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The Perceived Barriers to Services Among Hispanic Immigrant Community Members in Southern Connecticut

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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Walden University
2025

Abstract

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Abstract

In this qualitative phenomenological study, the perceived barriers to services among Hispanic immigrant community members in Southern Connecticut were explored. The study was grounded in social disorganization theory and cultural conflict theory to identify the specific obstacles these communities face, understand the underlying causes, and examine the broader societal and criminal justice implications. Data were collected through open-ended anonymous questionnaires with participants from Hispanic immigrant communities. The findings revealed that fear of deportation, language barriers, and limited education about available services and resources were the most perceived barriers. These challenges were found to significantly affect the integration and well-being of Hispanic immigrants, contributing to a sense of cultural disconnect and reluctance to seek necessary support. Participants also highlighted strained relationships with law enforcement, hindering community policing efforts and outreach initiatives. The study contributes to positive social change by amplifying marginalized voices and providing insight to Hispanic immigrants. The research underscores the importance of empowerment, inclusion, and ethical considerations in addressing systemic issues by engaging stakeholders and emphasizing community collaboration. The implications extend to policy development, service provision, and community engagement strategies to foster trust and equity within immigrant populations.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

There are perceived barriers to services among Hispanic immigrant community members in Southern Connecticut. The focus of this study is closely related to the field of criminal justice, as a lack of awareness or education regarding available support services may contribute to higher crime rates and increased recidivism (see Herzog, 2009). The services aimed to support this community by tackling essential issues like mental health, substance abuse, re-entry challenges, vocational training, unemployment, housing, truancy, rehabilitation, and other related issues.

The Hispanic-origin immigrant population has limited knowledge of resource and service availability, which would aid them in the process of community rehabilitation and restoration (Grest et al., 2023). These programs are provided by nonprofit and community-based organizations, with community policing efforts to conduct outreach with local, state, and federal government officials. These organizations should subsequently implement initiatives to educate the community about such programs. The results of this study could lead to positive social change by improving community policing tactics, enhancing their visibility and transparency, and building reliable connections with community members of all ages and local organizations. The barriers to attaining such assistance and why these challenges exist were addressed in the hope that a resolution would be found. Initiatives implemented to bring awareness and much-needed outreach to this community of the programs available, which could ultimately reduce crime within Hispanic immigrant populated communities of Southern Connecticut, which

struggle with socioeconomic disparities and disadvantages. Additionally, results may aid the Hispanic population in Southern Connecticut in recognizing, understanding, and locating programs and services that are available to them. Attaining change could restore and rehabilitate a community, which the research believed could lead to fewer crimes and less criminal involvement. In the major sections of this chapter, I describe the background, the gap in the literature, the significance of the research topic, and evidence that the research problem has current relevance. Additionally, this chapter includes the research paradigm, theoretical and/or conceptual framework, nature of study, assumptions, and limitations.

Background

Research on the study topic highlighted numerous factors. For instance, one source studied the immigrant and minority population of university students, and data collection was attained by participants from 242 US colleges and universities included in the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) Survey of Campus Law Enforcement Agencies (Basham, 2022). Findings suggested that campus law enforcement departments were more actively involved in community policing due to more significant tasks to combat campus property crime and the need for a feeling of safety (Basham, 2022). The author's goal was to examine community policing within campus law enforcement departments and assess the impact of organizational structure, agency characteristics, and campus attributes that may be influential. (Garcia-Hallett et al., 2020) focused on examining the economic and policing disparities faced by Latinx-disadvantaged communities in the Kansas City metropolitan area through qualitative analysis of interviews and workshops.

The data revealed a significant population of Latinx residents living in these regions. The conclusions revealed that enclaves function as both a protective factor for Latinxs against sociostructural adversity and make them highly visible targets for disproportionate criminalization. Garcia-Hallett et al. (2020) proposed community development and policing plans to promote sociospatial equity in law enforcement practices while adjusting to demographic shifts. Both studies demonstrated the need for new initiatives and community policing outreach efforts among such communities.

Lung-Amam et al. (2021) explored efforts to reduce crime and improve safety in the predominantly Latinx suburbs of Washington, DC. Evidence indicated that programs investing in trust and rapport between police and the community had a significant impact over 4 years. Additionally, the outcomes showed that community-building efforts, resource allocation, resident engagement, and neighborhood infrastructure investments were highly effective. The case highlighted the essential role of community-based organizations in aiding residents to create and implement programs that enhance community safety and develop services/resources without depending on the police.

My study needed to be conducted as the topic being studied appears to be an ever-growing issue that has been studied nationally in other states and internationally in other countries. However, limited attention has been given to the issue in Southern Connecticut, bringing about a significant gap. My study is relevant in its presumed outcome. It evidently placed the power of change in the hands of the community members themselves, subsequently building leaders of all ages and levels while becoming law-abiding, self-sufficient citizens.

Problem Statement

The problem I studied was the immigrant community members ' perception of barriers to accessing services in Southern Connecticut. This relates to criminal justice, as crime rates or criminal justice involvement rise when these communities are unaware of the services and resources available to address factors influencing crime (see Przeszlowski & Crichlow, 2018). Identifying the barriers and their underlying reasons could pave the way for new initiatives to address these influential factors and benefit the Hispanic immigrant community in Southern Connecticut. Research on the topic has been conducted in various states and countries over the past 5 years and beyond. However, this issue has received minimal attention in Connecticut, particularly in its Southern district, which is home to a large immigrant population of Hispanic descent.

Southern Connecticut communities populated by immigrants of Hispanic descent face socioeconomic disadvantages and disparities and are more prone to crime or criminal justice involvement due to many influential factors. Garcia-Hallett et al. (2020) explored sociospatial, economic, and policing inequities experienced by Latinx communities in the Kansas City metropolitan area and discovered challenges in which Latinx communities may be especially vulnerable to disproportionate criminalization from both federal and local law enforcement. Additionally, they questioned whether Latinx enclaves could continue to serve as effective support systems given inner challenges and their targeted subjection to racialized policing. Lung-Amam et al. (2021) proved that those communities where efforts were made to engage residents, add resources, and improve the development of such populations subsequently reduced crime

while increasing residents' sense of safety. The authors indicated that a lack of community policing outreach and engagement within the Hispanic immigrant community greatly impacted the community's well-being, safety, and crime rates overall and confirms a correlation and relationship between the two.

The focus of this study was closely related to the field of criminal justice, as a lack of awareness and education regarding available support services could contribute to higher crime rates and increased recidivism. The services and resources would assist this community in addressing critical areas such as mental health, substance abuse, re-entry challenges, vocational training, unemployment, housing, truancy, rehabilitation, and other related concerns. Change and reform could be attained by researching the barriers and challenges in such communities and why they exist.

Purpose of the study

In this qualitative study, I aimed to identify the barriers to services in Hispanic immigrant communities in Southern Connecticut, explore the reasons for their existence, and examine their impact on society and the criminal justice system. Due to a lack of awareness of available services and resources, the Hispanic immigrant community is more susceptible to criminal activity or involvement in the criminal justice system, as these services can help address factors that reduce crime or criminal justice involvement. Additionally, the immigrant community of Hispanic descent is subject to the factors above due to challenges faced within socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. As the researcher, I attained a more profound understanding by investigating and collecting in-depth feedback from personal experiences, opinions, and viewpoints. Through

phenomenology, a researcher can gain a greater understanding of the meaning of such perspectives and opinions through the subjective experiences of the population being studied.

Research questions

I used the following questions to address the research problem, which aligns with the study's purpose:

RQ1: What barriers to community services do Hispanic immigrants in Southern Connecticut perceive?

RQ2: How do barriers and perceptions affect the integration and well-being of Hispanic immigrant communities in Southern Connecticut?

Barriers to community members' experience include, but are not limited to, language barriers, lack of transportation, and lack of community policing outreach. The Hispanic immigrant community also fears law enforcement and the ideation of a potential investigation into their immigration status or that of their relatives, which could lead to deportation. This can lead to limitations within the study, and the barriers that were researched and explored through the study may indicate that the integration and well-being of this population are negatively impacted, as Hispanic immigrants may feel as if they are pariahs or not part of a community.

Theoretical Framework for the Study

This study was grounded in the theories of phenomenological research, a qualitative approach that gathered detailed, engaged data and feedback through open-ended questionnaires, allowing for the sharing and interpretation of lived experiences,

perceptions, and opinions (see Davies, 2000). The theoretical framework of social disorganization theory and cultural conflict theory validated the qualitative phenomenological study. The logical connections between the framework presented and the nature of the study include social disorganization theory (Shaw & McKay, 1942), which focuses on relationships between community characteristics and crime in urban areas, impacted by factors such as ethnicity, poverty, and weak social networks. The aim was to identify patterns that resulted in higher crime rates. McKay's original model indicated that low economic status, ethnic heterogeneity, residential mobility, and immigration disrupt community stability, leading to community social disorganization, which, in turn, influences the increase in crime and delinquency rates. Cultural conflict theory (Sellin,1938) analyzes how clashes between distinct cultural norms and values can cause social issues, including crime and delinquency.

Social disorganization theory is a significant framework in criminology that examines how a community's structural and cultural conditions influence crime rates. The theory was developed by sociologists Shaw and McKay in the early 20th century. They studied juvenile delinquency in Chicago and found that crime rates were higher in specific neighborhoods, particularly those experiencing poverty, residential instability, and ethnic diversity (Kubrin, 2009). (Shaw & McKay, 1942), argued that these neighborhoods lacked the social cohesion necessary to enforce informal social controls, leading to higher crime rates. They introduced the idea that crime was not randomly distributed but was prominent in disadvantaged communities exposed to certain social conditions. The evolution of this theory exercises the belief that communities can

maintain social order through mutual trust and shared norms, and aims to strengthen neighborhood networks and reduce crime.

Cultural conflict theory explores how differing cultures and values can lead to conflict and crime. Sellin introduced the concept of *conduct norms*, which are rules or behaviors accepted within a culture. He argued that conflicts arise when these norms clash, particularly in areas where different cultural groups interact (Goff & Geis, 2017). Cultural conflict theory remains relevant today, exploring and describing how cultural differences can lead to various forms of conflict, including crime and deviance. The social disorganization theory and the cultural conflict theory are explained in detail in Chapter 2.

Additionally, the intensive evolution and ever-growing population of immigrants of Hispanic descent resettling in Southern Connecticut as part of globalizing trends often leads to rapid changes in local cultures. The negative consequences of such change can contribute to the intensification of conflicts caused by distinct perceptions of the world determined by different systems of cultural values and beliefs. The socioeconomic situation in given communities often provokes cultural conflicts. For instance, immigrant communities from diverse cultural backgrounds may immigrate and resettle in new areas where their norms and values conflict with those already established. This cultural conflict can lead to criminal behavior, as individuals might violate the dominant culture's norms or resist assimilation. It can also result in delinquency among youth who struggle to reconcile conflicting cultural expectations.

The research design required detailed responses from first-hand experiences, opinions, and perspectives through open-ended questionnaires. Participants were recruited through outreach targeting individuals of Hispanic descent aged 18 or older. Additionally, recruitment was facilitated via word of mouth and through the distribution of study information to participants' relatives and friends. The invitation could be shared with Hispanic immigrants who reside or are employed in Southern Connecticut, or forwarded, but could not encourage participation nor ask any individual to share contact information. Individuals interested in participating accessed questionnaires on their own. The sample population consisted of 12 Hispanic males and females who are employed or reside in Southern Connecticut and are at least 18 years of age, or until saturation was reached. Sufficient English fluency was required as the survey was conducted solely in the English language.

Data was analyzed using NVivo, a Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDA) with an AI Solution that serves as a central hub for data organization, storage, analysis, and sharing. Further information on the analysis process is provided in Chapter 3.

Nature of Study

The qualitative research design approach of phenomenology was selected because of its ability to focus on exploring and understanding human experiences as perceived by individuals. This approach was most appropriate in aiding me in unveiling the essence of phenomena by examining how people experience and interpret events and situations, while entailing an in-depth understanding of the participants' personal perspectives, opinions, lived experiences, and beliefs through open-ended questionnaires. The

phenomenon studied is the Hispanic immigrants' lack of understanding or awareness regarding the services available to them (Rai et al., 2023). The evaluation design of a non-experimental design, used to investigate social phenomena without directly changing the conditions that participants experienced and answered questions about a specific group or population, and whether differences exist from their detailed responses, was beneficial to this study

Data was collected from constituents of Hispanic immigrant descent from Connecticut's southern district. The sample population consisted of 12 Hispanic males and females who were employed or resided in Southern Connecticut and were at least 18 years of age, or until saturation was reached. Data was collected via an open-ended questionnaire, minimizing the error in transcribing detailed information due to receiving written responses from the participants. The qualitative data analysis (QDA) tool NVivo 14 offered a centralized location to organize, store, analyze, and share your data, accelerating qualitative data analysis by automatically identifying themes and patterns.

