

Self-Perceptions of Latino Elderly in a Mid-Michigan Community

Yolanda M. Sanchez

Working Paper No. 22

November 1995

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the work and interaction that the author had over a six-year period with a Latino community in a Mid-Michigan. Through this interaction, she could observe the unique characteristics of the Latino elderly and learned about how they perceive their lives, families, and community. The paper also prompts questions regarding the nature and development of their support systems and describes the emotional impact of a changing social climate to this segment of the population that is continually growing. It also provides awareness of what is effective in a community and a possible foundation on which to start developing programs and policies.

Dramatic changes in demographics also reflect major changes in the composition of the U.S. population. Indications are that the Latino elderly is one of the fastest growing segments of the elderly population. This rapid growth has tremendous implications for their families and the society in general. The medical, social, and economic problems of the Latino elderly will require serious attention. There are prevalent signs of the struggle of this segment of the population with issues such as changing family patterns, affordable child and elder care, and with growing shortages in quality nursing and home care services. An important issue that the paper examines is the effectiveness of the support system the Latino family provides. Latinos are family-oriented with strong kin networks and consider family members as primary sources of support.