as universities. It has been found that life after DACA has greatly impacted the recipient's lives (Gonzales et al., 2014). Not all DACA recipients have pursued higher education since obtaining the permit, only 40% of total recipients are pursuing or have obtain a bachelor's degree (McGlynn, 2012). Nevertheless, the ability to obtain a work permit, driver's license, and a social security number have helped ease the stress and anxiety they had prior to this program (Gonzales et al., 2014). The DACA program created the opportunity to apply to better jobs and obtain financial aid, if they decided to go to college. This through the Dream Act application, which is similar to FAFSA (for those who are citizens and legal residents). It was created with the sole purpose of supporting DACA recipients with financial aid based on income in order to pay for college (Bui, 2002). Immigrant scholars such as DACA recipients have been found to out-perform, native-born peers in similar socioeconomic status (Keller, & Tillman, 2008).

However, this study does not differentiate between the ages of arrival and the impact that may cause on academic performance. As well, past studies differ on how parental involvement and motivation are linked and expressed to immigrant children. Turcios-Cotto & Milan (2013), talk about the term *familismo* as the role that family plays when planning for the future, regardless of the desires of an individual, family is first. Some of the youth reported the need to support their families as the motivator to pursue higher education. According to previous research the data supports the idea that one of the strongest motivators for DACA recipients in congruence with McClelland's motivational theory is the need to achieve, for themselves and their families.

Chapter 3: Methods

Research Design

A survey was used to reach and recruit DACA recipients who are pursuing higher education degree at California State University Northridge (CSUN). A survey distributed through a Qualtrics link was chosen due to its highly accessibility of the participants. In addition, anonymity can be assured given that no identifiable questions were asked and there was no face to face interaction between the researcher and participants. The study was distributed through the DREAM center, which is an office dedicated to serving DACA students at California State University Northridge (CSUN) and has a large data base with emails of current DACA students at CSUN.

Sample

The procedure included a recruitment email invitation and link to the survey sent to the DREAM Center office at CSUN for distribution. They agreed to distribute it to every DACA student in their data base. The recruitment phase consisted of emailing prospective participants, including the invitation to participate, the description, purpose of study, researcher's information and a link to the survey. Next, the selection process was done by emailing the invitation only to current DACA students at CSUN. The selection process was guaranteed to include only participants qualified for this study. Following, participation was encouraged by informing prospective participants of the purpose of the study and possible minimal risks thought the participant information form included as the first question of the survey. If they agreed to participate, they had to click the box provided to advance with the survey. Participants only moved on to completing the rest of the survey

if they agreed to participate. The projected number of participants was determined by a convenience sample, the sample size was determined by the number of participants who complete the survey. An estimate of fifty participants is expected given the Dream Center data base size. Some anticipated problems were not having control over the number of participants answering the survey, this was a problem due to insufficient data to provide statistically significant results.

Data Collection

Data was collected using the Qualtrics systems as participants answer the survey. The survey was approximately completed within five minutes. Data collected included demographic questions and motivational factors that could have influenced their decision of pursuing higher education. No identifiable information was collected to assured anonymity. The complete data results were downloaded to the researcher's personal computer to be analyzed and were not shared with anyone, upon completion of analysis data was deleted.

Measurement

Information was collected through a survey that includes demographic questions and a motivational measurement scale used in a previous study by Bai (2002), (see appendix A). This consists of sixteen factors that could have motivated the participants to pursue higher education. Participants rated in a five-point Likert style format how likely the statements were to influence their decision in pursuing higher education. Some of the statements included familial expectations, financial goals, and career goals as some of the motivators. There was no validity or reliability found for this measure.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

The data collected from the survey was analyzed using SPSS. The total number of participants was 71, the average age of participants was ($M=23.44$).

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis was used to report the demographics of the participants including ethnicity, gender identity, birth order, English level prior to arriving to the United States, native language and family structure (Appendix B, Table 1). A frequency test was used to calculate which demographic variables had the highest percentage amongst participants. By using frequencies, it was found that most participants (91%) were from Hispanic/Latino descent. In addition, there were (5%) Asians and (1%) other, this includes Filipino and Armenian. Most of the participants identify as women (73%), males make up (25%) and other (1%) who identified as pansexual. Moreover, birth order ranged from oldest (54%), middle (23%), to youngest (21%). Furthermore, family structure was classified in three categories: two-parent household (69%), single-parent household (26%) and extended family (4%). As for participants' native language, the majority reported Spanish (87%), some English (4%) and other (8%), this includes Filipino, Ilocano, Indonesian and Armenian. Participants also reported their English proficiency level prior to United States arrival: high (4%), moderate (7%), poor (9%) and nothing at all (78%).

An additional descriptive analysis using frequencies was used for the sixteen motivating factors (Appendix B, Table 2), these were analyzed in order to determine which one was the most prevalent amongst participants. The top five motivators starting with the most prevalent are as follows: I wanted to earn a better income with a college degree (98%),

I need a college degree to achieve my career goal(s)(97%), I want(ed) to help my family out after I'm done with college (97%), I want(ed) to bring honor to my family (94%) and I wanted to gain my independence (93%). The additional factors can be found in Appendix B, table 2.