Data analysis procedures consisted of using NVivo Qualitative Data Analysis tools, gathering and organizing data, content analysis, analyzing open-ended questionnaires completed by the participants, coding qualitative data, reviewing notes from observations, as well as implementing phenomenological analysis, which allowed the researcher to identify and analyze patterns and themes within the collected data attained to investigate lived experiences and valuable insights.

Additionally, this QDA tool supported importing text, audio, video, emails, and images. NVivo organized the people, places, and key metrics of the analysis of cases, and

linked these cases to attribute values such as age and gender to compare different groups within the data, if applicable. As the researcher, my choice for manual evaluation was hand coding and categorization instead of relying on computers, machinery, and technology mishaps, thus resulted in more accurate results. This approach involved assigning codes to support the development of themes and patterns for qualitative analysis. This research consisted of coding surveys and questionnaire responses for analysis. The inductive coding method will be employed, allowing the researcher to create codes derived from the collected data.

Definitions

Disparities: Differences in levels of treatment, especially those seen as unfair. These differences can occur in various contexts, such as economic, social, or health-related areas. Economic disparities might refer to the income gap between different regions or groups, while health disparities could indicate differences in access to healthcare based on income or race (Brenes, 2023).

English as a second or additional language (ESL): Speakers frequently encounter disadvantages, such as being deprived of equitable justice outcomes and facing obstacles and limitations in accessing services and support, including rehabilitative programs. (Webster, 2022).

Immigrants of Hispanic descent: Those who have moved to the United States from Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. They bring diverse traditions, languages, and perspectives, enriching American society culturally and economically (Bean & Tienda, 1988).

Language and cultural barriers: In criminal justice, these refer to the challenges faced by the criminal justice system due to the diverse cultures and languages of individuals involved. These barriers can impact communication, understanding, and fairness in legal proceedings (Wang, de Graaff & Nijkamp, 2018).

Latinx: A gender-neutral term used to refer to people of Latin American cultural or ethnic identity in the United States. It replaces the gender-specific endings of "Latino" (male) and "Latina" (female) with an "x" to be inclusive of all genders (Camargo, et al., 2022).

Socioeconomic status (SES): A comprehensive measure encompassing an individual's or a family's economic and social standing within society. It reflects a combination of factors, including income, education, and occupational prestige, that collectively influence one's access to resources and opportunities (Socioeconomic status and criminal justice outcomes, 2024).

Assumptions

I assumed that immigrants of Hispanic descent within the southern district of Connecticut lacked awareness and education related to resources and services in place due to the barriers and challenges they face. This included, but was not limited to, a lack of community policing outreach, which subsequently leads to higher levels of crime due to services not reaching the population to aid in areas that influence crime levels in this community. The assumption listed was necessary in the context of the study because if the assumptions proved to exist or that a relationship existed, then the barriers and challenges would become a relevant topic of research and an issue in need of attention to

resolve, initiate, and implement strategies to reduce such barriers and subsequently minimize criminal justice involvement. Assumptions are essential as they establish the foundation for the belief or idea that situations, events, or relationships may exist and be true, regardless of whether they are experimental or nonexperimental, without supporting evidence (Durkin, et al., 2020). However, assumptions are often used to justify reasoning.

Scope and Delimitations

In this study, I focused on the perceptions and lived experiences of immigrants of Hispanic descent in Southern Connecticut regarding barriers to services and how this relates to an increase in crime or criminal justice involvement. A delimitation within this study was restricting the study to a certain age group and geographic location, such as immigrants of Hispanic descent who reside or work within Southern Connecticut and must be 18 years of age or older. The sample population consisted of 12 Hispanic males and females until saturation was reached. Additionally, sufficient English proficiency was required as the survey was conducted solely in English. Delimitations outlined the choices I made regarding the study's focus. For example, the sample size chosen would become a delimitation, clarifying that findings may not apply to all sectors or possibly not to a larger sample size.

Delimitation boundaries can significantly impact the transferability of the study's findings if delimitations are too restrictive; the richness and depth of these descriptions may be compromised, making it harder for readers to determine the applicability of the findings to other contexts (Davies, 2000). Additionally, delimitations help ensure that the study remains focused, applicable, and relevant to its objectives and goals. However, they

also mean that the findings are tailored to a specific situation, which can limit their broader applicability. Delimitations set limits and constraints while improving the clarity of research and narrowing the main objectives.

Limitations

Limitations, including reliability and validity issues of the design selection, were vital to this study, as well as the need to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants within this study. The study's strengths encompassed the unique and detailed perspectives from lived experiences, which provided a deeper understanding of participants' insights and opinions. On the other hand, limitations are considered due to the challenge of ensuring reliability and validity, as subjectivity can lead to personal beliefs affecting perspectives rather than basing opinions on facts.

Researcher biases might shape the findings of studies and affect the outcomes. Researcher bias occurs when researchers' personal beliefs, values, or assumptions influence data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Davies, 2000). It could lead to selective observation and interpretation of data to fit preconceived notions. Response bias could also occur where participants may respond in ways they think are socially acceptable or expected rather than providing genuine answers. This can be influenced by the wording of questions or the order of questions within the questionnaire and survey. Nonresponse bias could occur when certain individuals do not participate in the study, leading to a sample that may not accurately reflect the population. Additionally, selecting a small participant or target population size within a study can undermine credibility and validity, as the results may not be representative or accurate for a larger population.

Using a survey tool with built-in separation, like Qualtrics and SurveyMonkey, collected emails in a way that stored them separately from the response data—protecting anonymity while still providing a contact list. Using such a tool as a communication channel for the open-ended questionnaires reduced the cost and time needed for in-person interviews. Using such platforms reduced the likelihood of errors in the interview transcripts as it was provided in the participant's own words and created a usable transcript (Ratislavova & Ratislav, 2014). Group interviews place the participants' identities and anonymity at risk. Such a risk was minimized when using open-ended questionnaires and surveys. Additionally, this allowed participants to complete the questionnaire at their convenience and schedule without interfering with home and work responsibilities. Another limitation that pertained to the chosen population was sensitivity and the fear within immigrants of deportation or investigation into their legal status or that of their relatives. Removing the need to meet in person brought comfort in providing more detailed responses without exposing their identity through in-person contact.

Another potential area for improvement or limitation was that qualitative research often relies on open-ended responses, which can make it challenging to verify the accuracy of the data collected. Additionally, challenges in establishing causality may arise as it can become difficult to determine cause-and-effect relationships due to the complex and often non-linear nature of qualitative data; however, despite limitations, qualitative research was invaluable and allowed for obtaining a deep insight into human behavior, motivations, and experiences.

In qualitative research, transferability and dependability are crucial for ensuring the study's trustworthiness (Davies, 2000). However, potential challenges related to their limitation must be addressed to eliminate the issues proactively. Within transferability, the researcher may run into context-specific findings. Qualitative research often produces findings specific to the context in which the study is conducted, making it challenging to apply these findings to other settings or populations (Drisko, 2024). To implement transferability, researchers must provide detailed descriptions of the research data and participants. This can be time-consuming and not always feasible. As mentioned, the small sample size chosen could make qualitative findings irrelevant to larger populations.

To address ethical issues effectively, it was crucial to maintain dependability by ensuring transparency and providing detailed information throughout the study. This approach, along with a comprehensive informed consent process, helped protect both the researcher and participant, ensuring their understanding and agreement. This ensured participants that their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without repercussions. It was crucial to safeguard the participant's identity and privacy by storing data on a private computer, not a public one, and/or in a locked home office accessible only to the researcher. Questionnaires being answered by the participant directly also minimized the researcher's biases and perspectives, which could have influenced the data collection and analysis process and led to subjective interpretations of the data. By eliminating personal biases, as the researcher, this allowed for the production of reliable findings. Researchers could mitigate these issues by implementing

triangulation to cross-reference sources and maintaining a detailed audit of all data collected.

Significance

This qualitative study may significantly advance knowledge related to criminal justice by offering diverse insights and perspectives regarding the topic of study. This was accomplished through an in-depth understanding of the phenomena by capturing human experiences, behaviors, and interactions, which could subsequently aid in interpreting findings accurately and/or applying them in real-world settings. Qualitative studies often contribute to developing new theories or improving existing ones by exploring new relationships (Davies, 2000). Additionally, the findings from qualitative research could inform policymakers and implement intervention strategies.

This qualitative study potentially contributes to positive social change by providing rich insight into the lived experiences of individuals and communities, allowing researchers to identify systemic issues, raise awareness about marginalized perspectives, and empower individuals to actively participate in social change efforts, especially when the research actively engages with stakeholders and prioritizes community collaboration. The implications of positive social change can be profound and multifaceted. Some key aspects included but were not limited to empowerment and inclusion, community engagement, and ethical considerations. Participants become the co-creators of knowledge, which empowers marginalized groups by giving them a voice and including their perspectives in the research process, such as the targeted population and group of this study, being immigrants of Hispanic descent within Southern

Connecticut. Engaging with communities and conducting outreach fosters trust and collaboration. This could lead to sustainable social change as communities are more likely to support and participate in initiatives they helped shape, as the power of change and leadership is placed in their hands.

In this qualitative research, I emphasized ethical practices, such as respecting participants' confidentiality and privacy. This ethical approach built stronger, more respectful relationships between researchers and participants, contributing to positive social change. The impact of qualitative research is often long-term and can include both intended and unintended consequences. By understanding the complexities of social issues, researchers can develop more holistic and sustainable solutions (Davies, 2000).

Summary

In Chapter 1, I delved into the background and purpose of the study and the issue being researched. The research filled a gap by my addressing an issue that has been studied and investigated in other states within the United States and internationally but not within Southern Connecticut. Additionally, I discussed the study's specific research questions and objectives as well as the theoretical framework, limitations and delimitations, significance of the study, and key contributions the qualitative research/study could have for positive social change.

In Chapter 2, I detail the literature search strategy and provide a more in-depth look at the theoretical framework of social disorganization and cultural conflict theories. It also provides an exhaustive review of the current literature regarding barriers to services available to Hispanic immigrants in Southern Connecticut.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Challenges experienced by a specific population or group are broadly defined as *marginalization* or *discrimination* (VanLandingham, Nguyen, Tran, Pham, Bui, & Anglewicz, 2023). These terms describe the social, economic, and political disadvantages that certain groups face due to race, gender, socioeconomic status, disability, or other characteristics (Kisa & Kisa, 2024). Immigrants of Hispanic descent face challenges in various categories. Socioeconomic disparities may lead to higher rates of poverty and limited access to quality education and job opportunities. Language barriers and limited English proficiency can hinder access to services, employment opportunities, and integration into the community. Immigration and legal status matters can create significant stress and uncertainty, affecting access to healthcare, education, employment, and community integration due to fear of their legal status being investigated or that of their relatives. Additionally, the immigrant population of Hispanic descent faces discrimination and stereotyping in various aspects of life, including the workplace, housing, and social interactions (Kisa & Kisa, 2024).

These challenges have long-term effects on the lives and future of this community, which subsequently impacts the barriers to services through the perceptions of the Hispanic-origin immigrant community within Southern Connecticut. The criminal justice field faces challenges due to a lack of awareness and education about available services, which can result in higher crime and recidivism rates. These services, which address issues such as mental health, substance abuse, re-entry, vocational skills,

unemployment, housing, truancy, and rehabilitation, are not effectively reaching the Hispanic immigrant community. This lack of access hinders efforts to rehabilitate and restore these communities (Villamil et al., 2023). These programs are run by nonprofit and community organizations that collaborate with community policing efforts and local, state, and federal government officials. This collaboration could significantly increase community awareness of these programs.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the literature search strategy and provide a more in-depth look at the theoretical framework of social disorganization and cultural conflict theories. It will also provide a review of the current literature regarding barriers to services available to Hispanic immigrants in Southern Connecticut, with a summary and drawn conclusions.

