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# Accessing human rights through faith-based social justice and cultural citizenship: Hartford's low-income Latino immigrants

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Community Partners: Jubilee House & Our Lady of Sorrows Parish

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## Abstract

Many low-income Latino immigrants in Hartford lack access to the human rights to education, economic security, and mental health. Who should be responsible for providing such access? The U.S. government maintains that immigrants should be responsible for their own resettlement. So, faith-based organizations, motivated by Catholic social teaching, take on much of the responsibility to provide these immigrants with the services that guarantee their basic human rights.

This thesis explores the work of two Catholic faith-based organizations (FBOs) in Hartford, Connecticut, Jubilee House (JH) and Our Lady of Sorrows Church (OLS), and asks the central questions:

**How do Jubilee House and Our Lady of Sorrows fill in the gaps between state-provided services and the norms of human rights?**

**What are the implications of immigrant accommodation via faith-based social justice for the human rights discourse on citizenship and cultural relevance?**

A formal, exploratory case study of each of these FBOs, over a 3-month period, offers some answers to these questions. The FBOs contribute to the human rights to education, economic security, and mental health by:

- directly providing services,
- facilitating and utilizing family and friendship networks to connect individuals to resources.

The FBOs are able to do a) and b) by using clients' and parishioners' cultural resources as the basis for a holistic sense of citizenship and access to rights. This case study illustrates how faith-based social justice in the Hartford Latino community is a culturally-relevant form of human rights advocacy.