When asked about the family support and self-motivation were evaluated (Appendix B, Table 3) respondents reported the following: parents/guardians encouraged participants to pursue higher education (82%), participants received emotional support from parents/guardians (84%), participants received financial support from parents/guardians (87%), participants were encouraged to apply for DACA (94%) and participants' self-motivation to pursue higher education prior to DACA was (71%). Through this analysis we can see the strong effect that parental/guardian emotional and financial support has in motivating participants to pursue higher education.

Bivariate Correlations

Correlation was performed to evaluate the relationship between the variables. Pearson correlation test indicated significant correlations between multiple of the motivational variables. The variable: 'My siblings or other relatives were going (or went) to college' had a positive correlation with two variables, first: 'I want(ed) to bring honor to my family' $r(71)=.257$, $p=.032$ and second: 'I want(ed) to acquire skills to function effectively in society' $r(71)=.242$, $p=.044$. As well, the motivating variable: 'I wanted to earn a better income with a college degree' had a positive correlation with 'I need a college degree to achieve my career goal(s)' $r(71)=.295$, $p=.013$. Additionally, 'My high school teachers/counselor persuaded me to go to college' had a positive correlation with two variables, first: 'My friends were going to college' $r(71)=.299$, $p=.011$ and second: 'I

want(ed) to gain respect/status by having a college degree' $r(71)=.267$, $p=.024$. The previous results indicate a motivation for self-achievement and family/friends/teacher support to pursue a higher education degree.

Furthermore, the motivator: 'getting out of my parent's neighborhood' had positive correlation with six other motivators. First: 'My siblings or other relatives were going (or went) to college' $r(71)=.291$, $p=.014$. Second: 'My parents wanted/expected me to go to college' $r(71)=.264$, $p=.026$. Third: 'I wanted to earn a better income with a college degree' $r(71)=.300$, $p=.011$. Fourth: 'I wanted to gain my independence' $r(71)=.262$, $p=.027$. Fifth: 'I want(ed) to acquire skills to function effectively in society' $r(71)=.292$, $p=.014$, and sixth: 'I did not want to work immediately after high school' $r(71)=.259$, $p=.029$. These correlations indicate a motivation for personal achievement as McClelland's learned needs theory of motivation states. The need for independence by moving out of parental housing/neighborhood is a great motivator towards wanting to achieve a successful career.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications and Limitation

Discussion

As Petty (2014) stated, the strongest motivators to pursue higher education amongst DACA students are family, money, friends' influences, the search for independence, and their future families. This proved to be the case amongst the 71 participants in this study. The findings suggest the strongest motivator for DACA students to pursue higher education was the desire to earn a better income with a college degree. This was closely followed by wanting to help out their families after they are done with their careers and needing to go to college to achieve their career goals. More than half of participants come from a two-parent household and are the oldest of their family. These factors can help explain their desire to help out their family once they are finished with their degree. Past studies and literature suggest the high importance the immediate family has on DACA recipients. Over 70% participants reported being motivated to pursue a higher education degree prior to the DACA policy taking effect. This can be explained through McClelland's learned needs theory of motivation. A person has a motivation to pursue something due to one of three dominant motivators. For DACA recipients this is self-motivation driven by the need of achievement, including a strong sense for accomplishing goals. The majority of participants in this study identified as Latino/Hispanic, are the oldest of their families and identified as women. Future studies can focus on these demographics and their correlation to motivation. Furthermore, most of the participants arrived to the United States with a low level of English proficiency. However, they were able to learn it and pursue a higher education degree with further help from the DACA program. Moreover, the motivating variables shed a light on what other important factors motivated this population. These

include: moving out, gaining respect, independence, building skills to thrive and being motivated by relatives and teachers. This study brought to light the strong sense of community and belonging DACA recipients have, as well, as their sense of responsibility towards their parents and future families.

Implications

The implications for social work practice this study can contribute to, include: the advocacy for policies such as DACA which provides resources and means to succeed and thrive for undocumented minors. The research supports the idea that undocumented minors are contributing to the growth of the United States. The implementations of policies such as DACA benefit not only the individual but the economy of the country. As Cisneros (2013) stated, access to higher education is obstructed for those who wish to pursue it. Through policies such as DACA youth is empowered to aim for success. Assembly Bill 163 is a reinstatement of language amended into Assembly Bill of 1663 which focuses on improving the conditions within detention facilities for undocumented children at this moment. This is crucial given that this bill would allow for legal representation, mental health assessments, would require the facilities to comply with standards and report the number and length of placement. This would help avoid the traumatizing experience some minor have experienced including fatalities that could have been prevented. As stated earlier the importance of bills that focus on the well-being of minors is an investment into the future members of society. Social workers and advocates should aim to advocate for policies such as this given the statistical support of its benefits to the person and community.

