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# Latino Immigrant Students in Spain: Potential Poly-Victims and School Underachievers

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## Abstract

Evidence suggests that school-age Latino immigrants from low socioeconomic backgrounds are at risk of multiple victimization with serious implications for their mental health and academic competence. This theory-oriented paper proposes that the overlapping of certain characteristics in the status of immigrant have been somehow overlooked or not properly addressed when dealing with immigrants' academic underachievement in Spain. Further, it considers Latino immigrant students susceptible to suffer more than one form of violence and describes how the acculturation process and social inequality clash with the host country's values. All this seem to exert too much stress on the family, bringing about patterns of victimization of children and youth that hinder competence in several domains. The inclusion in this paper of some American and Canadian neuroscience studies on attentional deficits are relevant to understand immigrants that struggle in Spanish schools. Finally, it discusses the pernicious effects of poly-victimization and the potential benefits of prevention and intervention programs.

**Keywords:** Latino, Immigrants, Academic underachievement, Socioeconomic status, victimization.

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# **Alumnos Inmigrantes Latinos en España: Poli-Víctimas en Potencia, con Bajo Rendimiento Escolar**

## **Resumen**

Existe evidencia que sugiere que los estudiantes inmigrantes latinoamericanos de estrato socioeconómico bajo tienen más riesgo de sufrir victimización múltiple y, por tanto, ver amenazado su ajuste emocional y competencia académica. Este artículo de corte teórico propone que ciertas características presentes en el estatus de inmigrante han sido ignoradas o bien, no debidamente consideradas. De hecho, el estudio considera a los inmigrantes latinoamericanos en España susceptibles de sufrir más de una forma de victimización porque distintos factores como son el proceso de adaptación a una nueva cultura y la desventaja económica ejercen mucho estrés en la familia dando lugar a situaciones de maltrato hacia los niños y adolescentes, afectando considerablemente la competencia del individuo en varias áreas. La inclusión en esta investigación de algunos estudios de la neurociencia de países como los Estados Unidos y Canadá sobre deficiencias en la atención de los niños, se hace necesarios para así entender mejor la crítica situación que sufren muchos inmigrantes en los centros educativos españoles. Finalmente, además de discutir sobre los efectos perniciosos de la polivictimización, se habla del beneficio potencial que tienen los programas de prevención e intervención.

**Palabras claves:** latinoamericano, inmigrantes, fracaso escolar, estatus socioeconómico, polivictimización

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## **Introduction**

Given the constant flow of immigrant students into most developed countries, accompanied by a pervasive academic underachievement (Cebolla-Boado & Garrido-Medina, 2008; Vaquera & Kao, 2012; Zinovyeva, Felgueroso, & Vázquez, 2008), it is substantive the identification of risk factors that compromise students' cognition and school performance.

According to this theory-oriented paper, the most significant and recent studies on poly-victimization in Spain were performed by Soler, Paretilla, Kirchner, and Forns (2012), Pereda-Beltrán, Abad-Gil, and Guilera-Ferré (2012) and Lila, Herrero, and Gracia (2008). With the exception of Lila, Herrero and Gracia (2008) whose study did not include immigrants, the rest of the studies did, but as part of the native-born sample. Without this overarching data it is more difficult to get a more detailed picture of the reality behind the insidious academic underachievement among immigrant students in Spain. For this reason, the authors of this paper analyzed research on immigrants from other countries.

## **Difficult Times: Worse for Immigrants**

Due to the world's financial crisis, unemployment has dramatically increased as has the number of families living in poverty (OECD Indicators of Immigrants Integration, 2012). For the purpose of this paper poverty is synonymous with low socioeconomic status (SES), low-income, or social inequality. In Spain, according to the Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad [Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness], as of October 24, 2013 the unemployment rate reached 26%, detrimental for millions, particularly for children who in times of economic recessions experience higher rates of maltreatment (Zielinski, 2009). In general, life for low-income immigrants is more troublesome because they tend to count on less social support, carry more emotional scars, have lower levels of education, and fewer financial resources (Pumariega, Rothe, & Pumariega, 2005). Clearly, low-income individuals face several adversities starting as early as at pre-natal stages that are beyond their control and may determine their life prospects.