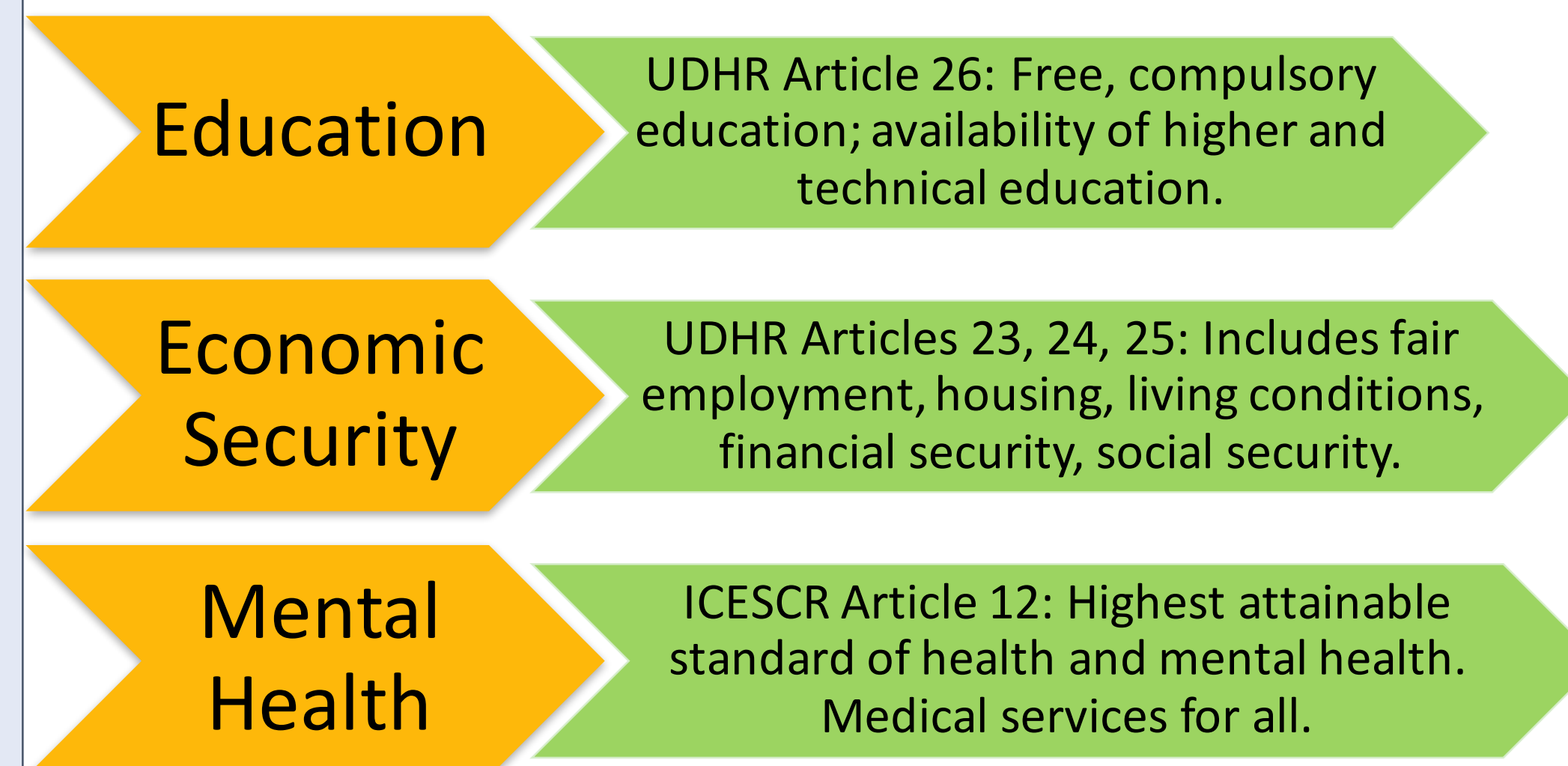
## Introduction

How do Jubilee House (JH) and Our Lady of Sorrows (OLS), both Catholic FBOs in Hartford, Connecticut, contribute to the human rights of low-income Latino immigrants? And what are the implications for human rights theory of immigrant accommodation based in Catholic faith-based social justice? These questions are important as they contribute to the human rights discourse on citizenship and cultural relevance.

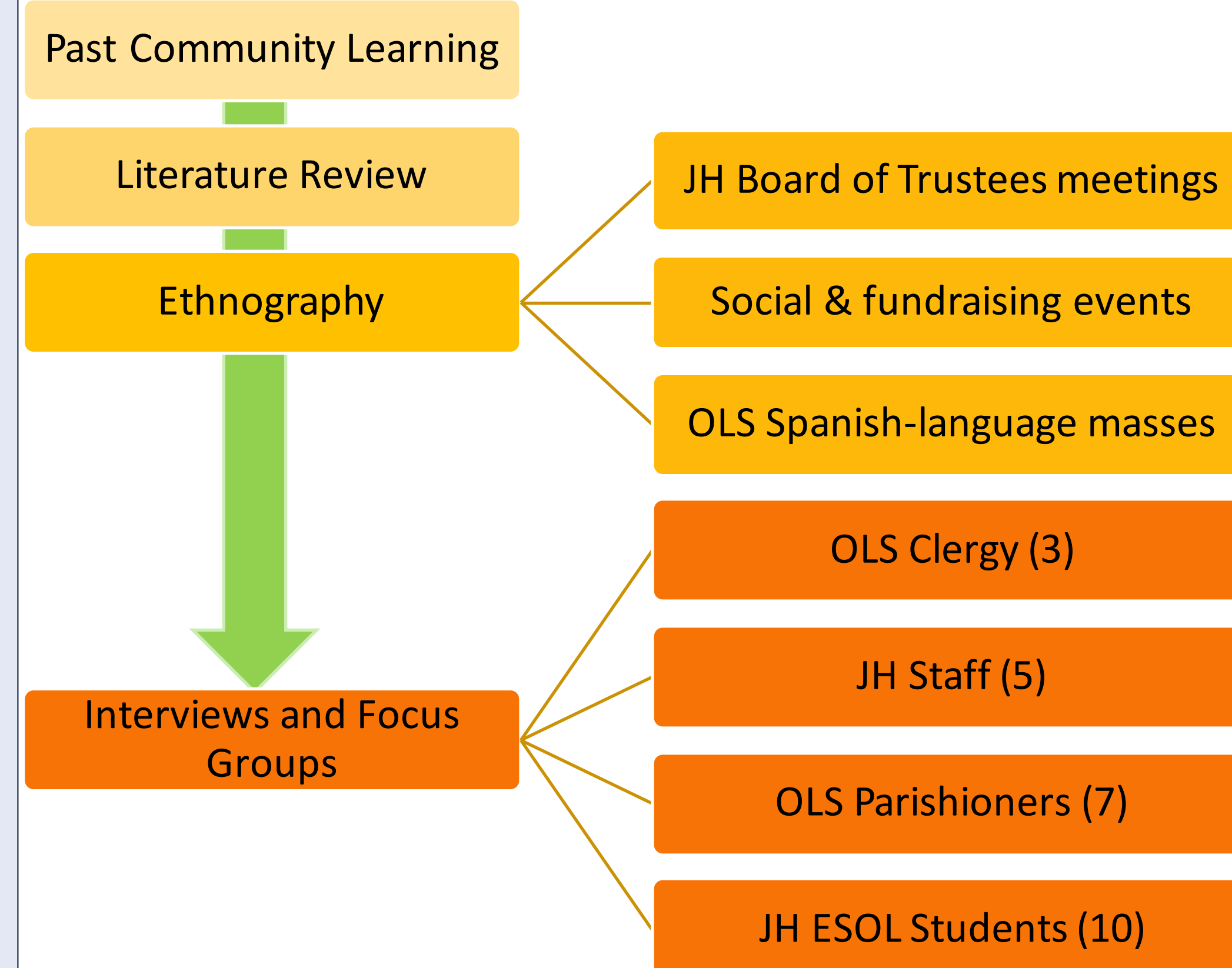
This project examines JH, an adult education center, and OLS, a large Catholic parish, over a three-month formal period, employing the methods of participant-observation, interviewing, and focus groups. Clients at JH are primarily of Central American and South American nationalities, and of low- socio-economic and education levels. Many parishioners at OLS are Puerto Rican or Peruvian and of low- to middle-socio-economic status.