Literature Search Strategy

Literature research was conducted using various resources, primarily the Walden Library multi-databases, to search for peer-reviewed scholarly journals on cultural disparities and qualitative studies related to this research topic and specific population. Additionally, research was conducted on social disorganization and cultural conflict theories. Search engines used include Google Scholar, SAGE Journals, and Semantic Scholar. A list of key search terms or phrases included but not limited to *social disorganization and cultural conflict, qualitative research, challenges in Hispanic immigrant communities, community policing efforts in Hispanic immigrant communities, cultural barriers and disparities, influences on crime in disadvantaged communities,*

phenomenological research, immigrant distrust of police, community relations, language, and *cultural barriers*.

The iterative search process was ongoing, and I used triangulation to cross-reference source validity and credibility. The search process consisted of thoroughly reviewing relevant and significant literature related to the topic of study and narrowing the specific population and geographic location within the study. While studies have been conducted on this issue both internationally and nationally in various states and countries, there is a lack of research and attention within Connecticut, highlighting the need for further investigation in this area. Limited research has been conducted in the specific geographic location being studied in Southern Connecticut.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical framework for this study was based on social disorganization and cultural conflict theories. I determined these theories were the most adequate in demonstrating a correlation and an in-depth understanding of the perceptions and experiences of immigrants of Hispanic descent regarding barriers to services and influence on potential increases in crimes. These theories describe the significance of cultural assimilation in adapting to a new culture while maintaining one's own cultural identity and the challenges that lead to issues about community involvement and interactions (Kubrin & Mioduszewski, 2019). Additionally, these theories aided in improving our understanding of how economic and social conditions relate to crime. Both theories are discussed further in the following sub-sections. Understanding these dynamics and the relationship between the chosen theories and research topics is crucial

for developing policies and interventions that promote social cohesion and reduce crime. Efforts to bridge cultural gaps and provide support and services while addressing economic inequalities could help mitigate the negative impacts of cultural conflict.

Social Disorganization Theory

Social disorganization theory is a significant framework in criminology that examines how a community's structural and cultural conditions influence crime rates. The theory was developed by sociologists Shaw and McKay in the early 20th century (Kubrin & Mioduszewski, 2019). They studied juvenile delinquency in Chicago and found that crime rates were higher in specific neighborhoods, particularly those experiencing poverty, residential instability, and ethnic diversity (Kubrin, 2009). (Shaw & McKay, 1942), argued that these neighborhoods lacked the social cohesion necessary to enforce informal social controls, leading to higher crime rates. They demonstrated that crime is not randomly distributed but is prominent in disadvantaged communities exposed to certain social conditions, which in this study correlates with the disadvantaged communities of Hispanic immigrants within Southern Connecticut.

The evolution of this theory exercises the belief that communities can maintain social order through mutual trust and shared norms and aims to strengthen neighborhood networks and reduce crime. (Shaw & McKay, 1942), The primary interest was in determining the extent to which differences in economic and social characteristics of local areas paralleled differences in delinquency rates. Questions of interest included (a) To what extent do variations in delinquency rates correspond to differences in economic, social, and cultural characteristics of local communities in different types of cities? (b)

How are delinquency rates in particular areas affected over time by successive changes in the national composition of the population? (c) Under what economic and social conditions does crime develop as a social tradition and become embodied in a system of criminal values? and (d) What are the implications for treating and preventing wide variations in delinquency rates in different types of communities? Social disorganization can thus be defined as the inability of local communities to realize the common values of residents or solve commonly experienced problems (Kubrin & Mioduszewski, 2019). This definition relates to the barriers the research population faces within Southern Connecticut.

As the researcher, I chose social disorganization theory as it suggested that crime is more prominent in communities with weakened social bonds and is particularly relevant to Hispanic immigrant communities in manners such as economic disadvantages and challenges in cultural integration due to differences in social norms, customs, and language, which lead to social isolation making it difficult for a community to maintain social order or prevent crime. In addition, the Hispanic immigrant community faces discrimination and marginalization, which further weakens social bonds and may lead to distrust of authorities or reluctance to engage and interact.

Cultural Conflict Theory

Cultural conflict theory was first introduced by Sellin in 1938 (Goff & Geis, 2017). Cultural conflict theory explores how differing cultures and values can lead to conflict and crime. Sellin introduced the concept of *conduct norms*, which are rules or behaviors accepted within a culture. Sellin argued that conflicts arise when these norms

clash, particularly in areas where different cultural groups interact (Goff & Geis, 2017). Cultural conflict theory remains relevant today, exploring and describing how cultural differences can lead to various forms of conflict, including crime and deviance. This theory is particularly relevant to Hispanic immigrant communities in several ways:

Language barriers and limited English proficiency can hinder effective communication and integration, leading to misunderstandings and tensions between Hispanic immigrants and other community members or authorities. Hispanic immigrants may face discrimination and marginalization, which can intensify cultural conflicts. These experiences can lead to feelings of alienation, anger, and mistrust and potentially result in higher crime rates and deviance as a form of resistance or survival (Anglewicz et al., 2023). Economic hardship and competition for resources can heighten cultural conflicts. Hispanic immigrant communities often reside in economically disadvantaged areas such as Southern Connecticut, where competition for employment, housing, and social services can lead to tensions with other groups.

Additionally, the intensive evolution and ever-growing population of immigrants of Hispanic descent resettling in Southern Connecticut as part of globalizing trends often leads to rapid changes in local cultures. The negative consequences of such change can contribute to the intensification of conflicts caused by distinct perceptions of the world determined by different systems of cultural values and beliefs. The socioeconomic situation in given communities often provokes cultural conflicts. An example is immigrant communities from various cultural backgrounds relocating and settling into new regions, where their norms and values may conflict with those already established.

This cultural clash can result in criminal behavior, as individuals might breach the dominant culture's norms or resist assimilation. As a result, youth who find it difficult to reconcile conflicting cultural expectations may become delinquent.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Barriers to Services and Challenges Affecting the Community

Immigrants of Hispanic descent perceive many barriers and challenges to services within their communities due to a lack of awareness, education, and the challenges mentioned within the theoretical framework (Lopez, Finno-Velasquez, Sepp, Mendoza, Corkill, & Salazar Pérez, 2024). Underserved communities have many resources and nonprofit organizations available that could reduce overall crime rates, such as rehabilitative services, mental health services, substance abuse, unemployment, and housing aid, among many more.

Police and community distrust are factors influencing barriers to services (Lung-Amam et al., 2021). Law enforcement officers engaged in community policing can help bridge referral gaps and overcome language barriers faced by these communities. This ensures that citizens receive the necessary services to improve their overall situation, thereby reducing negative decision-making and actions. Limited English proficiency can make it difficult for Hispanic immigrants to navigate services, including healthcare, education, and legal assistance. Theodore and Habans (2016) described the dire need for law enforcement to build better relationships with immigrant communities and the importance of implementing new initiatives to integrate and communicate with diverse

communities. Law enforcement departments must implement training in working with diverse communities, such as cultural sensitivity.

Immigrants of Hispanic descent continue to resettle within the United States, which results in community policing professionals frequently encountering diverse cultures and languages (Webster, 2022). As first responders, law enforcement personnel can engage productively with immigrant communities and communicate effectively with all victims, witnesses, and suspects. However, there is limited knowledge about how the majority of the 18,000 police agencies nationwide interact with immigrant communities. In 2010, the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Community-Oriented Policing Services collaborated with the Vera Institute of Justice to comprehensively examine how law enforcement agencies are fostering effective police-immigrant relations (Saint-Fort, Yasso, & Shah, 2012). This involves maximizing resources, developing partnerships, identifying community needs, conducting outreach, training law enforcement, monitoring program success or failure, and maintaining successful programs (Saint-Fort et al., n.d.). The study examined the challenges and barriers faced by law enforcement officers and immigrant communities. They implemented a nationwide initiative that aimed to identify, evaluate, and share effective law enforcement practices that build trust and foster collaboration with immigrant communities, ensuring these practices can be replicated.

Many Hispanic immigrants lack health insurance and face disparities in healthcare access and outcomes (Kisa & Kisa, 2024). This is often due to a shortage of Spanish-speaking healthcare providers and cultural misunderstandings. Additionally, this community may experience discrimination and stereotyping, which can affect their

mental health and willingness to seek help, especially if they are unaware of the services available to aid them. Another barrier to services is prejudice and discrimination, which can create hostile environments, discouraging immigrants from seeking help as well. Challenges affecting the Hispanic immigrant community can also include employment, education, housing, and mental health. Finding stable, well-paying jobs can be challenging due to language barriers, lack of recognition of foreign qualifications, and discrimination (Corkill et al., 2024). Finding affordable and safe housing can be difficult, especially in areas with high demand or unawareness of how to acquire assistance in affordable housing.

Police and Community Trust

Research suggested that immigrants of Hispanic descent experience feelings of fear and distrust due to discrimination, law enforcement misuse of power, and marginalization (Lung-Amam et al., 2021). Many immigrants of Hispanic descent fear investigation of their legal status or that of their relatives, and a lack of Spanish-speaking officers can build language barriers. Community services could be offered within local nonprofit organizations that work to rehabilitate and restore communities by tackling issues such as housing, mental health, substance abuse, truancy, job readiness skills, re-entry, second chance employment, vocational training, and more. These efforts aim to improve conditions within these communities and neighborhoods. This study helped better understand these community members' lived experiences and perspectives. Past experiences or encounters impact the trust between law enforcement and immigrants of Hispanic descent. Many immigrants come from countries where police corruption and

abuse are common, not to mention that the United States has a history of law enforcement cases where abuse of power has taken place. These past experiences can lead to a general distrust of law enforcement in the United States. Additionally, misunderstandings arising from cultural differences can also create barriers. For example, certain behaviors or gestures might be misinterpreted by police officers unfamiliar with Hispanic cultures, and certain gestures or behaviors made by police officers may be interpreted by the community members as intimidating or aggressive, as well as unfamiliar, which can subsequently lead to unexpected situations causing fear, distrust, and unintentional misunderstandings.

Mistrust of the police significantly impacts the Hispanic immigrant community in several ways, such as fear and underreporting of crimes, distrust in legal systems, barriers to community policing, mental health impacts, and victimization. The fear that interacting with the police could lead to deportation or other legal consequences often results in underreporting of crimes, which can leave serious issues like domestic violence, theft, and assault unaddressed (Marrs Fuchsel & Brummett, 2021). When crimes go unreported, it can create an environment where criminals feel entitled to target Hispanic immigrants who are vulnerable, knowing they are less likely to seek help from the authorities. This can increase the rate of victimization within the community as well. Mistrust of police overall can have adverse effects on mental health due to contributing to anxiety, fear, or depression.

Community policing would aid in engaging in community policing initiatives that help build relationships and trust. Officers can participate in community events and

activities to become more familiar with the residents they serve and understand their needs and concerns within the community. Training officers on cultural awareness and sensitivity can improve interactions with immigrant communities. Initiatives that fostered community, provided resources and engagement for residents, and enhanced neighborhood infrastructure proved to be more effective (Lung-Amam et al., 2021). Those communities where efforts were made to engage residents, educate, resource, and improve the development of such populations subsequently reduced crime while increasing residents' sense of safety (Lung-Amam et al., 2021). Additionally, offering translation services and hiring bilingual officers can help bridge the communication gap, and collaborating with local immigrant and cultural organizations can help police understand community needs and concerns.

Effective community policing relies on trust and cooperation between law enforcement and community members. Mistrust can hinder these efforts, making it challenging for police to foster relationships and work collaboratively with Hispanic immigrant communities to address local issues. These efforts can only succeed if resources are available and trustworthy relationships are built through community engagement, outreach efforts, and initiatives. Additional initiatives include, but are not limited to, cultural competency training for law enforcement and policies that protect the rights and safety of immigrants. Various institutions lack the resources to engage with diverse immigrant communities effectively. This includes having bilingual staff or culturally sensitive outreach programs.

Factors Bearing on the Problem of Trust

Hesitation to engage and trust within such a community is influenced by previous experiences or encounters with law enforcement, fear of investigating their legal status, and barriers in language. The Seattle Police Department in 2019 researched the relevant issue of strengthening relationships with immigrant communities. Immigrants may be wary of interacting with the police because they fear being asked about their immigration status. Even immigrants with legal status are often worried about reporting crimes to the police because they fear that the police may not realize they have legal status. Immigrants also may not understand the differences between federal immigration agents and local police officers or sheriff's department deputies. As a result, perpetrators of crime often target immigrant communities because they know that immigrants may be less likely to report crimes to the police. Mistrust of the police makes this community unwilling to report the crimes (Strengthening Relationships between Police and Immigrant Communities in a Complex Political Environment: Multicultural Outreach and Engagement Programs for Police Agencies, 2019).