## Risk Factors

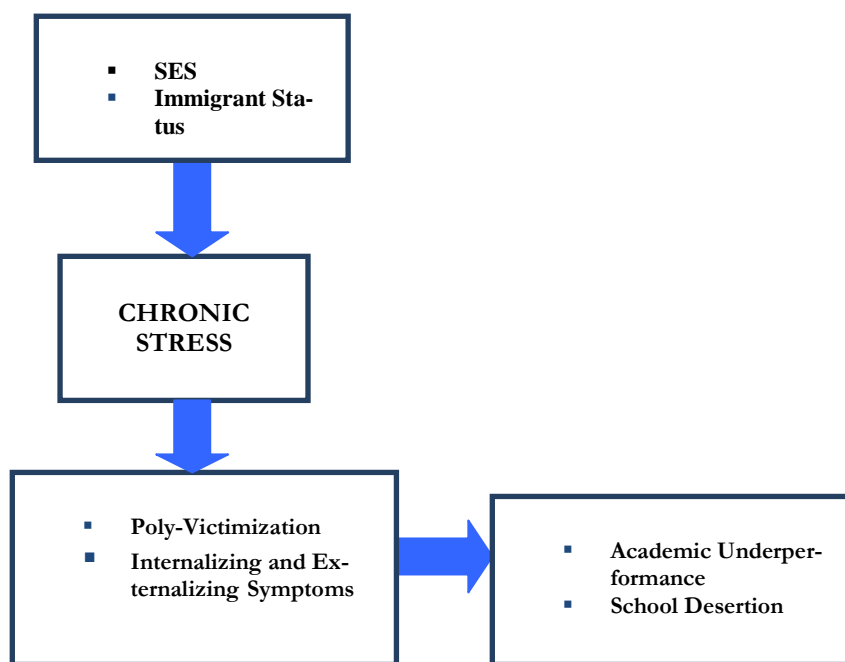
### *The status of immigrant*

Low SES individuals migrate to improve their lives and often bring their families along. Many arrive to a new country taking serious risks and overcoming countless adversities. They arrive full of expectations and eager to work hard, frequently in jobs that the native-born does not want, and start a new life (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Traditionally, the United States has been and continue to be a favorite target country for immigrants, many from Latin America (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). More recently, Spain has become a popular country for immigration producing massive arrivals of immigrants in a relatively short period of time. For Latin Americans, cultural roots, language, and religion, plus the job opportunities during the bonanza years made Spain very appealing (Sánchez-Alonso, 2011). Latino and non-Latino immigrants have settled in all parts of the country mainly in Cataluña (22.93%), Madrid (17.07%) and Andalucía (12.88%) (Ministry of Employment and Social Security, 2013). Many high skill professionals like doctors and nurses were recruited among these immigrants, but much more unskilled workers were hired and they are the ones whose situation we want to address.

Spain has a diverse Latino population coming from different countries, mainly from South America (Martinez-Brawely & Gualda, 2011). Latino immigrants represent the largest immigrant group with five major representations: Ecuadorians (8.96%), Colombians (5.43%), Bolivians (5.41%), Peruvians (3.12%) and Argentinians (1.88%). These numbers may be higher due to the fact that many immigrants were granted the Spanish nationality and are not considered immigrants anymore (Ministry of Employment and Social Security, 2013).

However, for some individuals the status of immigrant represent a risk because factors like socioeconomic backgrounds and acculturation generate high levels of stress and anxiety threatening their psychological stability (see Fig. 1 below) (Beehler, Birman, & Campbell, 2012; Pumariega, Rothe, & Pumariega, 2005). Many struggle with difficulties that were already present in the country of origin, for example, violence, social inequality, and poor education, and the new ones from the host country like acculturation, plus the lack of family and social networks (Glick & Clark, 2012). Even

after having a child born in the host country the acculturation process remains difficult and stressful (Dettlaff & Johnson, 2011). Differences in culture and ethnicity, in addition to financial constraints exert too much stress on the family and may give rise to victimization at home (Maiter, Stalker, & Alaggia, 2009).



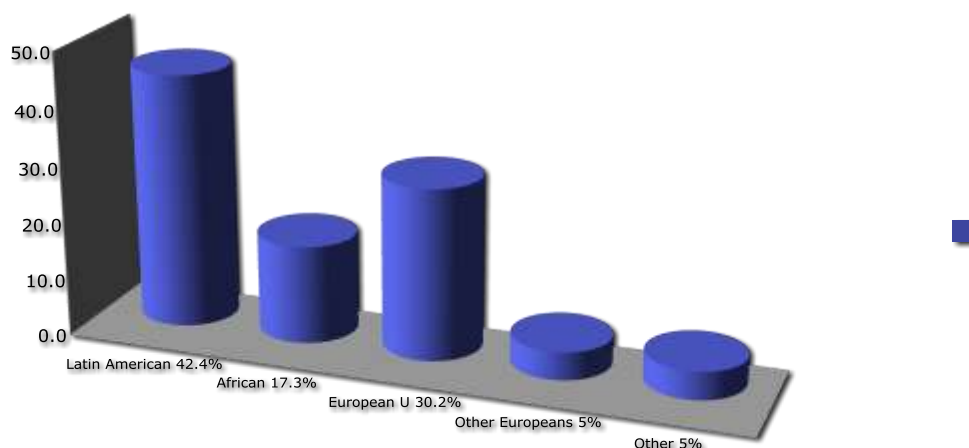
**Figure 1. The status of immigrant and SES generate chronic stress and negative outcomes.**