## Terminology

Based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.



## Methods/Methodology



A priest at Our Lady of Sorrows greets members of the HESMIPERU group at a procession in honor of Our Lord of Miracles.

## Findings

### Direct Provision of Services

- Education at JH:** ESOL classes, Esperanza academic program ("bridge" between high school/GED and college).
- Economic Security:**
  - JH:** Ad-hoc donations from tutors, financial and material assistance from Refugee Assistance Center.
  - OLS:** Ad-hoc material and financial assistance at Parish Office.
- Mental Health at OLS:** Spiritual counseling from clergy, parish groups and relationships as coping mechanisms.

### "Network effects": Using family and friendship ties

- Staff use **the intra-FBO and inter-FBO network** in greater Hartford to recruit clients, disseminate information, refer clients to resources.
- Staff and clients use **clients' family, friendship, and cultural networks** to recruit clients, spread information.

## Findings

### "Latino cultural citizenship"

Staff and clients draw upon Latino cultural resources, strengths, and capabilities so that clients access rights.

- OLS: Networks, spirituality, ethnic-cultural pride.**
- JH: Networks, learning capabilities.**

## Conclusions and Future Work

This project brings up tensions between faith-based social justice and human rights. Through direct provision of services and the "network effect," FBOs fill in gaps to provision and access to rights for this population. Human rights theory asserts that the state bears the duty to guarantee an individual's human rights. When the state fails to provide immigrants with the means for resettlement, it is no longer the duty-bearer of the right. Instead, FBOs like JH and OLS take on the state's responsibility to resettle low-income immigrants, guaranteeing their rights to education, economic security, and mental health. Therefore, the work by FBOs challenges the dynamic proposed by human rights discourse. However, faith-based social justice can be seen as a bottom-up, culturally-relevant form of human rights advocacy. As illustrated in this case study, FBOs used Latino cultural citizenship, based on cultural strengths, to help low-income Latino immigrants access rights. This thesis focused on two specific FBOs and, therefore, cannot be directly generalized to a broader setting. Future research could examine a particular human right in greater detail so as to reach more broadly applicable observations.

## Acknowledgements

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