INTRODUCTION

Background & Significance

- Within the U.S., Latinos are the fastest growing minority population with an increase in migration to rural communities (USDA, 2013).
- To date, Latino adolescents are a part of a disenfranchised group facing many social, educational and political challenges which may negatively impact their mental wellbeing and may inhibit them from becoming productive adults (Gonzales, 2011; NCLR, 2011).
- Rural Latino adolescents often live in ethnically homogenous areas and experience feelings of loneliness, discrimination and social and geographic isolation (Hiot et al., 2008; Kiang et al., 2010; Stacciarini et al., 2011).

Purpose

- The purpose of this study was to examine rural Latino adolescents’ perception of their family and community environment and the relation to their overall wellbeing.

METHODS

Sample

- Sample consists of 62 English and Spanish-speaking adolescents aged 11 – 18 years, living in rural North Florida.

Design

- This is a semi-structured, secondary qualitative analysis of a larger mixed-method study.
- Ten Family Environment Scale (FES) dimensions (Cohesion, Expressiveness, Conflict, Independence, Achievement Orientation, Intellectual-Cultural Orientation, Active-Recreational Orientation, Moral-Religious Emphasis, Organization and Control) were used as a framework for analysis (Moos & Moos, 2012).
- Free coding was performed to identify additional themes.
- Nvivo 10 software was used to thematically analyze English-written interviews.

RESULTS

Prevalent themes

- Community Belonging
  - I feel kinda’ lucky here. ‘You know, cuz’ most of my family is here and like I have friends here. I was born here and I can speak English.
- Legal Issues
  - ‘Just thinkin’ about me being here alone with my sister if my parents are deported—then I gotta’ get a job and do everything and we will be alone.
- Discrimination
  - Like at school and stuff, like they’ll say stuff like ‘stop crossing our borders to steal our jobs’ and it makes you feel like I don’t wanna live here.
- Isolation
  - ‘We don’t really live near people where we live…and sometime it can be lonely.’
  - ‘It’s really hard because both my mom and my dad are illegal and like— it feels like… I’m trapped cuz they can’t do certain things or have certain things and it makes me feel trapped.

National vs. Ethnic Identification

- Sometimes I feel like um— if I tell my parents something they won’t understand and take it the wrong way but mostly I talk to my mom.

Expressiveness

- I mean, I was born here, but sometimes I feel like I don’t fit in and kids like don’t really like— eat the food I eat and there are not a lot of Spanish people.

Achievement Orientation

- I mean, even though I don’t have much as the other kids, we go to a free school and eat free food sometimes and my parents have jobs. You learn to appreciate stuff because in Mexico we—we don’t have the same opportunities.

DISCUSSION

- Although rural Latino adolescents rely heavily on their families for emotional and instrumental support, issues of lack of expressiveness, fear of deportation, and the pressure to succeed may impact adolescents mental wellbeing and perpetuate feelings of isolation.
- Adolescents depicted a tantalizing phenomenon of U.S. versus ethnic identification, which perpetuated feelings of being an “outsider,” feeling “misunderstood by their family” and “loneliness.”
- Unlike U.S. born adolescents, foreign born Latinos expressed a greater appreciation of their life in the U.S. and their perceived advantages despite their economic hardships and fear of deportation.
- Concurrent with current literature, Latino adolescents described barriers to acculturation as: lack of English proficiency, geographic, social and cultural isolation, and indirect and direct discrimination (Berry et al., 2006; Cordova & Cervantes, 2010; Stacciarini et al., 2011).

Limitations & Future Recommendations

- The FES sub-scale themes may be limited as a framework for analysis of U.S. adolescent immigrants’ experiences due to lack of cultural aspects and immigration factors.
- Findings of this study support the need for further U.S. based migration studies and the development of culturally-tailored scales investigating the perception and impact of immigration on rural adolescents mental health, wellbeing and transition into adulthood.

FINDINGS