Some male immigrants may encounter more difficulties in the acculturation process if they have distorted beliefs about manhood related to, for example, alcohol consumption or gender differences in society, beliefs that are more rejected and penalized in the host country (Erez, 2000; Hancock & Siu, 2009). In the case of immigrant women, many tend to be too dependent on their partners, may not understand immigration laws, count on less social networks, and experience more isolation making them more vulnerable than immigrant men (Davis & Erez, 1998; Erez, 2000; Hancock & Siu, 2009; Raj & Silverman, 2002). Sadly, many Latinas in the United States and Spain live in domestically violent homes (Erez, 2000; Hancock & Siu, 2009; Fernández-Montalvo, Echauri, Martínez, & Azcárate, 2011) where children become direct victims of that violence (Maiter, Stalker, & Alaggia, 2009).

## Main Considerations

### *Prevalence of gender violence and child maltreatment among Latino immigrants*

Emerging research reveals that gender violence tends to be more prevalent among women from low socioeconomic backgrounds, who, as in the case of low-income Latina immigrants, typically hold low paying jobs, experience more unemployment, live in overcrowded and unhealthy homes, and in impoverished and conflictive neighborhoods (Dominguez & Menjibar, 2014; Jewkes, 2002). Low-income immigrant women also lack social and family networks, fear deportation, and experience problems understanding the laws of the host country, the kind of disadvantages that make them and their offspring more dependent of the family head and more vulnerable as well (Erez, 2000; Fernández-Montalvo, Echauri, Martínez, & Azcárate, 2011; Hancock & Siu, 2009; Raj & Silverman, 2002). Statistics in Spain reveals an overrepresentation of immigrants, particularly, Latinos in gender violence cases (see Fig. 2 below).



**Figure 2. Immigrant aggressors between the years 2003 and 2009.**  
Source: Fundación Directa

Similarly, immigrants' child maltreatment cases are also overrepresented. The data that we found revealed six children murdered in 2013 and one in May 2014 in the context of interpartner (IPV, Fundación Directa, n.d.). Meanwhile, the Observatorio de la Infancia (2011)



[Childhood Observatory] reported that 88.9% Spanish children and 11.5% immigrant children suffered maltreatment, and biological mothers stand out as the primary aggressors (46.4%) followed by their biological fathers (35.7%). Although most cases of maltreatment reported belong to native-born victims, it seems most pervasive among immigrants 9.26% than among the native-born 3.44%. Again, among all immigrants, Latinos in child maltreatment cases stand out (Ministry of Health Social Policy & Equality, 2011).

### *Co-occurrence of IPV and child maltreatment*

All too often, children living in domestically violent environments become innocent victims that suffer, witness, and learn to see this as an inevitable part of their lives, with devastating consequences for their development. Previous studies did not find a connection between IPV and child maltreatment (Eddleson, 2004; Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999), until the 1980s, when reviewing data from Child Protective Services that a link between IPV and maltreatment was found, including evidence of families with multiple referrals to the Child Protective Services (Hazen, Connelly, Kelleher, Landsverk, & Barth, 2004).

Hamby, Finkelhor, Turner, and Ormrod (2010) asserted that the overlapping of IPV and child maltreatment is a frequent phenomenon with a twofold harmful effect, first, the child suffers physical and psychological abuse and second, experiences the additional impact of witnessing the aggression of a parent. To complicate matters further, many children after the intervention have the extra burden of being placed in foster care or of witnessing the incarceration of a parent (Burgess & Phifer, 2013). Hamby et al. (2010) reported that children who witness IPV are also more likely to suffer more lesions requiring medical assistance and police involvement during their parents' brawls. Hamby et al.'s (2010) findings seemed to confirm previous studies suggesting that witnessing violence at home increases three to nine times a child's risk to suffer victimization in more than one context and by more than one aggressor, a phenomenon called poly-victimization (Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2007). It becomes increasingly clear the dire effects of parents' violence on children, producing what some authors call a "victim schema" that leave them vulnerable, and cognitive and socially incompetent in such a way that incite others to abuse them as in the case of bully victims (Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, & Holt, 2009, p. 317; Perry, Hodges, & Egan, 2001, p. 87).