Theodore (2013) surveyed Latino perceptions of police involvement in immigration enforcement. Forty-four percent of Latinos surveyed reported they are less likely to contact police officers if they have been the victim of a crime because they fear that police officers will use this interaction as an opportunity to inquire into their immigration status or that of people they know. Seventy percent of undocumented immigrants reported that they are less likely to contact law enforcement authorities if they were victims of a crime. Many Latinos reported that they feel like they are under

more suspicion now that local law enforcement authorities have become involved in immigration enforcement. This figure includes 26% of U.S.-born respondents, 40% of foreign-born respondents, and 58% of undocumented immigrant respondents.

These findings reveal one of the unintended consequences of the involvement of state and local police in immigration enforcement – a reduction in public safety as Latinos' mistrust of the police increases because of the participation of police in immigration enforcement. The following conclusions can be drawn from the survey findings: Isolation and disconnectedness from police, withdrawal, and a diminished sense of public safety (Theodore, 2013).

The Trump administration announced Friday (see Catalini & Santana, 2025) that it is expanding a fast-track deportation authority nationwide, allowing immigration officers to deport migrants without appearing before a judge as President Trump seeks to remove everyone who is in the U.S. illegally (Catalini & Santana, 2025). The administration said it is expanding the use of "expedited removal" authority nationwide (Catalini & Santana, 2025). Historically, Trump's mass deportation plans and Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids have attempted to involve local police departments, which causes fear among communities.

Immigrants fear police involvement in Trump deportation arrests, but many state laws will ban this across the nation (Catalini & Santana, 2025). Immigrant communities of Hispanic descent need a clear distinction between local and federal roles and to understand their rights. Ensuring local police are not seen as extensions of federal immigration enforcement can reduce fear and encourage cooperation. By addressing

these challenges and implementing these strategies, police departments can foster a more trusting and cooperative relationship with immigrant communities.

Psychosocial Factors Affecting Community Trust

Psychological factors affecting community trust can be caused by previous negative experiences or untreated trauma. Cognitive behavioral therapy would tremendously aid many experiencing negative thoughts as it requires changing thinking patterns by recognizing thoughts and decisions, moving past them, and understanding actions or decisions to develop ways to better cope with situations (Holle, 2024). It helps build self-confidence and awareness of one's abilities. This can be achieved through pilot program administration, which collects data from the target sample to validate the proposal and theoretical assumptions. Questionnaires address underlying factors influencing social behavior and identify internal and external risk factors impacting criminal and aggressive behaviors within a specific community, correlating to crime rates.

Psychological factors affecting the Hispanic immigrant community include, but are not limited to: Traumatic experiences, acculturative stress/ discrimination, negative cognitive-emotional factors, pushbacks and barriers, social/economic disadvantages, stressful conditions associated with migration, resilience as a protective factor, and increased risk for mental disorders. Negative cognitive-emotional factors can impact the mental health of the Latino community. Lack of awareness regarding mental health services or barriers to accessing mental health services is detrimental to the well-being and overall safety of a community. These factors can lead to depression, anxiety,

substance abuse, and poor sleeping quality, as well as negative or irrational decision-making, which can lead to criminal activity (Holle, 2024). Many immigrants have experienced significant trauma and stress, both in their home countries and during their journey to the U.S. This can include violence, persecution, and dangerous travel conditions. These experiences can lead to heightened anxiety and mistrust. Acculturation stress can also become a psychological factor influencing distress. The process of adapting to a new culture while maintaining one's own cultural identity can be stressful. This stress can affect mental health and trust in new social systems (Holle, 2024).

The separation of families can impact the mental state of immigrants of Hispanic descent, whether due to immigration policies or economic necessity; this can cause significant emotional distress. This can affect trust in institutions perceived as responsible for or complicit in these separations. In many Hispanic cultures, there is a stigma associated with mental health issues. This can prevent individuals from seeking help and contribute to a lack of trust in mental health services, which is why community outreach events to educate and build mutual trust, understanding, relationships, and respect for the unique experiences of Hispanic immigrants by institutions, community nonprofits, and law enforcement are vital.

Additional literature and studies conducted indicated the significance and correlation of the impact on communities due to the lack of community policing outreach and engagement within the Hispanic immigrant community, and how the impact affects well-being, safety, and crime rates overall. (Lung-Amam, Alvarez & Green, 2021) reveals that those communities where efforts were made to engage residents, educate, and

improve the development of such populations subsequently reduced crime while increasing residents' sense of safety. Efforts that built community, resourced and engaged residents, and invested in neighborhood infrastructure were more effective (Lung-Amam, Alvarez & Green, 2021).

Impact on Youth

Many Hispanic immigrant youth face educational barriers, including lower high school completion rates and higher dropout rates compared to their peers. Language barriers and economic challenges can contribute to these educational disparities. Lower levels of educational attainment can limit job opportunities and access to services that require higher education, which is why outreach, education, and services must be made readily available to youth of Hispanic descent to avoid potential criminal activity in their future or truancy issues. Hispanic youth are more likely to experience mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD, often due to family stressors, discrimination, and community violence. However, they are less likely to receive the necessary mental health services (Basham, 2022).

Community policing and presence within schools would positively impact on the youth of America in avoiding involvement in the criminal justice system and connecting youth with services to rehabilitate and engage in prosocial activities to keep the youth off the streets. Presence within the schools ultimately provides a sense of safety while cultivating trustworthy relationships. Basham (2022) studied immigrant youth on campus concerning economic and policing inequities experienced by Latinx-disadvantaged communities. The study discovered barriers to immigrant inclusion by law enforcement

within socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. Basham's research is significant to this study because it identifies that immigrant youth of Hispanic descent within campuses make up part of the community being researched within this study, and how the lack of inclusion results in insufficient education, awareness of available services, and access to resources.

Hispanic immigrant youth face significant challenges due to police distrust and barriers to accessing services. Some of these key impacts include mental health issues, educational barriers, limited access to health care, social isolation, and vulnerability (Psychiatry.org - Latino Youth: Overcoming Challenges to Mental Health and Access to Care, 2019). The stress and anxiety from fearing the police and facing barriers to services can lead to mental health dilemmas such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These issues are often exacerbated by the stigma surrounding mental health in many Hispanic communities. Distrust of authorities can extend to school resource officers and other school officials, making it difficult for students to feel safe and supported in their educational environment. This can lead to lower academic performance and higher dropout rates. Additionally, fear of interacting with authorities inside and outside of school can lead to social isolation, as immigrant youth of Hispanic descent may avoid community activities or public spaces where they might encounter police. This isolation can hinder their social development and integration into the community (Basham, 2022).

Limited access to healthcare is a key factor impacting Hispanic immigrant youth in accessing services. Barriers such as language difficulties, lack of insurance, and fear of

deportation can prevent youth from accessing necessary healthcare services (Holle, 2024). This can result in untreated physical and mental health conditions. Without trust in the police and without addressing the challenges they face, Hispanic immigrant youth will not have access to the support they need. They may be less likely to report crimes or seek help when needed, making them more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Hispanic immigrant youth are more susceptible to abuse and exploitation due to economic necessity.

Many immigrant families face significant financial pressures, which can force youth into labor markets or fall victim to human trafficking, where they are more prone to exploitation. This includes working in unsafe conditions or for unfair wages (Antunes & Ahlin, 2021). Hispanic immigrants often work in low-wage jobs with poor working conditions. They may face barriers to asserting their labor rights due to fear of retaliation, lack of legal knowledge, or limited access to legal resources. In general, immigrant youth of Hispanic descent lack awareness and education about services and resources. Immigrant youth may not be fully aware of their rights or the resources available to them. This lack of awareness can prevent them from seeking help or recognizing exploitative or manipulative situations. Addressing these vulnerabilities requires comprehensive support systems, including legal protections, mental health services, and community outreach programs that are culturally sensitive and accessible.

Legal and Policy Barriers

Immigrants of Hispanic descent face many challenges and barriers to legal services and policy regulations. Immigrant families with young children face many

barriers to attaining legal services, and some of these challenges are due to fear of deportation, lack of awareness, economic barriers, cultural differences, and policy regulations. The U.S. immigration system is often described as complex and restrictive. Many immigrants face long wait times for visas, limited pathways to legal residency, and stringent requirements that can be difficult to meet (Bier, 2023). Changes in immigration policies and regulations can create uncertainty and instability for immigrants. Policies that are constantly changing can make it difficult for immigrants to understand their legal status, rights, and some policies even penalize immigrants for seeking public assistance, which can dissuade this population from accessing benefits and services (Corkill, Finno-Velasquez, Lopez, Mendoza, Salazar Pérez & Sepp, 2024). The U.S. immigration system is constantly changing, making it difficult to understand, confuse, or navigate their legal status. Discriminatory policies and practices can limit opportunities for Hispanic immigrants in areas such as employment, housing, and education.

Undocumented immigrant families may fear that seeking legal help will subsequently expose them to deportation, which prevents them from accessing necessary legal services. Additionally, there is often a lack of education and awareness about legal rights and available services. Many may not know where to seek help or what rights are under U.S. law. Many immigrants are not fully aware of their legal rights, which can lead to exploitation in the workplace, housing, and other areas. This lack of knowledge can also prevent them from seeking justice when their rights are violated (Bier, 2023). Economic barriers are key factors influencing these increased challenges, and some

policies restrict access to public benefits and services based on immigration status, which can create economic hardships for immigrant families.

Legal services can be expensive, as not all immigration firms offer pro bono assistance. Many immigrants of Hispanic descent may not have the financial resources to afford legal representation. Cultural differences and misunderstandings can pose challenges as legal professionals may not always understand the cultural context of clients' situations, leading to miscommunication and mistrust. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including providing language support, increasing awareness of legal rights, offering affordable legal services, and fostering cultural competence among legal professionals (Lopez et al., 2024). Comprehensive policy reforms are also necessary to promote inclusivity and ensure fair treatment for all immigrants, and community education programs to inform immigrants of their rights.

Summary and Conclusions

Within this qualitative research, themes arose, which are central topics or patterns that emerge from the data. These themes help us understand and interpret the underlying meanings and insights within the data. Some common themes in this qualitative study were perceptions, social and cultural impacts, identity concepts and fear, relationships, and interactions between Hispanic immigrants, law enforcement, and community organizations. Additionally, each key concept described a similar or the same pattern in challenges and barriers faced by the researched populations in terms of economic disparities, cultural values and beliefs, language barriers, lack of awareness and education, and feelings of mistrust, fear, or lack of inclusion within the community. In

this qualitative study focusing on the challenges Hispanic immigrants face in attaining services, several recurring themes emerged. Additional key themes included immigration stress, acculturative stress, economic hardship, discrimination and bias, and health and well-being. Immigration stress highlights stress associated with their legal status, immigration process, and fear of deportation. Acculturative stress involves the psychological impact of adapting to a new culture and health issues related to physical and mental health (Holle, 2024). This subsequently correlates with limited access to healthcare.

Immigrants' unawareness of resources and vital assistance within communities can vary significantly based on factors such as location, socioeconomic status, and language barriers. Southern Connecticut is impacted tremendously due to being highly populated by immigrants within low-income housing or undergoing socio-economic disadvantages. However, literature has shown that a substantial portion of immigrants face challenges in accessing these resources. For example, nearly seventy percent of low-income immigrants reported being food insecure, and over half lacked health insurance. Additionally, barriers such as language, literacy, and cultural differences often prevent immigrants from accessing health and human services programs (Wang, de Graaff & Nijkamp, 2018).

Greater awareness and education of services in place to aid would decrease economic challenges, such as finding stable employment, earning a livable wage, and accessing affordable housing. Themes provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted challenges Hispanic immigrants face and can inform policies and services

aimed at supporting this community. The themes are identified by categorizing and analyzing qualitative data, questionnaires, and literature review. The present study will fill the gap of limited research being conducted on the issue and topic of research, specifically in Southern Connecticut. Chapter three will provide a detailed description and analysis of the research design and methodology. Chapter three will also thoroughly review the roles of the researcher and participants.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

In this qualitative study, I aimed to identify the barriers to services in Hispanic immigrant communities within Southern Connecticut, explore the reasons for their existence, and examine their impact on society and the criminal justice system. Due to a lack of knowledge about available services and resources, the Hispanic immigrant community is more susceptible to criminal activity or involvement with the criminal justice system. These services could help address influential factors that reduce crime and criminal justice involvement (Antunes & Ahlin, 2021). Additionally, the immigrant community of Hispanic descent is subject to the factors above due to challenges faced within socioeconomically disadvantaged communities.

