Research Summary:
An Evidence-Based Leadership Intervention for Latina Survivors of Domestic Violence

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Introduction: The Líderes program

The Líderes program was created in 2003 in response to Latinas in the Twin Cities of MN asking for leadership opportunities in their communities. In 2006, Casa de Esperanza developed a curriculum for the Líderes and in 2011 it was adopted by Caminar Latino in Atlanta, GA and adapted for women survivors of domestic violence. The Líderes program is a peer model that aims to tap into the abilities of community individuals to share critical information and resources, as well as build community and promote healthy relationships with other community members. Research indicates that the peer leadership model has been effective in promoting positive change in attitudes, beliefs and behaviors around the targeted issue, as well as increasing access to resources and knowledge of the topic for participants (Swider, 2002). In fact, one study utilizing qualitative methods, noted positively themed consequences for both the peers and the women who attended the presentations (Kelly, Lesser, Peralez-Dieckmann, & Castilla, 2007). Although many studies have documented the effectiveness of the peer model across many areas including health outcomes and leadership, little research has documented the effectiveness of the model with survivors of domestic violence. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to document the effectiveness of the program for Latina survivors of domestic violence by studying the curriculum that was developed for Latinas by Latinas.
Nine women participated in the intervention. Participants’ average age was 36 years and their average years of completed education was 10.6.

Methods

An embedded mixed methods design was utilized for this study. It involved collecting qualitative and quantitative data before and during the intervention phases of the study. An embedded design is a mixed methods design where one data set provides a supportive, secondary role in a study based primarily on the other data type (Creswell & Clark, 2007). In this case, although quantitative data are the primary data type, qualitative data were collected at the onset of the project to help shape the Líderes intervention (during the adaptation process; which is not the focus of this study and is documented elsewhere). During the intervention and at follow-up, qualitative data were collected using participant journals (written accounts) to understand the participants’ experiences during and after the intervention.

Description of Participants

Nine women participated in the intervention. Participants’ average age was 36 years and their average years of completed education was 10.6. All of the participants were born outside of the United States. Four Latin American countries were represented: Colombia (1), El Salvador (1), Honduras (1) and Mexico (6). All but one participant had children, with an average of two children per participant. All participants self-identified as survivors of intimate partner violence. Five of the participants were divorced or separated, two were married, one lived with her partner and one was single/never married. On average, participants attended Caminar Latino for 3.6 years, with the shortest attendance time being six months and the longest being 11 years. At the time of the intervention, three participants regularly attended the Caminar Latino weekly support groups.
**Procedures**

Before beginning data collection, the researchers submitted a protocol to the Georgia State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure that ethical standards would be upheld. In addition, a consent form was created in English, and translated into Spanish to ensure participants’ understanding of their rights. The consent form was submitted to and approved by GSU’s IRB.

Caminar Latino chose one staff member to be a co-facilitator of the intervention along with the principle investigator of this project. These individuals and the women advocates at Caminar Latino were responsible for selecting the women who participated in the program. The advocates and Caminar Latino staff have over 20 years of experience working with immigrant Latina survivors and families and have a rich understanding of the Latino community culture in Atlanta, as well as knowing the women participants very well.

Selection criteria in past research has included such things as high school education and bilingual status (O’Brien, Squires, Bixby, & Larson, 2009). However, for the purpose of this study, program participants were not asked to meet this type of criteria. In fact, Casa de Esperanza provided a guide for establishing selection criteria in their Líderes curriculum, including interest in doing community work. The Caminar Latino women advocates and staff followed this guide when establishing participant criteria. Using this guide, Caminar Latino staff met and reviewed a list of women participants who had sought services over the past year or who were currently attending Caminar Latino’s support groups. Caminar Latino offers two open support groups for survivors of intimate partner violence. The first support group offers services for women who are in active crisis or have recently left crisis situations. The second group offers support for women who have attended Caminar Latino for a longer period of time. Women in this group have attended Caminar Latino anywhere from fifteen sessions to over ten years. Caminar Latino staff decided to recruit participants from the second support group, as they would most likely be out of crisis situations.
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Once IRB approval was obtained, the designated Caminar Latino staff person contacted the selected participants (described above), explained the study to them and invited them to participate. When the participants expressed interest, a meeting was set up with a trained Spanish-speaking undergraduate research assistant at a convenient time and location for the participant. The undergraduate research assistant met with each participant and reviewed the consent form, reading each consent form with the participant, answering any questions and subsequently registering the participant for the study.