### *Reenactment of IPV and child maltreatment*

A growing body of research has supported the notion that some individuals who witness IPV in childhood, reenact IPV either as victims or as perpetrators in adulthood (Dube, Anda, Fellitti, Edwards, & Williamson, 2002; Hamby & Grych, 2013). Similarly, there is evidence suggesting that some abusive parents were also maltreated children leading to an intergenerational transmission of family violence (Kempe, Silverman, Steele, Droegemueller, & Silver, 1984; McKinney, Caetano, Ramisetty-Mikler, & Nelson, 2009). Whereas other reviews contradict these findings (Cicchetti & Aber, 1980; Zygler & Hall, 1989), further studies supported this notion of intergenerational transmission of violence (Fritz, Slep, & O'leary, 2012; Heyman & Slep, 2002).

### *IPV and child maltreatment in the context of immigration*

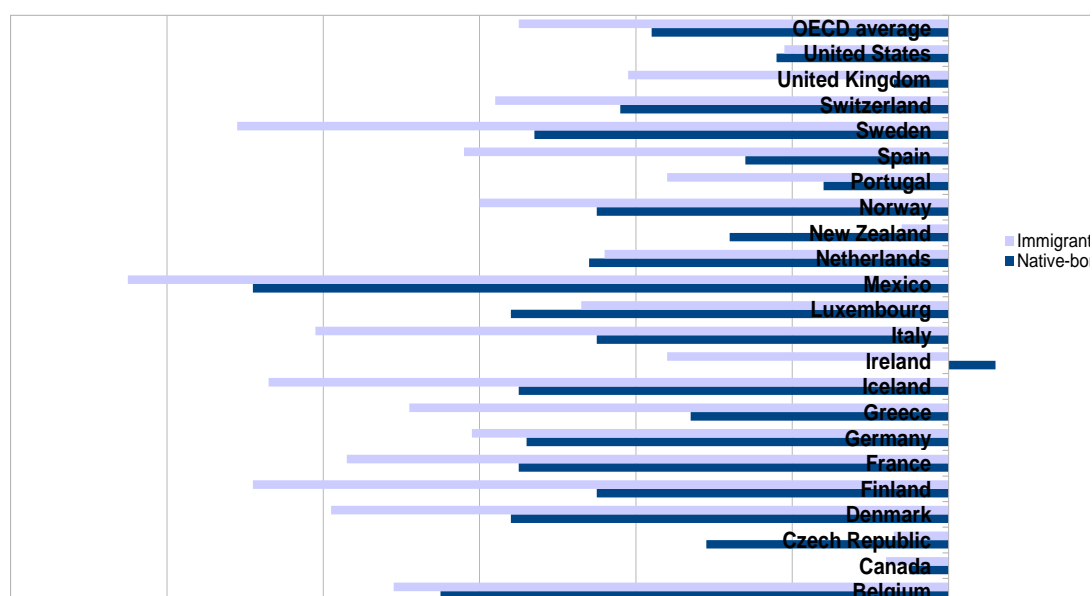
For many low-income immigrant children, life in a new country can be problematic because at early ages they face several adversities that started before, during, and after immigration (Guarnaccia & López, 1998) predisposing to depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD, Pumariega, Rothe, & Pumariega, 2005). Alcántara, Casement, and Lewis-Fernández (2012) went further and proposes the existence of a conditional risk for PTSD in Latinos including onset and severity, but these studies are far from conclusive. In any case, maltreated and neglected children experience significant risk for PTSD because the dramatic experiences they endure have cumulative effects that increase vulnerability and produce long-lasting physical and psychological conditions that compromise academic, social and work competence that put them at risk of social exclusion (Danese & McEwen, 2012; Masten, Desjardins, McCormick, Kuo, & Long, 2010).

Despite that both immigrants and non-immigrants from disadvantageous environments have to face similar risks and adversities, the status of immigrant underlies additional vulnerabilities (Pumariega et al., 2005). It is worth mentioning that access to certain government services in Spain, unthinkable for many immigrants in their own countries might have ameliorating and compensatory effects. For example, free and full medical coverage, free K-12 education, social aid programs exclusively created for immigrants; safer neighborhoods, efficient police forces and stricter laws protecting minors, women and minorities, and the Latinos' additional advantage of sharing the same language and Spanish roots. However, despite all this, it raises some concerns the fact that similar or even better government services are enjoyed by immigrants in other countries of the European Union, and yet

their rates of domestic violence, educational achievement and social integration remain problematic.

Incidentally, immigrant roots may play a protective role for some immigrants, for example, studies in the United States have found that many first generation Latino immigrants display a series of family and developmental assests like lower divorce rates, higher in-group loyalty, lower mental health issues, and less incidence of substance use, in addition to strong social competence and self-regulation skills, and academic competence (Fuller & García-Coll, 2010). These assests gave rise in the United States to the term *immigrant paradox*.

