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## Multi-lingual Research in Rural Multi-cultural Communities

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Institute for Student Learning Assessment  
Diversity Conference  
Multi-lingual Research in Minority-majority Communities  
Empirical Research, Debra J. Bolton, Ph.D.

**Purpose of Study:** This study addresses the health, well-being, and social connectedness needs of multi-lingual, Minority-majority, rural community populations. These types of data have been largely absent when human service needs for these populations are addressed. This empirical approach compares similar data in similar studies done in similar populations with an English-only approach.

**Perspective/Theory and Relevant Literature:**

The study engaged the Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1974 & 1994) so that we considered respondents in their home and community environments. Social connectedness theories of Putnam (2000a) were considered in development of survey instruments. However since Putnam tends to be seen as racially biased (Hero, 2007 & Kao, 2004), we opted for development of survey instruments that would be linguistically-appropriate (Perez, 2009) and culturally considerate.

**Methodology and Data Collection:**

In order to reach a population sample more representative of a county's ethnic and racial diversity, a mixed methods approach was necessary. Quantitative and qualitative survey instruments were developed in four languages to represent the county's most-represented ethnic populations. Once survey questions were translated, back translations were employed (Perez, 2009). Researchers use caution when studying racially ethnic groups who may have different priorities. There can be a tendency of culturally dominant groups to judge diverse groups with the dominants' values (Perez, E. O., 2009, Hero, 2007; Kao, 2004). For this study, it became important to use research tools that reflected the language(s), sentence syntax, and vocabulary of the group(s) to be studied (Hero, 2007). The survey instrument was designed by members of an ad hoc committee organized to complete this project. The survey was written in four languages, English, Spanish, Karen (the language of one of Burma's major clans (pronounced, Kah-ren), and Somali. The translated surveys were taken from the original English questionnaire. Once the questions were translated, they were back translated to English to make sure that the integrity of the original questions remained and meaning was not lost. We took steps to assure that there would be what we believe to be a representative sample of Minority-majority population in Southwest Kansas. Most of the surveys were distributed in a focus-type group format in that groups were given surveys to complete. Focus group facilitators were trained prior to their proctoring the completion of surveys by any gathered groups of people. For example, surveys were completed at the local senior center, with various parent groups associated to different school programs or adult education classes. Qualitative focus groups were also completed to reach people beyond surveys and in more intimate settings. These methods of data-gathering was necessary since we were targeting groups that had not, traditionally, been exposed to roles of research subjects. The survey was also made available on-line and face-to-face interviews were completed in English and Spanish. The other two linguistic groups were not interested in meeting face-to-face.

**Data Analyses:**

- Frequencies
- Test of Proportions (t-test)
- Test for Independence ( $X^2$ )
- Ethnographic examples

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•Qualitative Interviews

Interviews (Qualitative data were analyzed separately from quantitative data.)

**Findings and Conclusions:**

Data were compared with previous studies, with English-only survey instruments, completed in our target population. We found that previous assumptions were incomplete and in some cases incorrect because of non-representative samples. Among the many conclusions in terms of health, well-being, and social connectedness, this paper will focus on the conclusion of the importance of multi-lingual data collection to reach better understanding of the assets in and needs of multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-lingual, rural populations.

**Implications for Education and Human Services in Theory and Practice:**

Among the many foci of education and human services, reaching under-served audiences can be one of the greatest challenges. Once those audiences *are* reached, the matter of making educational topics relevant to adults who may have other “fires” to put out, such as dealing with acculturation, poverty, poor health, and low-educational outcomes can be another challenge. By having a deeper understanding and representative data of these under-represented audiences, educators and human service providers can be better equipped to address the family as a whole with educational programs and prevention/intervention tools.