

Introduction

Literature shows that everyday routines of life reflect cultural practices and values (Weisner, 2002).

Household chaos is defined as the level of disorganization or environmental confusion in the home (Dumas et al., 2005). Chaos can be detrimental to parents' mental health and their ability to respond sensitively to their children (Nelson et al., 2009).

Although some developmental contexts are universally considered chaotic and undesirable for parents and children, it is important to use a cultural lens to appreciate that the daily activities, interactions, and environments in a home may be perceived differently by different people (Weisner, 2002). For example, one might feel that a noisy home is a chaotic environment that causes stress. Conversely, another might perceive noise as a cheerful feature of the home environment.

Research Question:

To gain a better understanding of parents' perception of home chaos from an eco-cultural lens, we asked Latinx mothers what they perceive to be chaotic and meaningful in their home environment, activities, and routines and how that affects their sense of well-being.

Method

Participants:

Participants included eight mothers, all Spanish-speaking from Mexico (62.5%) and El Salvador (37.5%), who participated in a larger study on home noise and child language among Spanish-speaking families. Mothers' average family income was \$63,625; they had 3 children on average.

Procedure and Measures:

We conducted structured qualitative interviews with Latinx mothers. Interviews took place over the phone at a time selected by each woman and lasted approximately 45 minutes. All interviews were conducted in Spanish. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated from Spanish to English for thematic coding. Phenomenological qualitative coding revealed themes from the mothers' responses.

Primary Interview Questions

- Walk me through a typical day at your house?
- Are there parts of your day that you find overwhelming?
- How do you deal with your feelings if you are overwhelmed? Is there someone who supports you when you feel overwhelmed?
- How would you characterize your home environment, in terms of how busy or quiet, messy or organized, difficult or easy it is to stick to schedule?
- What are some of your family's favorite things?

Results

Phenomenological qualitative coding revealed four themes from the mothers' responses: organization, emotion regulation, support, and family time.