In general, better educated immigrants with more financial resources or with families already established in the receiving country, experience easier transition and integration processes. However, evidence worldwide suggests a tendency for low-income immigrants to academically perform worse than native-born students (Martin, Liem, Gregory, Mok, & Xu, 2012; Ranvid, 2005; Vaquera & Kao, 2012). According to findings from PISA 2012 (OECD Indicators of Immigrant Integration, 2012), immigrant students scored 54 points less in reading skills than the native-born students (see Fig. 3 below).



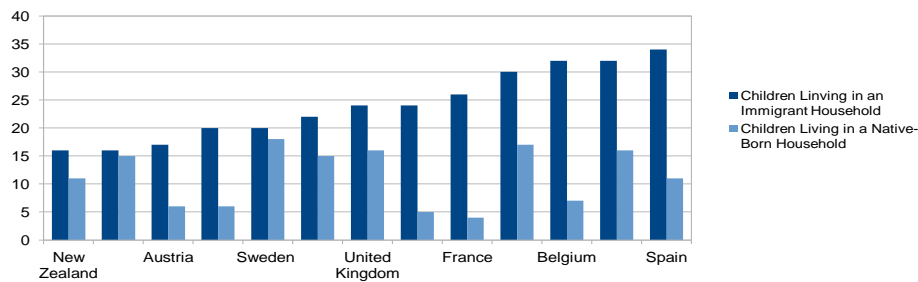
**Figure 3. Differences in reading scores between immigrants and native-born students, year 2009.**  
**Source: OECD Indicators of Immigrant Integration, 2012.**

Although reading score differences have been reduced in countries like Czech Republic, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Switzerland, United States and United Kingdom, the opposite is true for Spain, Italy and Portugal (OECD Indicators of Immigrants Integration, 2012). It is necessary to indicate that since PISA does not identify immigrants' nationalities, we ignore the exact performance of the nationals from each country, and results from competent immigrant students may be diluted with the final scores. With this in mind, Zinovyeva et al. (2008) analyzed PISA results of immigrant students taking into account the language spoken at home. Based on this aspect, they were able to determine that among immigrant students, Latinos had the lowest results despite their language advantage.

This considerable gap in performance between the immigrant and the native-born students, particularly, Latinos, in some provinces of Spain broadens more than 50% of the standard deviations of the scores (Etxeberria & Elosegui, 2010; Fernández-Enguita, Mena & Riviera, 2010; Vaquera & Kao, 2012; Zinovyeva et al., 2008). In line with these findings another study indicated that in Spain as in most countries of the OECD, schools with large concentrations of immigrants have the worst performance, suggesting that in these schools the whole student body gets affected (Cebolla-Boado & Garrido-Medina, 2008). Although there tend to be some exceptions among female students and Asian students, in general, there is a substantial performance gap between immigrants and native-born students (PISA in Focus, 2012), and more so among Latino immigrant students who are the largest subgroup in Spain.

### **Academic and Work Competence**

Many Latino immigrant students belong to low-income families with lower levels of education (Blom & Severiens, 2008) (see Fig. 4 below), less external support and more susceptibility to chronic stress (Beehler, Birman, & Campbell, 2012; Martin, Liem, Mok, & Xu, 2012). Considered a multidimensional phenomenon, social inequality endangers the individuals' physical and mental health (Alley et al., 2006; Chen, Cohen, & Miller, 2010; D'Angiulli, Lipina, & Olesinska, 2012; Evans & Kim, 2013), predisposing to learned helplessness (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978) and hopelessness (Bolland, 2003), increasing vulnerability and impeding the development of resilience (Chen, Cohen, & Miller, 2010; Werner & Smith, 1992).



**Figure 4. Social inequality predominates among immigrant households in 2008.**

**Source: Indicators of Immigrant Integration OECD 2012.**

Some authors posit that a family's SES is so significant that it predicts academic achievement (Masten, Desjardins, McCormick, Chun-Kuo, & Long, 2010; Stevens, Lauinger, & Neville, 2009) as though poor academic achievement were intergenerationally embedded in lower-income families (Stevens, Lauinger, & Neville, 2009). Further, the lack of academic competence seems to have serious implications on the individual's capacity to effectively search, find, and keep jobs (Masten et al., 2010). Competence, developed during childhood is implemented later in the jobsite but maltreatment seems to impair competence and earning capacity, an effect more frequently observed in males than in females (Caspi, Wright, Moffit, & Silva, 1998; Duncan, 2012; Hoff, 2003; Masten et al., 2010; Pérez and Widom, 1994; Sampson, Sharkey, & Raudemnbush, 2007; Zielinsky, 2009).