I sought a more profound understanding by exploring and collecting detailed feedback from individuals' lived experiences, opinions, and perspectives. Through phenomenology, a researcher can better understand the meaning of such perspectives and opinions through the subjective experiences of the population being studied. In Chapter 3, I describe the research design, the role of the researcher, methodology, and data collection instruments. Additionally, I provide details regarding the procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection, as well as a description of strategies used to combat issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

I used the following research questions to address the research problem:

RQ1: What barriers to community services do Hispanic immigrants in Southern Connecticut perceive?

RQ2: How do barriers and perceptions affect the integration and well-being of Hispanic immigrant communities in Southern Connecticut?

The key concepts of the study included barriers to services and challenges affecting community, police, and community trust, factors bearing on the problem of trust, psychological factors affecting community trust, impact on youth, and legal and policy barriers. I studied the phenomenon of Hispanic immigrant perceptions of barriers to services within Southern Connecticut and why the barriers exist. Additionally, the phenomenon studied was the Hispanic immigrants' lack of understanding or awareness regarding the services available to them (see Rai et al., 2023).

This study is grounded in the qualitative research approach of phenomenological research, which involved collecting detailed and engaged data through open-ended questionnaires. These questionnaires allow for the sharing and interpretation of lived experiences, perceptions, and opinions. The conceptual foundation of social disorganization theory and cultural conflict theory will validate the qualitative phenomenological study. This approach was most appropriate in aiding me in revealing the essence of phenomena by examining how people experience and interpret events and situations, while entailing an in-depth understanding of the participants' personal perspectives, opinions, lived experiences, and beliefs through open-ended questionnaires. I used a nonexperimental design, which involves researching social phenomena without directly manipulating the conditions experienced by participants, and answering

questions about a specific group or population, and whether differences exist from their detailed responses can also be beneficial to this study.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher within this qualitative study was crucial to the study's success, as I had various responsibilities. Some of these responsibilities included designing the study, gathering rich data details, and building rapport with participants to foster trustworthy relationships. Additionally, a researcher must be mindful and aware of their biases and assumptions and not allow them to influence the research process (Park, 2025). The researcher should reflect on these factors that can impact the study and take necessary steps to diminish the potential impact. In qualitative research, researcher and participant relationships are crucial and can be complex. While building rapport and trust is essential for gathering rich, authentic data, having a professional relationship is vital, as personal relationships can raise ethical concerns due to biases and affect the objectivity of the research.

Maintaining professional boundaries is important to ensure the integrity of the research (Park, 2025). Researchers should strive to build a respectful and trusting relationship without crossing into personal territory yet still attaining the participant's trust and comfort. Transparency is essential within the study, and researchers should communicate the nature of their relationship with participants in a clear, concise manner and obtain informed consent.

Participants should be aware of the potential implications of their relationship with the researcher. Personal relationships can diminish credibility within the study, and

researchers need to reflect on their biases, assumptions, and the impact of their relationship with participants on the research process (Park, 2025). Protecting the privacy and confidentiality of the participants and the sample for the study was a priority. It was important to maintain the anonymity of the participants, as their immigration status is a sensitive area that could place them at risk of their legal status being investigated or deported. This was combated by providing informed consent with clear information about the study's purpose, benefits, details, and questionnaire.

The questionnaires provided comfort and relief for those who feared their physical identity being exposed to due to the sensitive population being studied. Ensuring that participation was voluntary and agreed upon within the informed consent form was vital. I used a private home computer to document and collect data rather than public or work technology. Additionally, I saved information in a locked drawer within a home office and provided the participant with a transcript for his or her review and approval of the accurate data collected.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The population studied and recruited as participants consisted of immigrants of Hispanic descent residing or employed in Southern Connecticut, as limited research has been conducted within this chosen demographic and geographic area. Participants were recruited through outreach targeting individuals aged 18 or older. The sample population consisted of 12 Hispanic males and females who were employed or resided in Southern Connecticut and were at least 18 years of age, or until saturation was reached. I required

detailed responses from lived experiences, opinions, and perspectives through open-ended questionnaires. Sufficient English fluency was required as the survey was only conducted in English.

Additionally, recruitment was facilitated via word of mouth and through the distribution of study information to participants' relatives and friends, encouraging them to share it with Hispanic immigrants residing or employed in Southern Connecticut. The invitation could be shared or forwarded. Individuals interested in participating accessed questionnaires on their own.

An additional sampling strategy was employed, called snowball sampling. This strategy is commonly used to locate hidden populations. This method relies on referrals from initially sampled respondents to other persons believed to have characteristics of interest (Johnson, 2014). Limitations of this approach include nonrandom selection procedures, reliance on the subjective judgments of informants, and confidentiality concerns. Advantages include cost and efficiency (Johnson, 2014).

The relationship between saturation and sample size is closely related, as saturation refers to the point at which no new information or themes are observed in the data. When saturation is reached, additional data collection no longer contributes to new insights or understanding of the studied phenomenon. The relationship can be summarized by achieving saturation, determining sample size, and/or flexibility. The goal was to collect enough data to reach saturation. This meant that the sample size should be enough to capture all relevant themes and variations in the data. The required sample size could vary depending on the complexity of the phenomenon being studied, the diversity

of the population, and the research method used. Some studies may reach saturation with a smaller sample size. In contrast, others may require a larger sample, and this specific used a smaller sample size within the research methodology.

Instrumentation

Data was collected through an open-ended questionnaire where detailed responses were obtained from lived experiences, opinions, and perspectives. Sources were obtained through scholarly, peer-reviewed journals and articles that provided both historical data and relevant data within the last 5 years. Data collection from previous studies and research is vital to analyze patterns, relationships, or what could be done better within the following study. It allows the researcher to compare findings across different studies, identifying consistencies and discrepancies that could lead to new research questions or hypotheses. Additionally, these are the best data sources as the data can be used to triangulate findings, compare sources, and subsequently enhance the validity and reliability of the research by providing multiple perspectives on the same issue.

An instrument used in analyzing data was NVivo, a Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) software with AI capabilities that offers a centralized platform to organize, store, analyze, and share data. Data was collected via an open-ended questionnaire, minimizing the error in transcribing detailed information due to receiving written responses from the participants. Qualitative data often includes detailed descriptions and narratives that can bring to life the experiences and perspectives of participants, making the research more relatable and impactful. Survey tools with built-in separation, such as SurveyMonkey

collected emails in a way that stored them separately from the response data—protecting anonymity while still giving you a contact list.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Recruitment was facilitated via word of mouth and through the distribution of study information to participants' relatives and friends, encouraging them to share it with Hispanic immigrants residing or employed within Southern Connecticut. Targeted participants of Hispanic descent must have been 18 years of age or older and have sufficient English fluency, as the survey was only conducted in English. The sample population consisted of 12-15 Hispanic males and females, or until saturation was reached. The invitation could be shared or forwarded as people wished, but I did not ask any individual to share their contact information.

I provided a consent form to each participant, and they were invited to take part in a research study about the perceived barriers to services among Hispanic immigrant community members in Southern Connecticut. The informed consent allowed the participant to understand the study before deciding whether to participate. The consent form sets the pathway for transparency by providing concise information regarding the study. The consent form described the purpose of the study and the procedures for answering the open-ended questionnaire and submitting the questionnaire to the researcher. The consent form was on the first page of the questionnaire.

Additionally, participants could obtain a copy of their transcripts for review and approval of the most accurate data collected. The consent form explained the voluntary nature of the study and stated that the participant is free to terminate the voluntary

participation at any time. The risks and benefits of the study were described, along with the measures taken by the researcher to protect the participants' privacy and anonymity. The participants could contact me with any questions by email.

The duration and frequency of data collection events in qualitative studies could vary widely depending on the study's scope, complexity, and methods. This study consisted of a short-term study involving a questionnaire, which was conducted once. Future researchers may conduct the study once or multiple times as new data becomes available to analyze whether any improvements and/or changes have been made regarding the perception of immigrants of Hispanic descent to barriers in attaining services within Southern Connecticut. Data was recorded via questionnaires completed by the participants themselves, and I took notes about immediate thoughts or reflections. A software tool, such as NVivo, was used to organize and analyze qualitative data. These tools helped in coding, categorizing, and finding patterns within the data.

Participants completing questionnaires in this qualitative study had several benefits, such as authenticity, reduced bias, convenience, anonymity, and cost-effectiveness. Self-completed questionnaires captured participants' responses in their own words, providing authentic and personal perspectives. This minimized bias from the researcher interviewing, as participants are not influenced by the presence or behavior of the interviewer. This also protected against the risk of exposure to privacy and anonymity and enhanced the sense of comfort, allowing participants to be more honest and detailed in their responses. Questionnaires were cost-effective and time-efficient, reducing the

need for the researcher to schedule interviews without disrupting participants' daily schedules, commitments, and responsibilities (Kuphanga, 2024).

The questionnaire avoided asking for names, emails, phone numbers, or any combination of answers that could make someone easily identifiable. Survey platforms: Tools like Qualtrics and Survey Monkey were set up not to collect IP addresses or any metadata that could link a response to an individual. Additionally, responses were stored on secure, encrypted servers with limited access only to the researcher. It is vital to use reputable platforms designed for secure data collection. Ideally, with compliance with privacy standards such as HIPAA or institutional review board (IRB) recommendations. As the researcher, I included a short explanation at the beginning of the survey, stating that their anonymity was protected, and what data is or isn't being collected, as Transparency builds trust. I solely administered a one-time online questionnaire with no follow-ups.

Debriefing procedures in qualitative research are essential for ensuring the integrity and trustworthiness of the study. Examples of key debriefing aspects may include peer and participant debriefing. Peer debriefing involves engaging with colleagues or experts to review interpretations and minimize personal biases. The goal was to enhance the trustworthiness of the research by getting feedback and testing insights. Peer debriefers should be knowledgeable about qualitative research methods and familiar with the research topic but should not be directly involved in the study. Participant debriefing ensures that participants are informed about any deceptive elements of the study, understand the need for such deception, and leave with a positive

regard for research participation. This may include asking participants if they have any questions or suspicions about the study and clearly describing its true purpose and the relationship between procedures.

Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis software tool NVivo organized and analyzed qualitative data. These tools helped in coding, categorizing, and finding patterns within the data. Open coding and thematic coding were beneficial to this study. Open coding allowed the researcher to highlight phrases or sentences representing a particular idea or theme. Through thematic coding, the researcher identified patterns that emerged across data, which provided a detailed understanding of the data (Isangula, Kelly, & Wamoyi, 2024). Thematic coding also allowed the researcher to group codes into broader themes such as "challenges," "strategies," and "outcomes to visualize relationships. Procedures for coding included familiarization, generating initial codes, searching, reviewing, and naming themes, and producing a report by compiling findings to explain the data in detail or tell a story about the data itself. Familiarization was attained through re-reading data and content, highlighting significant concepts, and taking notes. The initial codes were generated using NVivo or manual coding by highlighting them and taking notes. There were no discrepant questionnaires that needed to be addressed.

Using SurveyMonkey for anonymous data collection offered several benefits, including increased honesty, higher response rates, and enhanced privacy. Respondents were more likely to provide truthful and candid feedback when they knew their responses were anonymous. This led to more accurate and reliable data. Anonymity encouraged

more people to participate in surveys, as they feel their privacy is protected. SurveyMonkey allows you to enable the Anonymous Responses setting, which prevents the collection of identifiable information, such as IP addresses and email addresses. Additionally, it employed encryption and data anonymization techniques to comply with data privacy regulations like HIPAA, ensuring that sensitive information was protected. Organizations can build trust with respondents by ensuring anonymity, making them feel valued and respected.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Appropriate strategies to establish credibility within this qualitative study included triangulation, saturation, peer debriefing, reflexivity, and member check. Triangulation was used through researching and analyzing multiple data sources, and methods to cross-reference and verify findings in the study of the phenomenon. This increased credibility, validity, and dependability, and reduced bias. Member checking allowed for the sharing of findings and interpretations with participants to verify the accuracy. The participants reviewed and provided feedback on the findings and results. Through peer debriefing, the researcher could involve and engage colleagues or experts in reviewing or challenging findings, interpretations, and conclusions.

Colleague feedback was vital in enhancing the validity and credibility of this study. Transferability was attained through thick description, which offered comprehensive, detailed accounts of the research, participants, and findings, enabling readers to assess the transferability of the results. Reflexivity established confirmability in this qualitative study as the researcher could reflect and document their biases,

assumptions, and overall influences on the research process (Cruz & Tantia, 2017). Notes of personal reflections were essential because doing so enhanced awareness of what could positively or negatively impact data collection and analysis within this study.