Once the consent form was signed, participants were randomly assigned to be contacted by the research assistant one, four, or seven consecutive weeks prior to the intervention. All participants filled out the first questionnaires in person with the research assistant in order to familiarize the participants with the survey. Participants who were contacted up to seven weeks before the program began were given an envelope with a research number as well as note cards, which had the response scales for each measure. The participants used the contents of the envelope when they were contacted by telephone to complete the surveys. If the participant did not attend Caminar Latino’s regular support group, the subsequent baseline questionnaires were collected over the phone every week at a time convenient for the participant. For the participants who were attending regular Caminar Latino support groups, their baseline data were collected after the Wednesday evenings support group meetings at Caminar Latino.

During the intervention (described below) self-report data and the facilitator ratings were collected after each weekly intervention session. Post-intervention data were collected every week for three weeks after the participant graduation ceremony and subsequent meetings, including the three-month follow up.

Qualitative data were collected utilizing participant journals. Participants were given the option to voice record their journals; however, all participants chose to hand-write their journal entries. Participants were asked to journal their thoughts and feelings regarding their experiences of the intervention by writing down their entries in a spiral bound notebook. They were reminded on a weekly basis to write in their journals.
Training/Intervention

The implementation of the adapted Líderes training took place over a 5-week period (originally planned as a four week course but one session had to be split into two due to weather conditions that forced the evacuation of the building) at Caminar Latino’s offices, a location that was most convenient for the program participants. Líderes met weekly as a group for approximately four hours to learn the curriculum materials (e.g., presentation and public speaking skills, as well as content knowledge about the IPV workshop) and practice presentation techniques. The training was provided by two Spanish-speaking facilitators (the principal investigator and an advocate from Caminar Latino) and followed the adapted Líderes curriculum. The participants were provided food and free childcare during the training. They were also provided with incentives for completing the research surveys through the form of gift certificates to Walmart over the course of 15 weeks, which totaled $65.

Measures

Based on the logic model developed for the program and the self-empowerment framework, measures were chosen and adapted for the purposes of this study. The measures included leadership development measures (e.g., knowledge of leadership, knowledge of leadership competencies, sense of leadership competence, leadership emergence, and leadership self efficacy) and a facilitator rating was utilized to measure behavioral change (e.g., leadership skills as displayed in the group setting).

The qualitative data for this study consisted of participants’ journal entries. The participants were given spiral notebooks and writing utensils at the beginning of the Líderes program. The participants were asked to write about their thoughts and feelings that describe their experiences as growing leaders while going through the program and beyond.
Results

Quantitative Data

For this study, a traditional visual inspection technique was utilized for all variables of interest.

Knowledge of Leadership

Self reported knowledge of leadership during baseline, intervention, post intervention and three-month follow up are displayed in Figure 1. Pseudonyms are used to identify participants.

During the intervention phase, self-reported means of knowledge of leadership indicated drastic improvement in half of the participants (Consuela, Graciela, Rosa, and Lourdes). In addition, six of the participants’ post intervention and three-month follow up averages remained markedly above their original baseline levels (Consuela, Graciela, Rosa, Lourdes, Mireya, and Estella). The replication of increased knowledge of leadership associated with the presentation of the intervention across many participants provides evidence for the intervention. Although it would be beneficial to see more drastic increases in knowledge gains for participants Lupita, Itzel and Mireya, this information indicates that individuals who began the intervention with pre-existing knowledge of leadership only slightly benefited from the intervention in their knowledge of leadership. Nevertheless, reviewing the means more closely across phases indicates that these participants did benefit from the intervention.
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Figure 1. Knowledge of Leadership Graph
Knowledge of Leadership Competencies

As displayed in Figure 2, improvement of knowledge of competencies following the introduction of the intervention was seen in all but two of the participants (Lupita & Mireya). In addition, all but two of the participants’ post intervention and three-month follow up averages remained markedly above their original baseline levels.

Overall, these results generally support the effectiveness of this intervention in improving the participants’ knowledge of leadership competencies, which includes knowledge of the organization in addition to increasing their understanding of their roles as community leaders.
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Figure 2. Knowledge of Leadership Competencies Graph
Figure 3. Sense of Leadership Competencies Graph
Of note, one point that can be concluded from the intervention is that, although it may not have significantly changed these variables, it did not decrease participants’ sense of community or view of empowerment within the organization.

