

## ABSTRACT

### LATINA YOUTH AND GANGS: A RURAL PERSPECTIVE

This study attempts to determine factors that predispose adolescent Latinas who live in a rural community to gang membership. It takes a qualitative look at factors through a semistructured interview guide that inquired about the girls' families, peer relationships, school, community, and gang. A snowball sampling method was used to gather participants. This study uncovered the following predisposing factors: low socioeconomic status, parents with low educational achievement, parental separation, female headed household, alienating school experience, gang affiliated relatives, and a peer group of friends that are also at risk for gang involvement. In addition, this study uncovered a continuum of gang involvement in this rural community. Once the process of becoming a gang member begins, there is an extended period where the girl must prove herself to be worthy of membership to the gang. Several implications for social work practice are also discussed.

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