Ethical Procedures

Agreements to gain access to participants or data included the consent form. Additionally, recruitment of this population could require letters asking for each university's IRB. Data was retained for a minimum of 5 years. To dispose of digital data, data wiping tools were used to overwrite files or folders before deletion. Examples include Eraser (Windows), Permanent Eraser (macOS), and BleachBit (cross-platform). I wiped the entire storage drive for extra-sensitive data if it was dedicated to the project. If I stored responses on platforms like Google Drive, I permanently deleted files from the trash/archive, emptied the platform's "trash" folder afterward, and disabled syncing to avoid ghost copies lingering on other devices. The researcher must protect the participant's privacy, and the identity was kept anonymous within the limits of the law. The researcher did not use participants' personal information outside this research project. Also, the researcher did not include the participant's name or anything else that could identify the participant in the study reports. If the researcher were to share this dataset with another researcher in the future, the dataset would contain no identifiers, so this would not involve another round of obtaining informed consent. Data was kept secure by being accessible only to the researcher within a locked, private home office.

Additionally, the researcher explained and confirmed that participation in the study and questionnaire is entirely voluntary, and the participant could withdraw at any

time without consequences or risk. Data collected was stored on a private computer and in password-protected files within a private home office, protecting the identity and privacy of participants. Participating in this study could involve some risk of minor discomforts that could be encountered in daily life, such as sharing sensitive information. With the protections in place, this study would pose minimal risk to their well-being. If distress arises, support and referral could be obtained via dialing 988 for a national crisis hotline. Adult Crisis Line (ACTION Line): Call 1-800-HOPE-135 (1-800-467-3135) for 24/7 adult mental health crisis support.

This study did not provide direct benefits to individual volunteers. Instead, it aimed to benefit society by researching issues that require social change. The consent form explained that results would be shared through academic channels such as the University Repository, if Walden archives dissertations in their digital library, or the thesis repository for public access. The study results would be shared using more public means, such as referring participants to Scholarworks.

The participant was permitted to ask questions of the researcher by email at catherine.ortegon@waldenu.edu. If participants want to discuss their rights or any negative aspects of the study privately, they can contact Walden University's Research Participant Advocate at 612-312-1210.

Recruiting participants for a qualitative study involves several ethical considerations, as does data collection to ensure the process is respectful, transparent, and fair. Key concerns may include being sensitive to how their position might influence participants' responses, ensuring that participants are fully informed about the study’s

purpose, methods, potential risks, and benefits. Additionally, participants should understand their rights, including the voluntary nature of participation and their ability to withdraw at any time. As the researcher, I ensured that personal information was kept confidential and data anonymized to prevent identification.

This qualitative study explores a sensitive topic and a sensitive population, and the potential emotional impact on participants must be considered to provide participants with access to support resources if needed. Resources were provided on the consent form. Another key component is data representation, and having the participant complete the questionnaire himself or herself allowed for more accurate representation of participants' views and experiences. Misrepresentation of the data collected could lead to ethical issues and harm participants. Overall, ethical recruitment involves transparent and respectful communication, and it is vital to avoid coercive or persuasive tactics and ensure that participants are genuinely interested and willing to participate.

Participants received a detailed informed consent as the first page of the questionnaire explaining the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, benefits, and their rights. This document ensured they understood what participation entailed. After reviewing the consent form, participants would click the “I consent” option on the form and begin the survey. This form included statements confirming they understood the study and agreed to participate voluntarily.

Summary

Chapter Three explained the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, the methodology in attaining, analyzing, and transcribing data collection, as

well as issues of trustworthiness and how to establish credibility and validity. A thorough explanation was provided of how the data would be collected and how participants would be recruited, as well as a description of the instruments to be used to collect data. The researcher explained why the chosen methodology would benefit the target population most in protecting their privacy and confidentiality. Additionally, Chapter Three described ethical procedures and agreements to gain access to participants or data. Chapter four will dive into the participants' demographics, data collection analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The problem that I studied was the perception of the Hispanic immigrant community members in Southern Connecticut about the barriers they face in accessing services. This relates to criminal justice, in the relationship between crime rates and criminal justice involvement, which arises when these communities are unaware of the services and resources available to address factors influencing crime. Identifying the barriers and their underlying reasons could pave the way for new initiatives to address these influential factors, benefiting the Hispanic immigrant community in Southern Connecticut. Literature has focused mainly on the impact of the lack of community policing on this community. However, I aimed to unveil what additional barriers impact accessing services and why.

In this qualitative study, I aimed to identify the barriers to services in Hispanic immigrant communities in Southern Connecticut, explore the reasons for their existence, and examine their impact on society and the criminal justice system. Due to a lack of awareness of available services and resources, the Hispanic immigrant community is more susceptible to criminal activity or involvement in the criminal justice system, as these services could help address factors that reduce crime or criminal justice involvement.

The research questions were as follows:

RQ1: What barriers to community services do Hispanic immigrants in Southern Connecticut perceive?

RQ2: How do barriers and perceptions affect the integration and well-being of Hispanic immigrant communities in Southern Connecticut?

In this chapter, I present the results of my study focused on Hispanic immigrant adults aged 18 and older who reside or work in the region. Data were collected through anonymous online surveys using SurveyMonkey, ensuring participant confidentiality by disabling IP tracking and other identifiable metadata. The analysis was performed using SurveyMonkey for initial data organization and NVIVO for qualitative coding. Trustworthiness was established through member checking, triangulation, and secure data collection practices. The findings revealed three major categories: structural barriers, cultural and linguistic barriers, and access and adequacy. These reflected participants' perceptions of limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, and gaps in cultural sensitivity. Key themes included cultural stigma, educational needs, agency limitations, psychosocial challenges, poor service integration, cultural competency gaps, and systemic inequities. Immigration status and poverty were identified as factors that intensify health disparities within these communities.

Setting

As I focused on phenomenology, participants were influenced by personal conditions, which influenced their responses to the questionnaire and ultimately the overall results. Factors such as socioeconomic status, employment stability, language proficiency, and access to healthcare can shape participants' responses and engagement with the study. These conditions often intersect with immigration status, cultural identity, and experiences of discrimination, potentially affecting how individuals perceive and

report their well-being, integration, and challenges. Recognizing these influences is essential to interpreting the data accurately and ensuring that the findings reflect the nuanced realities of Hispanic immigrant communities. To attain a more profound understanding, I explored and gathered detailed feedback from lived experiences, opinions, and perspectives, which included previously experienced trauma. Participants did not disclose characteristics or perspectives that would lead me to believe organizational conditions influenced them. The study was conducted in an online setting, using anonymous surveys distributed via digital platforms to ensure participant confidentiality and ease of access.

Demographics

Participant demographics include 12 males and females, immigrants of Hispanic descent, who reside or are employed within Southern Connecticut. An additional participant inclusion criterion was that the participants must be eighteen or older, and sufficient English fluency was required, as the survey was only conducted in English. Demographics are important as they provide generalizability, replication, and transparency (Kuphanga, 2024). This is achieved as it aids readers in assessing whether findings apply to other populations, enables future researchers to reproduce the study, and clarifies inclusion and exclusion criteria. Additionally, demographics can show how identity and context influence behavior and outcomes through cultural sensitivity.

Data Collection

Twelve participants completed the questionnaire anonymously; I collected data until saturation was met, and no new information or themes were observed in the data.

Participants consisted of six females and six males. The data collection was conducted virtually through online surveys using the SurveyMonkey platform, which allowed me, as the researcher, to enable anonymous responses and prevent the collection of IP addresses or any metadata that could link a response to an individual. I avoided asking for names, emails, phone numbers, or any combination of answers that could make someone easily identifiable. The frequency of the data collection was a single data collection event with no follow-up. Data collection occurred during August 2025, with each questionnaire being completed in approximately 20 minutes. The completion rate was 100%, and the participants who chose to participate did not skip any of the questions on the questionnaire.

Data was recorded through an online survey platform (SurveyMonkey), which automatically stored data in a secure, encrypted database, and I wrote observational notes I made. Data format included open-ended responses. All survey responses were anonymized and stored on a secure server with restricted access. Settings were programmed not to collect IP addresses or metadata that could link a response to an individual. Unusual circumstances were not encountered during data collection; however, allowing the questionnaire to be completed at the participant's convenience indicated that participants were more willing to fully complete the questionnaire when they could complete it without it interfering with their daily responsibilities and lives. The completion times varied from morning to evening, and surprisingly, participants were more willing to complete the online questionnaire on weekdays rather than weekends.

Data Analysis

The inductive thematic analysis process allowed themes to emerge from the data itself, and I immersed myself in the data and open-ended survey responses to gain a deeper understanding. Generating initial codes was obtained paragraph-by-paragraph, grouped into broader categories or patterns. These categories formed themes, such as "challenges," which became overarching ideas that captured something significant about the data. Several codes, categories, and themes emerged that helped explain the challenges this population faces in accessing essential services such as healthcare and social services. Codes included a lack of health insurance, immigration status concerns, limited English proficiency (LEP), stigma around mental health and substance use, lack of culturally competent providers, lack of education in knowing your rights as immigrants of Hispanic descent, fear of deportation, mistrust of law enforcement, inadequate outreach from agencies, and limited knowledge of available services.

The main categories were structural barriers, cultural and linguistic barriers, and access and adequacy. These categories arose due to the notion or perceptions of participants that these communities experience funding limitations, inadequate infrastructure, language, and cultural sensitivity issues. The category of access and adequacy explains the limited availability of services or the belief in the provider's capacity.

Themes included cultural stigma, need for education, agency limitations, psychosocial barriers, inadequate service integration, cultural competency gaps, and systemic inequities. Immigration status and poverty exacerbate health disparities from

data collected and perceptions of participants. Mental health is often misunderstood or stigmatized in Hispanic communities (Brenes, 2023), which subsequently leads to fear and emotional distress. Participants disclosed that increasing awareness is key to improving service use, as community organizations struggle to effectively inform and engage the community members of Hispanic immigrant descent.

Participants overall agreed with their open-ended responses to some relation between barriers to services and an increase in crime due to services for substance use, violence, and mental health not being well-coordinated and inadequately integrating such services within the studied population and community. Participants disclosed within the online survey a perception and opinion that cultural competency gaps were present, as Providers often lack training to serve this community effectively or lack cultural sensitivity. In terms of systemic inequities, data collected indicated that participants perceive immigration status and poverty as significant factors exacerbating disparities in need of services and resources.

The qualitative aspects of discrepant cases included the contradiction of dominant themes and the reflection of unique demographic or contextual factors. All participants expressed the belief that fear of deportation is a significant barrier; a discrepant case, such as (Holle, 2024) described, at times, positive experiences with local community organizations that actively protect undocumented patients or minimally aim to understand the impact of traumatic experiences and coping styles of Hispanic immigrants and emphasize the importance of emotional well-being. The reflection of unique demographic or contextual factors would include communities such as older adults, LGBTQ+

individuals, or those with higher education levels who may experience barriers differently. These characteristics were not required as inclusion criteria to participate but were also not excluded. Due to the anonymous online survey, such identifiers were not asked by each participant to be disclosed. Discrepant cases were factored into the analysis by validating themes, refining categories, credibility, and trustworthiness, as well as program design implications.

Validation of Themes

As the researcher, I used discrepant cases to test emerging themes. If a theme could not accommodate a discrepant case, it was-revised or expanded. Cases, which did not initially align with emerging patterns, were examined closely to determine whether they revealed alternative perspectives or challenged existing interpretations. By validating themes against these outliers, the analysis ensured a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the data, enhancing the credibility and depth of the findings.

Refinement of Categories

Discrepant cases helped refine categories by highlighting nuances. For instance, while “language barriers” was a common category, Webster (2022) demonstrated that having bilingual staff mitigates such an issue. Alternative viewpoints or unexpected patterns were offered that led to adjustments in category definitions, ensuring that the final framework more accurately captured the diversity and complexity of participant experiences.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

Addressing discrepant cases enhanced the credibility of the study by showing that, as the researcher, I considered all data, not just the majority perspective. By examining cases that deviated from dominant patterns, I was able to review the robustness of emerging themes and ensure that the findings were not overly generalized. This process contributed to a more balanced and transparent interpretation of the data, reinforcing the study's integrity.