Sense of Community & Empowering Organizational Characteristics

As displayed in Figures 4 & 5 sense of community and view of empowering characteristics of the organization did not significantly change with the introduction of the intervention. As one can see, most participants’ baselines levels for view of empowering characteristics (Figure 5) were relatively high, leaving little or no room for change. For example, Consuela’s ratings were at 5 (the maximum level) at baseline and continued there throughout the intervention and follow up periods. Additionally, for sense of community (Figure 4), most participants’ baselines means were relatively high with very little room for improvement during the intervention phase. Of note, one point that can be concluded from the intervention is that, although it may not have significantly changed these variables, it did not decrease participants’ sense of community or view of empowerment within the organization. This is important as one can conclude that the intervention at the least did not inversely impact participants’ already high sense of community and positive view of the organization.
Figure 4. Sense of Community Graph
Leadership Emergence

As displayed in Figure 6, visual analysis of data collected by one of the group facilitators revealed that participant improvement of leadership emergence following the introduction of the intervention was seen in all of the participants. In addition, according to this rating, the effect of the intervention appeared to sustain over time indicating that the participants were each displaying leadership emergence behaviors at increasing rates.
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Figure 6. Leadership Emergence Graph
Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis plan utilized a phenomenological approach as proposed by Creswell (2007) who states that a phenomenological study describes the meaning of the lived experiences of a phenomenon for several individuals. The phenomenon in this study is the experience of attending the leadership workshop (the intervention).

Following Creswell’s (2007) data analysis plan, first, the author went through the interview transcriptions and highlighted significant statements, sentences, or quotes that provided an understanding of how the participants felt about attending the leadership workshops. Next, clusters of meaning were developed from the significant statements into two meaning units or themes. In addition, two other categories were created to increase understanding of the phenomenon. These included textural descriptions or statements that described the experience of “what” happened, and structural descriptions or statements that described “how” the experience happened. Subsequently, the significant statements, themes, and textural and structural statements were combined to write a description of what the participants experienced.

The analysis was conducted in Spanish by the bilingual author. The statements were translated into English once the significant statements were identified. It was important to use language that most accurately captured the meaning of what the participants were saying in their native language and, most importantly, the essence of their experience.
Qualitative Findings

In attempting to understand the essence of the experience, significant statements were identified and grouped into meaning units. Two meaning units were identified: sense of self as leader/presenter and motivation to impact the community.

Theme 1: Sense of Self as Leader/Presenter

Three of the four women described in their journals a process of transformation in regards to their sense of leadership. In the first journal entries for each participant, the participants described difficult feelings such as nervousness, not feeling competent, and not identifying themselves as leaders. For example, one member noted the following:

_Hoy si creo que voy a renunciar porque esto siento que no es para mí; veo a todas mis compañeras seguras y animadas y yo me siento perdida._ (Today, I do think that I am going to quit because this feels like it’s not for me. I see my colleagues confident and secure and I feel lost).  
– Lourdes

This statement reflects the participant’s thoughts of wanting to quit and feelings of insecurity in her own abilities. However, in a later journal, this same participant noted a transformation in her view of herself as a leader. She noted the following:

_Hoy me pasó algo muy bueno: me sentí más segura de hacer mi presentación… Me almiré [sic] de mí misma que lo pude hacer hoy._  (Today something happened to me that was really great. I feel more confident to do a presentation. I impressed myself with what I could do today.)  
– Lourdes

These statements reflect the process of transformation for this participant who, during the first few sessions, did not feel competent in her abilities. However, as the sessions progressed, she shifted the perspective she had of herself as being more competent and able to be a leader in her community. This theme is reflected in her later journals. All of the women described a process of transformation as a key element to their experience.
Theme 2: Motivation to Impact the Community

Another theme that emerged from the data analysis was a sense of community connectedness. Although the program was difficult and anxiety provoking for many of the participants (for different reasons) they all described being motivated to continue due to their connection to the community. They described continuing with the program and motivation for developing their skills in order to give back to the community. The following prayer that one of the participants wrote in her journal captures this sense quite well:

*Diosito, Mi deceo es tener la sabiduria, el amor suficiente para escuchar, apoyar, compartir, consolar a mis semejantes…no me dejes solita señor y proverme el deceo de servir en mi comunidad te lo ruego señor en el nombre de tu hijo amado Jesus señor en tu vondad, escucha my oracion [sic]. (Dear God, my desire/hope is to have the wisdom, enough love to listen, support, share, and comfort my peers….Do not leave me alone, Lord, and provide me the desire to serve my community, I beg you sir in the name of your beloved son Jesus, hear my prayer.) – Consuela

This prayer reflects this participant’s commitment to impacting her community. Part of this participant’s experience is drawing on her spirituality as strength to help her influence her community peers. Another participant wrote in her journal the importance of using what she is learning to influence and support others in a positive manner. The focus on community involvement and obtaining skills with which they could give back seemed to be an important element for participants.

