



The Families and Children Who Live in the Buena Vista Mobile Home Park

Donald Barr, MD, PhD Amado Padilla, PhD
Stanford University Graduate School of Education
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Executive Summary

This report summarizes the results of our recent research on the educational and health status of children who live in the Buena Vista Mobile Home Park in Palo Alto. (A copy of the full report is available at https://ed.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/buena_vista_research_report.pdf.) Buena Vista has been part of the Palo Alto community for nearly a century. It provides a source of permanent affordable housing for low-income individuals and families. In 2012 the owners of the property on which Buena Vista is located announced plans to close down the Mobile Home Park and sell the land to a commercial developer. As the controversy surrounding the proposed closure of Buena Vista has grown following this announcement, we became aware of a core issue that has come up repeatedly: there were almost no data about the children who live at Buena Vista, and how the closure of the Park might affect them.

Research design

Beginning in January 2013, Stanford students who were fluent in Spanish and who had been trained in research methods began to visit the Park and have conversations with the families there. We learned that nearly all the families with children living in Buena Vista were considered to be “low-income” by government standards, and that most of these families were Hispanic. Based on these findings, the students conducted a formal survey of the adults in each family at Buena Vista who had children living with them. The survey focused on three general issues: the demographics of the children; the educational experiences of the children; and the health needs and experiences of the children. This report provides a description of the findings of that research.

Research results

Demographics:

There are 115 separate rental units at Buena Vista, of which 67 are occupied by families with children aged 18 or younger. We were able to obtain 100% participation in this study of the families at Buena Vista with children. We learned that:

- 129 children live in these 67 families;
- 52% of the children were female and 48% were male;
- The average age of these children is 9.5 years (median age 10 years);
- More than 90% of the children in Buena Vista are Hispanic, with Mexican Americans as the largest ethnic group. 78% of the adults surveyed requested that the survey be administered in Spanish.
- Most of the parents are long standing members of the Palo Alto community and are employed in Palo Alto or in the surrounding communities, often in service positions.

Educational experiences:

All school-aged children living at the Park were enrolled in school. We were unable to identify any of the children (age 18 or younger) as having dropped out of school. This is in contrast to the high school drop out rate of 29.3% among the Hispanic high school students living in Silicon Valley, and 26.7% among Hispanic students statewide. Of the 129 children in Buena Vista:

- 33 children (25%) were not yet of school age, of which 5 were in a preschool program;
- 38 children (30%) were in elementary school (36 in Barron Park School);
- 23 children (18%) were in middle school (19 in Terman);
- 31 children (24%) were in high school (28 in Gunn);
- 4 children (3%) were in a local college.

40 of the 92 children (43%) in grades K-12 were enrolled in at least one special education program, with a number of these students enrolled in multiple programs. The most common type of program was English as a Second Language (ESL). Parents of 87 of the 97 children (90%) either in pre-school or in grades K-12 had met with the child's teacher within the past year. When needed, schools provided Spanish translation for parents during these meetings.

Access to health insurance and medical care

- 114 of the 129 children (88%) were covered by health insurance. The most common type of coverage (90 children) was through publicly funded health insurance programs available in Santa Clara County that target children.
- 97% of the parents responding indicated that they have a usual source of medical care for their children, with Packard Children's Hospital and Mayview Community Clinic the most frequent.
- The average number of visits to a doctor in the past 12 months was 2.1, with a small number of children making frequent visits. 74% of children had had a checkup within the past 12 months.
- 95% of parents reported no problem finding a source of care for their children when needed.
- One-third of the children at Buena Vista have not seen a dentist in the previous 24 months. One child in five needed dental care in the previous year, but was unable to obtain it. One explanation for this disparity is the scarcity of dentists in the Palo Alto area who accept Medi-Cal or other public insurance for payment.

Conclusions

The children living in the Buena Vista Mobile Home Park are benefitting from a strong educational experience and the local availability of health insurance and health care providers, with the exception of dentists who accept public insurance plans. These benefits stand in stark contrast to low-income Hispanic children living in less affluent communities than Palo Alto that do not enjoy the same educational and health care resources.