The link between social inequality and poor academic performance is of major concern. Evidence is building that social inequality impacts on the limbic system with long-lasting effects on memory and attention (D'Angiulli, Herdman, Stapells, & Hertzman, 2008; D'Angiulli, Lipina et al., 2012; D'Angiulli, Weinberg, Grunau, Hertzman, & Grebenkov, 2008; McEwen & Gianaros, 2010; Schibili & D'Angiulli, 2011; Stevens & Bavelier, 2012) and producing significant deficits in executive functions, that is, cognitive skills in the pre-frontal cortex responsible for the control and regulation of our abilities and behaviors (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010). Severe stress produces neuroendocrine imbalances that fixes traumatic experiences in the amygdala and compromises memory in the hippocampus (Cicchetti, Rogosh, Gunnar et al., 2010; Cicchetti, Rogosh, Howe, & Toth, 2010; Teicher, Anderson, & Polcari, 2012; Tottenham, & Sheridan, 2009) hampering attention and learning (Schibli & D'Angiulli, 2011). Under these circumstances some children experience serious

academic and social competence deficits, can not finish school nor find steady jobs and become at risk of social exclusion, a prominent risk for immigrants.

## **Theory of Stress**

As a way to expand analysis on the implications of severe stress on cognitive functions and learning, the authors explain the *Cognitive Activation Theory of Stress*. This theory establishes that previous experiences shape the brain that tends to react to stress according to how it learned in the past. For example, if during childhood individuals learned to cope with stress properly, they develop a positive expectancy outcome and before stressful events react accordingly (Ursin & Eriksen, 2004). The opposite is also true, not learning effective coping skills leads to the acquisition of a negative expectancy outcome (Ursin & Eriksen, 2004).

Delahanty, Nugent, Christopher, & Walsh (2005) explained that under stress, corticotrophin releasing hormones are secreted by the hypothalamus stimulating the pituitary gland, which in turn produces adrenocorticotrophic hormones activating the adrenal glands, and these glands produce cortisol and adrenaline, which travel through the bloodstream. This adaptive mechanism is known as the hypothalamus, pituitary, adrenal (HPA) axis. Exposure to chronic stress is associated with higher levels of cortisol and smaller hippocampal volume that hinder neural network (Danese & McEwen, 2012; Rao et al., 2010; Staff et al., 2012). Severe stress hampers dendritic branching and induces changes in the metabolic process and alterations in the immune response bringing about vulnerability and psychopathology (Cicchetti & Rogosh, 2007; McEwen, 2003) with a negative impact on learning (Hackman & Farah, 2009; Hackman, Farah, & Meaney, 2010). Prolonged and severe stress adversely affects the limbic system leaving sequelae that impair cognition, attention capacity, behavior, and general health (Danese & McEwen, 2012; D'Angiulli, Lipina et al., 2012; D'Angiulli, Van Roon et al., 2012; Frodl & O'Keane, 2013; Rogosh, Dackis, & Cicchetti, 2011; Sapolsky, 1994; Staff et al., 2012).

## **Lack of Selective Attention Interferes with Learning**

Selective attention is defined as the capacity to pay attention to relevant information without the distraction of irrelevant information, and the lack of selective attention is more

apparent in low-SES children (D'Angiulli, Herdman et al., 2008; D'Angiulli, Weinberg et al., 2008; Schibli & D'Angiulli, 2011; Stevens et al., 2009). According to Schibli and D'Angiulli (2011), the increased strains experienced under conditions of social inequality may induce parents to apply harsher disciplinary actions that may generate physical and emotional abuse. As a consequence, traumatic experiences become more “salient” impeding students’ attention to focus on academic relevant information (Schibli & D'Angiulli, 2011, p. 3).

Some authors contend that a better understanding of the complexity of the neural mechanism of attention would facilitate prompt interventions and the development of appropriate strategies to tackle children’s attention deficits (Stevens et al., 2009). In that sense, developmental neuroscientists performed studies with children from different SES backgrounds using non-invasive technique called event-related-potentials (ERPs), and some also included salivary cortisol tests to understand the mechanism of attention. ERPs measures psychophysiological functions during cognitive tasks that involve visual or auditory stimulus (Lagopoulos, 2007). For example, Shackman, Shackman, and Pollak (2007) observed that maltreated children were more distracted and displayed less selective attention than the non-maltreated ones.

In another study, findings from D'Angiulli, Herdman et al. (2008) suggested that children from lower SES groups displayed less selective attention than children from higher SES groups. Similarly, D'Angiulli, Weinberg et al. (2008) found that children from lower SES environments displayed more deficits in attention and elevated cortisol levels than their counterparts. Just in a similar way, Stevens et al. (2009) determined that children from lower SES environments displayed less selective attention. Finally, D'Angiulli, Van Roon et al. (2012), in a more recent study, confirmed differences in attention and overall cortisol levels between the lower and the higher SES groups. A possible explanation that may account for these differences was that children from the lower SES group applied some sort of adjustment ability joined to compensatory resources learned as a result of living in disadvantageous, threatening and unpredictable environments (D'Angiulli, Van Roon et al., 2012).