Limitations

Some of the limitations of this study include: a convenient sample, in this case students from only one specific university. As well, recruitment; students in this sample were emailed an invitation to the study. However, there was no incentive due to the lack of funds available to this research. In addition, this study focuses on the DACA population currently pursuing a college degree. Those who have DACA and are not pursuing higher education are not accounted for. Their motivation or lack thereof can be researched in a follow-up study. In addition, the measurement instrument which contained the sixteen motivators had no reliability or validity found, other than previously being used by another study. As a result, this could have omitted alternative motivating factors and therefor missing important data. As for the questionnaire, some questions could have been modified and additional questions could have been asked to increase the information gathered from participants and developed a more solid conclusion to this research.

Conclusion

Undocumented students have demonstrated that they are able to succeed even with all the social, legal, financial, and psychological challenges they face in the United States. This study reflects the resilience undocumented minors have in trying to achieve their goals. The motivation these young people have comes from the self as well as for the benefit of their families. DACA recipients have proven that when given the opportunity to thrive, they take it and make good use of it. The importance of studies such as this is the concrete data. This shows the true motivation and goals of undocumented minors, their desire to succeed, support their families and give back to their community.

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Appendix A

Select how likely the following reasons were in deciding to pursue higher education

Variables	Extremely Unlikely	Somewhat Unlikely	Neither Likely nor Unlikely	Somewhat Likely	Extremely Likely
My friends were going to college					
My siblings or other relatives were going (or went) to college					
My parents wanted/expected me to go to college					
My high school teachers/counselor persuaded me to go to college					
I need a college degree to achieve my career goal(s)					
I wanted to earn a better income with a college degree					
I want(ed) to gain respect/status by having a college degree					
I want(ed) to bring honor to my family					
I want(ed) to help my family out after I'm done with college					
I like to learn/study					
I want(ed) to provide a better life for my own children					
I wanted to gain my independence					
I wanted to move out of my parents' home					
I want(ed) to acquire skills to function effectively in society					
I wanted to get out of my parents' neighborhood					
I did not want to work immediately after high school					

Appendix B

Table 1

Characteristics of Demographic Variables (N=71)

Variables	n	%
<u>Ethnicity</u>		
Latino/Hispanic	65	91.5
Asian	5	7.0
Other	1	1.4
<u>Gender Identity</u>		
Man	18	25.4
Woman	52	73.2
Other	1	1.4
<u>Birth Order</u>		
Oldest	38	54.3
Middle	17	23.9
Youngest	15	21.4
<u>English level prior to U.S. arrival</u>		
High	3	4.2
Moderate	5	7.0
Poor	7	9.9
Nothing at all	56	78.9
<u>Family Structure</u>		
Two-parent household	49	69.0
Single-parent household	19	26.8
Extended family	3	4.2
<u>Native language</u>		
Spanish	62	87.3
English	3	4.2
Other	6	8.5

Table 2

Motivating Factors to Pursue Higher Education (N=71) Extremely /Somewhat likely

Variables	n	%
My friends were going to college	32	45.1
My siblings or other relatives were going (or went) to college	17	24.0
My parents wanted/expected me to go to college	54	76.1
My high school teachers/counselor persuaded me to go to college	48	67.6
I need a college degree to achieve my career goal(s)	69	97.2
I wanted to earn a better income with a college degree	70	98.5
I want(ed) to gain respect/status by having a college degree	53	74.6
I want(ed) to bring honor to my family	66	94.3
I want(ed) to help my family out after I'm done with college	69	97.2
I like to learn/study	65	91.6
I want(ed) to provide a better life for my own children	64	90.2
I wanted to gain my independence	66	93.0
I wanted to move out of my parents' home	38	53.5
I want(ed) to acquire skills to function effectively in society	55	92.8
I wanted to get out of my parents' neighborhood	30	42.3
I did not want to work immediately after high school	18	25.4

Table 3

Family Support (N=71)

Variables	n	%
Parents/guardians encourage to pursue higher education	58	82.9
Received emotional support from parents/guardians	60	84.5
Received financial support from parents/guardians	62	87.3
Encouraged to apply for DACA	67	94.4
Self-motivation to pursue higher education prior to DACA	51	71.8

Table 4

Correlations Among Variables

Motivating Variables	Getting out of my parents' neighborhood	I wanted to bring honor to my family	I want(ed) to acquire skills to function effectively in society	I need a college degree to achieve my career goal(s)	My high school teachers/counselor persuaded me to go to college
My sibling or other relatives were going to college	.014	.032	.044		
My parents wanted/expected me to go to college	.026				
I wanted to earn a better income with a college degree	.011			.013	
I wanted to gain my independence	.027				
I want(ed) to acquire skills to function effectively in society	.014				
I did not want to work immediately after high school	.029				
My friends were going to college					.011
I want(ed) to gain respect/status by having a college degree					.024

Significant at the .05 level