Program Design Implications

Discrepant cases often point to successful interventions or overlooked needs, guiding more inclusive and effective service design. Discrepant cases were factored into the analysis to inform program design implications by highlighting diverse participant needs and experiences that may not align with dominant trends. This revealed gaps or limitations in existing program assumptions, prompting reconsideration of strategies to ensure inclusiveness and responsiveness. Ultimately, inclusion helps guide more adaptable and culturally sensitive program recommendations.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Implementing credibility in anonymous surveys during a study was crucial to ensuring that the data collected was trustworthy and ethically sound. As the researcher, I achieved this by clearly explaining the purpose of the survey to participants, assuring them of anonymity and how their data would be used, obtaining approval from Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB), and mentioning the IRB approval number, 07-29-25-1198463, within the informed consent, which could also boost credibility. It was also

vital to secure data collection tools by using platforms that support anonymous responses, such as SurveyMonkey, which also allowed users to modify settings to avoid collecting IP addresses or other identifiable metadata. Data validation and triangulation could also aid in implementing credibility by looking for patterns that suggest dishonesty (e.g., identical answers, speedy completion times), and through triangulation, I was able to compare survey results with other data sources (e.g., existing data sets) to validate findings.

Transferability in this study referred to how the findings derived from anonymous survey responses could be applied to other contexts, populations, or settings. While anonymity limits the ability to conduct follow-up interviews or gather in-depth contextual data, several measures were taken to enhance the potential for transferability. First, the study provided a detailed account of the research context, including the demographic characteristics of participants, the method of survey distribution, and the cultural setting in which the data were collected. This allowed readers to assess the relevance of the findings to their environments.

Second, the consent form described the required criteria to participate, which consisted of demographic information such as age range, location or residence, and/or employment, requiring participants to be in Southern Connecticut, of Hispanic immigrant descent. However, the survey design did not incorporate such questions to not compromise participant anonymity. These variables enabled subgroup analysis and offered insights into how findings may vary across different population segments. The patterns identified in the analysis were framed in a way that emphasized broader trends

rather than context-specific phenomena. This thematic clarity supports the applicability of findings to similar populations or settings.

Dependability was implemented through consistency and reliability of the research process, ensuring that the findings result from a well-documented and logically coherent methodology. Given the anonymous nature of the survey, specific strategies were employed to maintain methodological rigor. An audit trail was maintained throughout the study, documenting each phase of the research process—from survey design and distribution to data cleaning and analysis. This included records of decisions made regarding question phrasing and platform selection. The survey was distributed using a consistent format and platform, with identical instructions and question ordering to minimize variability in participant experience. No modifications were made to the survey once data collection commenced, ensuring uniformity across responses.

Reflexivity was also considered throughout the research process. Awareness of potential biases was maintained, and documentation of reflections was used to avoid personal assumptions and positionality in influencing the design and interpretation of the study. Additionally, dependability was applied to the study through transparent reporting of the methodology and analytical procedures, allowing other researchers to assess the dependability of the findings and replicate the study in similar contexts if desired.

Confirmability was implemented through specific strategies that were employed to ensure objectivity and transparency throughout the research process. An audit trail was maintained to document all stages of the study, including survey design decisions, data collection procedures, coding frameworks, and analytical methods. This record allowed

for external review and supported the traceability of interpretations back to the original data. To further enhance confirmability, the study incorporated reflexivity practices. As the researcher, I actively reflected on personal assumptions and potential biases that could influence the interpretation of data. These reflections were noted and considered during the analysis to minimize subjective influence. A systematic and transparent analytical process was employed, using consistent coding procedures and established frameworks for thematic analysis. This helped reduce interpretive bias and supported the reliability of the conc

Results

The following research questions were used for this study:

RQ1: What barriers to community services do Hispanic immigrants in Southern Connecticut perceive?

RQ2: How do barriers and perceptions affect the integration and well-being of Hispanic immigrant communities in Southern Connecticut?

Barriers experienced by community members may have included, but were not limited to, language barriers, lack of transportation, and the lack of community policing outreach. The Hispanic immigrant community may also fear law enforcement and the initiation of a potential investigation into their immigration status or that of their relatives, which could lead to deportation. This could cause limitations within the study, and the barriers that were researched and explored through the study indicated that the integration and well-being of this population were negatively impacted, as Hispanic immigrants may feel as if they are pariahs or not part of a community.

Most participants perceived that the barriers to community services that Hispanic immigrants in Southern Connecticut experience are due to fear of deportation, language barriers, and lack of education in the services and resources available. Most participants perceived that barriers and perceptions affect the integration and well-being of Hispanic immigrant communities in Southern Connecticut because such community members feel a cultural disconnect or are afraid to seek necessary services. Participants disclosed that challenges exist within the fear and relationship between community members and law enforcement, which could ultimately hinder community policing efforts and outreach.

Participants shared that the services the Hispanic immigrant community members need the most include resources to navigate life in the US and maintain the well-being of their families, as well as assistance in housing, affordable health care, and English language learning courses. Additionally, participants believed that community members would benefit from receiving outreach and education regarding these services and resources from people in the community whom they trust, such as churches, bilingual staff, or healthcare workers. Feelings and perceptions of a lack of cultural sensitivity were shared, and the need for law enforcement to have more bilingual officers present in communities that are largely populated by Hispanics.

I did not encounter non-confirming data, indicating that evidence does not support the findings of a research hypothesis. None of the questions on the survey were skipped; all were completed. Themes included cultural stigma, need for education, agency limitations, psychosocial barriers, inadequate service integration, cultural competency gaps, and systemic inequities. Immigration status and poverty exacerbate health

disparities from data collected and perceptions of participants. Mental health is often misunderstood or stigmatized in Hispanic communities (Brenes, 2023), which subsequently leads to fear and emotional distress. Participants disclosed that increasing awareness is key to improving service utilization, as community organizations struggle to effectively inform and engage the community members of Hispanic immigrant descent.

Participants overall agreed with their open-ended responses to some relation between barriers to services and an increase in crime due to services for substance use, violence, and mental health not being well-coordinated and inadequately integrating such services within the studied population and community. Participants disclosed within the online survey a perception and opinion that cultural competency gaps are present, as Providers often lack training to serve this community effectively or lack cultural sensitivity. In terms of systemic inequities, data collected indicated that participants perceive immigration status and poverty as significant factors exacerbating disparities in need of services and resources.

Figure 1

Education Assessment

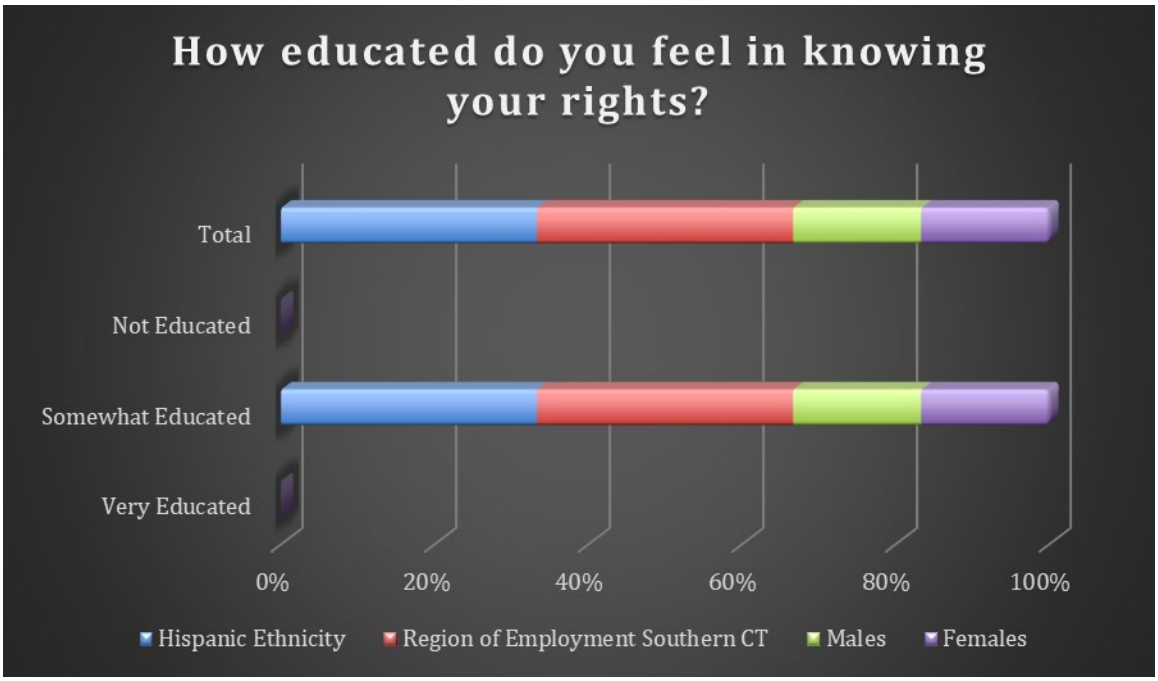
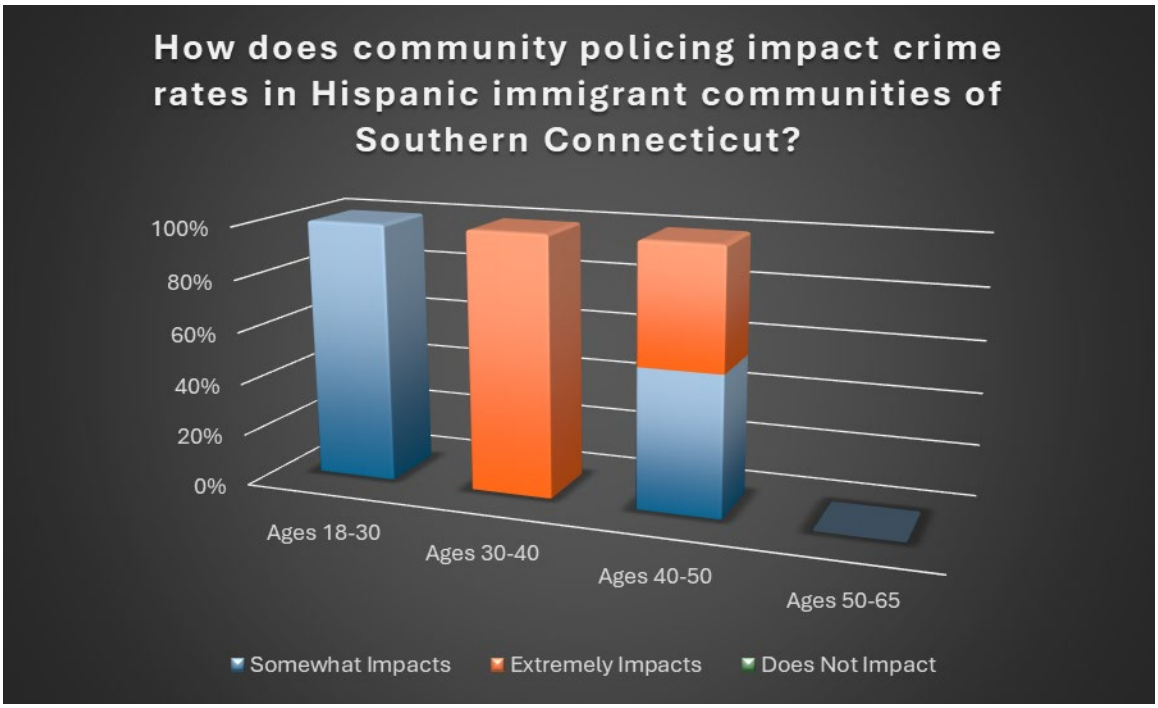


Figure 2

Community Policing Impact



The figures included in this study were organized using key identifiers to ensure clarity and relevance to the research focus on the perspectives of Hispanic immigrants' barriers to services. The goal was to maintain anonymity while allowing consistent tracking across data points. Demographic variables such as age, ethnicity, region of employment, or residence were included to contextualize individual experiences. Additional categories captured language proficiency, a critical factor influencing integration and access to resources. The tables also represent education access to services such as healthcare and legal aid, and reported challenges, including housing instability and employment barriers. Thematic responses from surveys were summarized, and

discrepant cases, if any, were flagged to highlight unique or outlier perspectives that contributed to the depth of the analysis.

Summary

Participants believe that Hispanic immigrants in Southern Connecticut face barriers to accessing community services due to fear of deportation, language difficulties, and lack of awareness about available resources. These barriers negatively impact on their integration and well-being, leading to feelings of cultural disconnect and reluctance to seek help. Additionally, mistrust and fear of law enforcement were identified as significant challenges, potentially undermining community policing and outreach efforts.