Although the studies utilized small samples, yielded a clear insight into the consequences of children’s dramatic experiences that produce neurobiological alterations in the mechanism of attention and learning with implications for academic functioning. Together, these studies reveal a significant relevance to the improvement of attentional skills that seem

consistent with our research on the deleterious effects of chronic stress typical of children living in disadvantageous environments. These findings also highlight the possibility to change years of attention deficits and poor academic outcomes that seem more common among low-income immigrant students in general, and Latino immigrants living in Spain in particular.

## **Additional Risks**

### *Poly-Victimization and Re-Victimization*

Relatively recently, research demonstrated that many children who suffered one type of victimization had in reality experienced additional forms of victimization occurring in different contexts, for example, maltreatment and sexual abuse at home, bullying at school, and more bullying and violence in the neighborhood (Finkelhor, 2008; Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2007; Herrenkohl & Herrenkohl, 2007). Poly-victimization is more distressful and complex than one single form of victimization because it is cumulative, enhances vulnerability and prevents the development of resilience leaving children and adolescents fewer areas to feel safe (Finkelhor, Turner, Hamby, & Ormrod, 2011; Gustafsson, Nilson, & Svedin, 2009; Turner, Finkelhor, & Ormrod, 2010). Further, poly-victims experience more internalizing and externalizing symptoms generating more negative outcomes as dramatic and harmful as re-victimization in adulthood (Cavanaugh et al., 2011; Desai, Arias, Thompson, & Basile, 2002; Whiting, Simmons, Havens, Smith, & Oka, 2009; Widom, 1989) that according to Widom, Czaja, and Dutton (2008) it might take the form of (a) aggression from partners or non-partners, (b) sexual assaults, (c) kidnapping, (d) stalking, (e) a next of kin murdered or a friend committing suicide. Unfortunately, a history of child maltreatment and neglect seems predictive of worse outcomes over the life course (Desai et al., 2002; Widom et al., 2008).

## **Effective Response to Cultural Diversity**

Given the impact of multiple victimization on individuals, families, communities, and society, schools should represent safe and supportive environments for victimized children and youth. Effective schools foster bonding, promote resilience and enhance achievement (Ristuccia, 2013). Further, trauma sensitive schools facilitate learning of many victimized stu-



dents (Ristuccia, 2013). Based on the Trauma Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI) Ristuccia (2013) asserts that trauma sensitive schools:

1. Create social, emotional, physical and safe environments.
2. Enhance awareness and understanding of the role of trauma on learning and behavior.
3. Promote team-work among school staff when dealing with students needs.
4. Create awareness of the importance of students' self-regulation, social and academic competence, and general health.
5. Foster school bonding.
6. Evolve and adapt to the students' new challenges and needs.
7. Keep parents and community working together with the school.

Among the school professionals, school psychologists are central in the promotion of healthy academic environments. As they are trained in consultation and assessment and also, in the design, evaluation, and utilization of programs become instrumental in the successful implementation and sustainability of evidence-based interventions (Forman, Olin, Hoagwood, Crow, & Saka, 2009). School psychologists have the capacity to influence adults' attitudes and resistance to change when change is necessary to improve the children's lives. Also, standing in a position different from others enjoy a broader perspective to better understand the school, teachers, diverse students and families bringing about opportunities for academic, social, behavioral and emotional success (Beaver, 2011).

Ideally, school psychologists take into account students' bio-ecological aspects (Ungar, 2008, 2011) and focus on prevention before learning, social, or behavioral issues arise (Biglan, Mrazek, Carnine, & Fly, 2003; Garaigordobil, 2009; Merrel, Ervin, & Peacock, 2012). According to Merrel et al. (2012), a prevention approach helps to fulfill the needs of every student and it is based on three universal interventions: (a) primary prevention, (b) secondary prevention, and (c) tertiary prevention. Primary prevention seeks to enhance learning and reduce the risk of social or behavioral issues, secondary prevention tackles academic and/or social-behavioral issues, and tertiary prevention for more critical conditions (Merrel et al., 2012).

By implementing a prevention model school psychologists have the opportunity to make staff and teachers aware of students' signals of problematic behaviors (Merrel et al., 2012). The early identification and referral for evaluation and intervention has the potential to

stop victimization, reduce social and behavioral problems, and improve competence resulting in better prognosis (Berkowitz, Stover, & Marans, 2011).