The program appears to have provided the women with a supportive environment where they felt comfortable seeking additional support and advice from the facilitators and their peers. In addition, the environment of the workshop seemed to foster a positive learning experiencing where participants learned new skills and knowledge through the activities of the program. This context allowed participants to partake in a transformation process in which they transitioned from being less confident in their leadership abilities to, by the end of the training, becoming more confident in their own sense of leadership. Interestingly, the women had a shared experience of connecting with their larger community. Sense of leadership and community connectedness were key elements of the experience for all of the women.
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Discussion

This study represents the first systematic evaluation of the Líderes program and provides important information regarding the different variables impacted by the curriculum. For the participants, most variables specific to leadership (e.g., knowledge of leadership, knowledge of leadership competencies, sense of leadership competence, and leadership emergence) were influenced by the curriculum with the exception of leadership self-efficacy. This finding adds to the existing body of literature across many fields (including public health, business, psychology and education) about the potential for interventions to influence leadership (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Hannah, Avolio, Luthans, & Harms, 2008; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004). This study also adds to the complexities of leadership research.

Implications for Practice

The study provides promising information for the dissemination of the Líderes curriculum in other groups of survivors of IPV. This is the first documented attempt of including survivors of IPV as participants in a peer leadership program. Overall, this research adds to the extensive research in the fields of leadership development as well as peer leadership. This study documents the potential that a leadership program can have for use with diverse populations, including Latina survivors of IPV. Thus, it may be beneficial to continue to carefully disseminate the Líderes program (with suggestions for adaptation) among other diverse groups of survivors considering unique cultural experiences of each group.

An important implication for other organizations implementing such a program is the importance of the environment. This study documented the importance of a supportive environment where the participants felt comfortable with sharing thoughts and engaging in self-growth. This is also an important element for researchers to include in studies of leadership development. It appears that a collaborative culture within an organization may be a prerequisite for implementing a self-empowerment model, such as the peer leadership model, which supports research within this area (Hughey, Peterson, Lowe, & Oprescu, 2008; Maton, 2008; Peterson & Hughey, 2004).
Of note, a supportive environment may be especially important for the self-growth of survivors of IPV. Research has documented the negative effects of experiencing IPV (Aldarondo, Kaufman Kantor, & Jasinski, 2002; Bonomi, Anderson, Cannon, Slesnick, & Rodriguez, 2009), which will undoubtedly impact a survivor’s ability to engage in a leadership program. However, other research has also documented the tremendous strengths within survivors who are provided the means with which to exhibit this strength (Buchbinder & Birnbaum, 2010; Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Previous research has also documented important organizational characteristics that Latina survivors of IPV have noted as key components when seeking services, such as cultural competence (Dutton, Orloff, & Hass, 2000). Thus, in order to see the strengths in survivors of IPV, organizations must move past the service-provider model where the staff are seen as the experts and create a supportive environment where personal strengths are encouraged and welcomed.
References


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National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families and Communities

Casa de Esperanza is the National Latin@ Domestic Violence Institute whose mission is to mobilize Latinas and Latin@ communities to end domestic violence. The organization’s National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families and Communities incorporates training and technical assistance, a public policy initiative in Washington, D.C., and a research center in Atlanta, GA, in an effort to advance effective responses to eliminate violence and promote healthy relationships. Casa de Esperanza also works within communities by providing advocacy, emergency shelter, a 24-hour bilingual crisis line, and opportunities for peer education. For more information, please visit www.casadeesperanza.org and www.nationallatinonetwork.org.

National Latin@ Research Center on Family and Social Change

The National Latin@ Research Center on Family and Social Change engages Latin@ community members to generate accurate, relevant, valid, and reliable research using unique and cutting-edge approaches. The research center is directed by Dr. Julia Perilla, a clinical community psychologist and Associate Professor at Georgia State University and is guided by an advisory council of nationally recognized researchers and academics. As one of the cornerstones of the National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families and Communities, the research center seeks to increase academic and practitioners’ knowledge about Latin@ communities’ experiences in the U.S.A. and promote the training and mentoring of Latin@ researchers.

Recommended Citation