Chapter 4 provided a comprehensive overview of the study's data collection and analysis processes, including evidence of trustworthiness and a detailed presentation of the results. These findings offered valuable insights into Hispanic immigrants' barriers to accessing community services in Southern Connecticut. Building upon these results, Chapter 5 will present an interpretation of the findings in the context of existing literature and theoretical frameworks. It will also address the study's limitations and offer recommendations for future research, policy development, and community engagement strategies to improve service accessibility and trust within immigrant communities.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

In this qualitative study, I aimed to identify the barriers to services in Hispanic immigrant communities in Southern Connecticut, explore the reasons for their existence, and examine their impact on society and the criminal justice system. Due to a lack of awareness of available services and resources, the Hispanic immigrant community is more susceptible to criminal activity or involvement in the criminal justice system, as these services can help address factors that reduce crime or criminal justice involvement. Additionally, the immigrant community of Hispanic descent is subject to the factors above due to challenges faced within socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. As the researcher, I attained a more profound understanding by investigating and collecting in-depth feedback from personal experiences, opinions, and viewpoints. Through phenomenology, a researcher can better understand the meaning of such perspectives and opinions through the subjective experiences of the population being studied.

The qualitative research design approach of phenomenology was selected because of its ability to focus on exploring and understanding human experiences as perceived by individuals. This approach was most suitable for aiding the researcher in unveiling the essence of the phenomena by examining how people experienced and interpreted events and situations, while providing an in-depth understanding of the participants' personal perspectives, opinions, lived experiences, and beliefs through open-ended questionnaires. The phenomenon studied was the Hispanic immigrants' lack of knowledge or awareness regarding the services available to them (see Rai et al., 2023).

Key findings consisted of themes that included cultural stigma, need for education, agency limitations, psychosocial barriers, inadequate service integration, cultural competency gaps, and systemic inequities. Immigration status and poverty exacerbate health disparities from data collected and perceptions of participants. Mental health is often misunderstood or stigmatized in Hispanic communities (Brenes, 2023), which subsequently leads to fear and emotional distress. Participants disclosed that increasing awareness is key to improving service utilization, as community organizations struggle to effectively inform and engage the community members of Hispanic immigrant descent.

Participants overall agreed to some relation between barriers to services and an increase in crime due to services for substance use, violence, and mental health not being well-coordinated and inadequately integrating such services within the studied population and community. Participants disclosed within the online survey a perception and opinion that cultural competency gaps are present, as Providers often lack training to serve this community effectively or lack cultural sensitivity. In terms of systemic inequities, data collected indicated that participants perceive immigration status and poverty as significant factors exacerbating disparities in need of services and resources.

Interpretation of the Findings

I chose social disorganization theory as a theoretical foundation for the study as it suggested that crime is more prominent in communities with weakened social bonds and is particularly relevant to Hispanic immigrant communities in ways such as economic disadvantages and challenges in cultural integration due to differences in social norms,

customs, and language, which lead to social isolation, making it difficult for a community to maintain social order or prevent crime. In addition, the Hispanic immigrant community faces discrimination and marginalization, which further weakens social bonds and may lead to distrust of authorities or reluctance to engage and interact. This theory was confirmed in responses by participants, which disclosed that a significant challenge and barrier lies in the broken relationship of fear and distrust between community members and law enforcement.

The previously mentioned information coincides with research conducted by Lung-Amam et al. (2021), who explored efforts to reduce crime and improve safety in the predominantly Latinx suburbs of Washington, DC. Evidence indicated that programs investing in trust and rapport between police and the community had a significant impact. Additionally, the outcomes showed that community-building efforts, resource allocation, resident engagement, and neighborhood infrastructure investments were highly effective. The case highlighted the essential role of community-based organizations in aiding residents in creating and implementing programs that enhance community safety and develop services/resources without depending on the police.

Lung-Amam et al. (2021) showed that those communities where efforts were made to engage residents, add resources, and improve the development of such populations subsequently reduced crime while increasing residents' sense of safety. They indicated that a lack of community policing outreach and engagement within the Hispanic immigrant community significantly impacts the community's well-being, safety, and crime rates overall and confirms a correlation and relationship between the two.

Most participants perceived that the barriers to community services that immigrants of Hispanic descent in Southern Connecticut experience are due to fear of deportation, language barriers, and lack of education in the services and resources available. Most participants perceived that barriers and perceptions affect the integration and well-being of Hispanic immigrant communities in Southern Connecticut because such community members feel a cultural disconnect or are afraid to seek necessary services. Participants disclosed that challenges exist in fear and trust between community members and law enforcement, which could ultimately hinder community policing efforts and outreach. This was previously acknowledged within the literature review as the fear of interacting with the police could lead to deportation or other legal consequences, often resulting in underreporting of crimes, which can leave serious issues like domestic violence, theft, and assault unaddressed (Marrs Fuchsel & Brummett, 2021).

Participants shared that the services the Hispanic immigrant community members need the most include resources to navigate life in the United States and maintain the well-being of their families, as well as assistance in housing, affordable health care, and English language learning courses. Additionally, participants believed that community members would benefit from receiving outreach and education regarding these services and resources from people in the community that they trust, such as churches, bilingual staff, or healthcare workers. Feelings and perceptions of a lack of cultural sensitivity were shared, and the need for law enforcement to have more bilingual officers present in communities that are largely populated by Hispanics. This would alleviate the chosen

cultural conflict theory (Sellin,1938), which analyzes how clashes between distinct cultural norms and values can cause social issues, including crime and delinquency. Cultural conflict theory is specifically relevant and confirmed by the study in that language barriers and limited English proficiency were expressed to be a hindering factor in effective communication and integration, leading to misunderstandings and tensions between Hispanic immigrants and other community members or authorities. Theodore (2013) surveyed Latino perceptions of police involvement in immigration enforcement and cultural sensitivity. Forty-four percent of Latinos surveyed reported they are less likely to contact police officers because they fear that police officers will use this interaction as an opportunity to inquire into their immigration status or that of people they know. This confirms that language barriers, cultural differences, and misinterpretations can cause their perception.

Limitations of the Study

I acknowledge the limitations of the study, including potential biases introduced by self-selection and the constraints of anonymous data collection. These limitations were transparently discussed to assist readers in making informed judgments about the transferability of the results. An additional limitation included the lack of follow-up due to anonymity and the potential for misinterpretation of brief or ambiguous responses. These limitations are openly discussed to provide a balanced and credible account of the research findings. Nonresponse bias was a limitation mentioned earlier within that study that could occur when specific individuals do not participate in the study, leading to a sample that may not accurately reflect the population. An equal number of participants

completed the survey and did not skip any questions. Additionally, selecting a small participant or target population size, such as twelve participants within a study, could undermine credibility and validity, as the results may not be representative or accurate for a larger population.

Another limitation that pertained to the chosen population is sensitivity and the fear within immigrants of deportation or investigation into their legal status or that of their relatives. Removing the need to meet in person brought comfort in providing more detailed responses without exposing their identity through in-person contact and maintained participant anonymity.

Recommendations

Based on the strengths and limitations of this current study on perceptions of Hispanic immigrant community members regarding barriers to services in Southern Connecticut, several recommendations for further research could be made. First, future studies should aim to expand the geographic scope beyond Southern Connecticut to include other regions of the state or neighboring areas. Connecticut's population includes a substantial Hispanic demographic. This would allow for comparative analysis and help identify whether specific barriers are region-specific or more widespread. Additionally, researchers should consider diversifying the sample to include a broader range of Hispanic subgroups, such as individuals from different countries of origin or age groups. This would enhance the representativeness of findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the varied experiences within the Hispanic immigrant community.

To build on the qualitative depth of the current study, future research could adopt a mixed-methods approach and combine interviews or focus groups with quantitative surveys. This would allow for both nuanced insights and broader generalizability. Moreover, longitudinal studies could be valuable in tracking how perceptions and barriers evolve, especially in response to policy changes or shifts in the socio-political climate. Another important direction is to conduct service-specific analyses, focusing separately on healthcare, education, housing, and legal services, as the nature and severity of barriers may differ across these domains. These research directions carry important policy implications. Findings from expanded and more inclusive studies can inform state and local policymakers about the specific needs of Hispanic immigrant communities, leading to more equitable resource allocation and culturally responsive service design. Evidence from longitudinal and service-specific research can support the development of targeted outreach programs, language access initiatives, and training for service providers. Ultimately, such research can contribute to the creation of policies that reduce barriers, promote inclusion, and improve the overall well-being of Hispanic immigrants in Connecticut.

Finally, future research should explore the role of service providers, particularly their cultural competency and awareness of immigrant needs. Including providers' perspectives could shed light on systemic issues and inform training programs aimed at improving service delivery. By addressing these areas, future studies can contribute to more effective, equitable, and culturally responsive services for Hispanic immigrants in Connecticut and beyond.

Implications

This qualitative study potentially contributed to positive social change by providing rich insight into the lived experiences of individuals and communities, allowing researchers to identify systemic issues, raise awareness about marginalized perspectives, and empower individuals to participate in social change efforts actively. This is especially achieved when the research actively engages with stakeholders and prioritizes community collaboration. The implications of positive social change could be profound and multifaceted. Some key aspects included but were not limited to empowerment and inclusion, community engagement, and ethical considerations. Participants become the co-creators of knowledge, which empowers marginalized groups by giving them a voice and including their perspectives in the research process, such as the targeted population and group of this study, being immigrants of Hispanic descent within Southern Connecticut. Engaging with communities and conducting outreach fosters trust and collaboration. This could lead to sustainable social change as communities are more likely to support and participate in initiatives they helped shape, as the power of change is placed in their hands.

In addition to the potential impact of positive social change, this study may have encompassed several significant outcomes. It could have contributed to developing new legislation proposals or policy initiatives aimed at addressing systemic issues affecting marginalized communities. A crime reduction may have been observed due to improved community engagement and targeted interventions. The study might also have led to enhancements in healthcare access programs designed explicitly for Hispanic immigrants,

ensuring more equitable and culturally competent care. Furthermore, it fostered community empowerment through advocacy efforts and the strengthening of support networks, enabling individuals to take active roles in shaping their environments. A reduction in discrimination could have emerged from increased awareness and inclusive practices. Employment opportunities may have expanded, particularly through initiatives that promote workforce diversity and economic inclusion. The study has also positively influenced mental health and well-being by addressing social determinants and providing better access to mental health resources. Lastly, improvements in community policing tactics could have been implemented, promoting trust and collaboration between law enforcement and the communities they serve.

Conclusion

This study explored the perceptions of Hispanic immigrant community members in Southern Connecticut regarding barriers to accessing essential services such as healthcare, education, housing, and legal aid. Findings reveal that despite the availability of services, immigrants face persistent challenges, including language barriers, lack of culturally competent care, fear of legal consequences, and limited awareness of available resources. These obstacles contribute to the underutilization of services and reinforce systemic inequities. This was addressed within previous literature as the U.S. immigration system is often described as complex and restrictive. Many immigrants face long wait times for visas, limited pathways to legal residency, and stringent requirements that can be difficult to meet (Bier, 2023). Changes in immigration policies and

regulations can create uncertainty and instability for immigrants, and it is important to educate the studied population about legal services.

The study and perspectives of community members confirmed research data regarding how Limited English proficiency can make it difficult for Hispanic immigrants to navigate services, including healthcare, education, and legal assistance. Theodore and Habans (2016) described the dire need for law enforcement to build better relationships with immigrant communities and the importance of implementing new initiatives to integrate and communicate with diverse communities. The study highlighted the importance of community engagement and culturally responsive service delivery. Recommendations for further research include expanding geographic scope, diversifying participant demographics, conducting longitudinal and service-specific studies, and incorporating service providers' perspectives. Policy implications suggested the need for targeted reforms that improve language access, enhance cultural competency training, and build trust between immigrant communities and service institutions. Addressing these barriers is essential to promoting equity, inclusion, and the overall well-being of Hispanic immigrants in Connecticut.

In conclusion, this study highlights the critical barriers that immigrants of Hispanic descent face in accessing essential services, offering a strong take-home message rooted in advocacy, equity, and systemic reform. Through their lived experiences, the research underscores persistent challenges such as language barriers, discrimination, limited healthcare access, and inadequate community support. These obstacles hinder individual well-being and affect broader social integration and

opportunity. However, the study also reveals pathways for meaningful and positive social change, emphasizing the importance of culturally responsive policies, community empowerment, and inclusive service delivery. By amplifying the voices of Hispanic immigrants, this research calls for a collective commitment to dismantling barriers and fostering environments where all individuals, regardless of background, can thrive with dignity and access to opportunity.

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