#### *Assessment of poly-victimization*

The Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire 2<sup>nd</sup> Revision (JVQ R-2) from Hamby, Finkelhor, Turner, & Kracke (2011) is an instrument that measures victimization in multiple areas. The instrument combines modern and effective techniques with items carefully designed and continuously improved, meeting the validity and reliability requirements that help to establish the quality of the instrument (Hamby et al., 2011). The JVQ-R2 consists of short or long versions in the form of interviews or self-reports to assess victimization. The instrument can be downloaded free of cost for research or clinical purposes but it does require users to acknowledge the source. It provides guidelines for scoring and is flexible enough to apply other types of scoring or even modify or include new items depending on the objectives of the study (Radford, Corral, Bradley, & Fisher, 2013).

The instrument identifies children and adolescents' histories of trauma in five areas of victimization: 1) conventional crime, 2) maltreatment, 3) bullying by peers and siblings, 4) sexual victimization, and 5) witnessing violence against others. The JVQ-R2 is used in interventions for bullying, child maltreatment, neglect, interparental violence, sibling assault, dating violence, and sexual abuse. Victimization has a strong impact on students' mental and physical health, and it must be detected and stopped.

#### **Supporting Low-Income Immigrant Students in Spain**

When we see the high rates of IPV and child maltreatment, and the low rates of educational achievement among low-income immigrant Latino students in Spain, we conclude that there exists a considerable risk for this subgroup. If something is not done, their future in the Spanish's society seems bleak. It seems evident that the central problem they have is not acculturation, the central problem is SES. Higher income immigrants are able to successfully overcome different obstacles and adversities, but the constraints that low-income individuals have to face are huge and permeate every aspect of their lives. Social inequality represents an overwhelming experience for any human being. Lower SES individuals develop vulnerabilities caused by years of living in disadvantageous environments that have generated significant neurobiological

changes, impeding competence across several domains, namely, familial, social, educational, and economical.

On the other hand, school systems seem to have a strong impact on a country's economic growth (Dronkers, 2010; Hanushek & Woessmann, 2012). Moreover, school system differences among countries may have serious implications for the level of academic competence acquired by low-income individuals who later decide to move to another country. School systems differences can limit parents' capacities to help their children with school tasks, parents who frequently, can not afford private classes either, leaving children disengaged, unmotivated and adrift.

To compensate this lack, the school ethos is fundamental. The school should provide a safe, caring and engaging environment that promotes cognitive stimulation, parental involvement, homework assistance, and prompt interventions when needed. Otherwise, the achievement gap between immigrant students and the native-born will continue widening and even affecting the overall performance of the entire school.

## **Conclusion**

Immigrants in general and school-age immigrants in particular face burdens and challenges that leave them in a vulnerable position because their susceptibility to victimization has serious implications on their physical and mental health, and academic competence. A mounting body of studies indicating the Latinos' high prevalence of victimization and low school engagement raises concerns about their future. Unfortunately, the scarcity of information on rates of poly-victimization among immigrants in Spain makes difficult the development and implementation of effective policies to prevent and treat maltreatment and other forms of victimization.

The cumulative effects of poly-victimization, particularly when it is multiple, increase vulnerability leaving a constellation of long-lasting psychopathologies that impact academic and work competence and put individuals at risk of social exclusion. Moreover, in the middle of a severe recession, with declining opportunities, unprecedented unemployment, and high rates of academic failure we wonder about the life prospects of those who failed school, particularly, immigrants.

The authors are of the opinion that important risk factors like the status of immigrant and social ranking are correlates and predictors of family conflict and turmoil and as such, core issues responsible for the immigrant's reduced rates of academic achievement. We think that the immigration status and SES tend to be overlooked or not properly addressed and thus we make the following suggestions:

1. Expand analysis on immigrant students supported by an approach that takes into consideration the interaction of important aspects like culture, neighborhood, friends, and quality of home environments (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Ungar, 2008, 2011).
2. Enhance the Spain's *unified registry of maltreatment* so as to obtain current and larger official statistics showing maltreatment trends among immigrant and non-immigrant children (Ministry of Health, Social Policy and Equality, 2013).
3. Enforce school mandatory screening procedures aimed at the assessment of poly-victimization among at-risk students and the implementation of evidence-based intervention programs.
4. Promote effective programs to fight and prevent social inequality and exclusion.

The authors concluded that families cognizant of their children's education as a long-term investment and who see the need to join efforts with schools, promote mental health and foster school bonding increasing the chances for their children's academic success.

Finally, this theory-oriented paper highlights the need to understand and support immigrant students in general and Latino immigrants in particular. The hypothesis stated here clearly needs to be shaped and enhanced by more studies. Due to its limitations, the authors encourage investigation and expansion of scholarship in the field, creating more awareness that contributes to the development of better educational policies and frameworks designed to create the right conditions for learning, preventing any form of victimization, and ultimately closing the immigrants' educational achievement gap.

Our students have to grow feeling safe, protected, happy and competent in a world that they have not built. They deserve a brighter future for themselves and for the future generations. We owe them that.

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