



Cultural Barriers to Education among the Tarahumara

Chihuahua, Mexico is home to the Tarahumara, an indigenous population with a culture rich in tradition that is struggling to maintain its unique identity, while taking advantage of educational opportunities offered by the dominant culture. The Tarahumara in Chihuahua number fifty thousand, occupy one-fourth of the state, and make up 81.3 percent of the indigenous-language speakers. No one knows exactly how long the Tarahumara have lived in the Sierra Madre mountain range, but the earliest human artifacts found in this region date back fifteen thousand years.

The Tarahumara speak *Rarámuri* and live in communities with houses far from each other and away from the town center, which generally consists of a church and a school. Immediate and extended families reside together on small plots of land,

typically living in small, one-room log houses without running water or electricity.

According to the 2000 census, there is a large gap in the completion of basic education between indigenous groups and those who speak Spanish as their first language. *Mestizos*, or people who are a mix of Spanish and Indian descent, make up the majority of Mexico's population and speak Spanish as their primary language. The educational gap is amplified in the Tarahumara, but existing research tends to focus on the inequality of education in Mexico instead of focusing specifically on inequalities and attitudinal barriers regarding educational attainment among a specific indigenous group.

Education has the potential to positively influence these groups and is one of the few ways for outside intervention to affect a culture; education is also a significant indicator of socioeconomic status. Studying education among the Tarahumara illuminated the cultural factors and attitudes that have contributed to the lack of education and extreme poverty.

No Events