Leadership Skills Possessed and Attitudes Toward Individual or Group-Centered Leadership as Perceived by Hispanic Women With Limited Resources in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas

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Abstract

This research study was conducted with Hispanic women, primarily homemakers, serving or who agreed to serve as Extension master volunteers with the Texas Agricultural Extension Service/Family and Consumer Sciences Program in three south Texas counties of Cameron, Hidalgo, and Starr from September 1999 through October 2000. These women were recruited primarily from limited resource areas to teach information learned in training programs to others in their communities.

The primary purpose was to determine the self-perceptions of leadership skills and attitudes toward individual or group-centered leadership as perceived by Hispanic women with limited resources serving as Extension master volunteer leaders. A secondary purpose included identifying leaders and characteristics/traits that were admired in leaders. Five research questions and four hypotheses related to six objectives were examined. Of the 337 leaders in the sample population, 210 participated in a series of 13 survey workshops within the tri-county area to provide the data.

The rating of leadership self-perceptions in the five skill areas of communication, positional leadership, understanding of self, making decisions, and working in groups was generally high. They perceived their weakest areas in conducting meetings and leading discussions. In relation to individual and group-centered attitudes, respondents reported agreement for needing authority figures and leader wisdom, but on the other hand, agreed to the importance of group member contributions.

Significant relationships were found in four of the five skill areas in relation to a group-centered attitude, excluding self-understanding, while no significant relationships were found in relation to an individual-centered attitude. An increased level of participation or involvement in the number and length of volunteer experiences yielded a higher self-perception of skills in all areas, excluding self-understanding. A higher educational level of the leader was significant only in the skill area of self-understanding, while language ability had no significance in relation to any of the skill areas. Respondents identified a variety of admired leaders and traits/characteristics pertaining to those identified.

Twenty-two conclusions, associated implications, and four recommendations for action were developed.