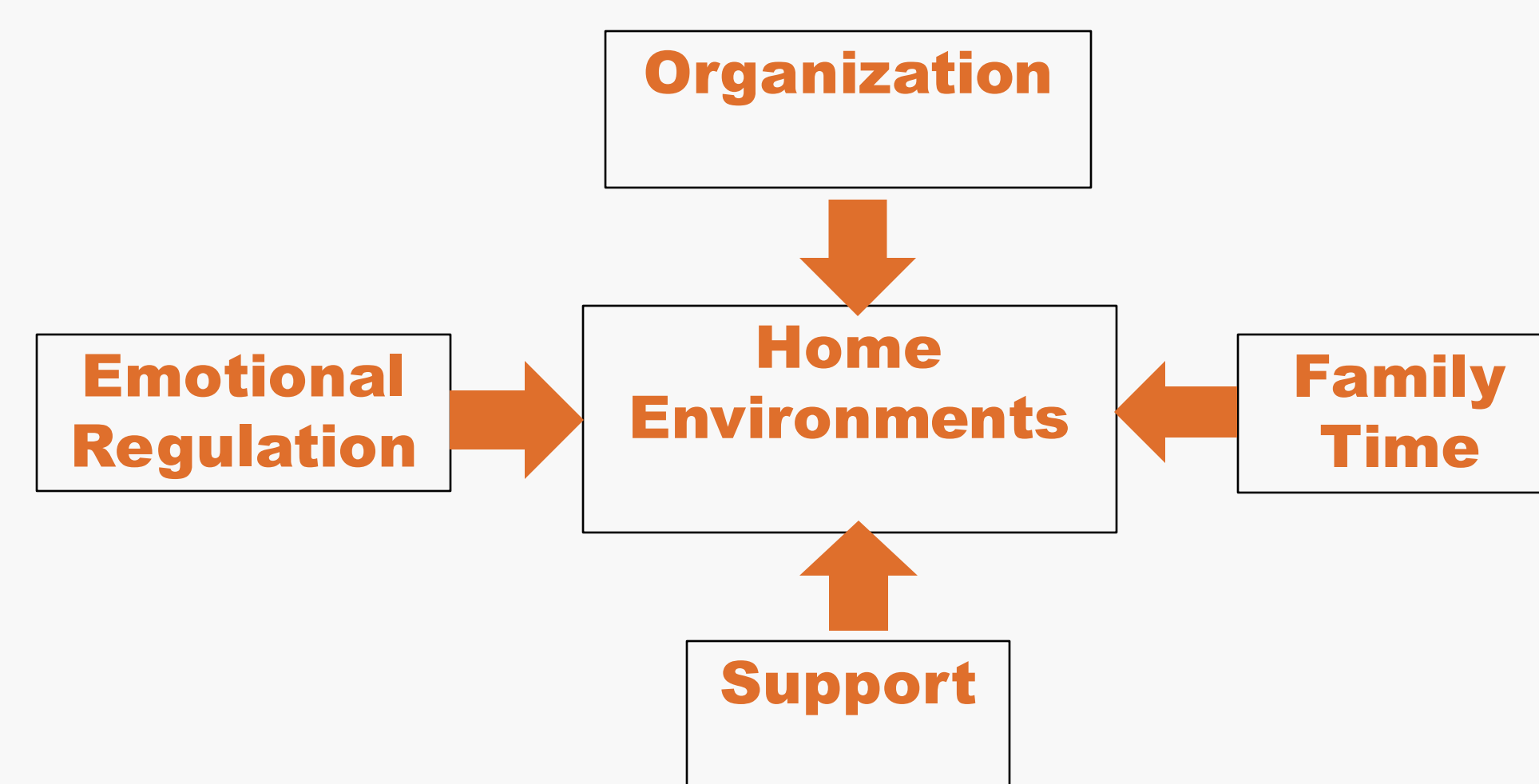


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Latinx Mothers' Home Environments

Organization

Organization can be the order of physical objects around the house as well as order in routines and schedule of activities.

"We have a calendar. In the calendar we have written down all the activities of my children and all my activities."

"We have conflicts in following the routine when [the children] are tired, didn't sleep well, or get to school late."

Emotional Regulation

Emotional Regulation is one's ability to cope with the adversities of each day along with the affect this ability has on one's mental state.

"I get into an emotional slump. And that's when I turn to friends or family or do activities that can distract my mind a little."

"I just breathe and listen to music; music distracts us and relaxes us."

Support

Support is who is helping the mothers with their responsibilities.

"I get frustrated if it's not clean. I struggle with each one washing their plate or having someone help me clean the pots."

"My husband has always been the person; it has been essential for our marriage, and not only with my children, but in every aspect."

Family Time

Family Time could be within the nuclear family, with extended family, with close friends, or moments shared throughout one's community.

"When my husband comes home from work, it's like a party at my house. To give you a picture: me cooking, my children running, hiding and playing with their dad. It is pure happiness."

"We attend all my son's games together to cheer him on. Or meetings with friends, most of them have children of the same age, so we all get together."

Discussion

When Latinx mothers have strong support, able organization, healthy regulation of emotions, and habitual moments of positive family time, they perceive their home environments as calm, happy places – as opposed to chaotic and out of control.

Latinx cultural values, such as the importance of children in every aspect of mothers' daily efforts, were central to all participants' responses. Mothers' perceptions of their ability to attend to children's needs seemed to greatly inform their perceptions of home chaos and stress. An important implication of this finding is the benefits for Latinx mothers' well-being when they feel efficacious in their parenting.

A primary limitation in this study is that the eight Latinx mothers were diverse in terms of socio-economic status, ages of children in the home, and children's disability status. While common themes among diverse participants are useful, a larger sample is needed to understand generalizability of our findings.

This study on mothers' perceptions of chaos is crucial to learn about Latinx families' environments and interactions. Furthermore, it gives the Latinx community and opportunity to be heard and to share aspects about their culture that may not be known. Lastly, this work will contribute to further research in child development, the effects of noise, language acquisition, parent and children interaction, and parenting stress among Latinx families using an eco-cultural context.

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