

The Hispanic/Latino community is made up of people from many different nationalities, races, educational and socioeconomic levels. The common threads for most are the Spanish language and common basic cultural values.

While many Hispanics/Latinos have lived in the U.S. for many generations, others are recent immigrants who have come to the U.S. to escape poverty, for improved professional opportunities, to flee political oppression.

Under any circumstance, immigration can be traumatic. It can lead to the loss of loved ones, extended family networks, discrimination, and poor living conditions. There is also stress in adapting to a new culture, language, and customs. As a result of these stressors, immigrants are at a higher risk for mental/emotional problems—particularly depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, and substance abuse.

Cultural Issues

Although Hispanics/ Latinos are quickly becoming part of mainstream U.S. culture, many still face inequities in socioeconomic status, education, and access to health and human services. Recent studies have shown that mental-health programs are not always successful in reaching Hispanics/Latinos in need of mental-health care.

Many Hispanics/Latinos rely on their extended family, community, traditional healers, and/or churches for help during a health crisis. As a result, thousands of Hispanics/Latinos with mental illnesses often go without professional mental health treatment.

At-Risk Groups

Studies have shown that older Hispanic adults and Hispanic youth are especially vulnerable to the stresses of immigration and acculturation.

Many older Hispanic Americans find the strain of acculturation overwhelming. Their traditional values and beliefs are often at odds with the new culture, they may lack family support, and they also may face language barriers or be physically infirm.

Hispanic/Latino youth also have been found to be at risk for higher levels of emotional distress because of the pressures to rapidly adopt the values of their new culture, as well as inequality, poverty, and discrimination. This stress may account for the high number of suicide attempts (the highest among all ethnic groups in the U.S.), high rates of substance abuse, and increasing rates of juvenile justice involvement among this group.

Second and later-generation Hispanic/Latino youth also are at higher risk for mental and emotional disorders. Studies have found that Hispanic/Latino youth suffer from many of the same emotional problems created by marginalization and discrimination, but without the secure identity and traditional values held by their parents. In addition, many Hispanic/Latino immigrant parents place high expectations on later-generation children, hoping they will become part of the American dream.

Access to Care

Lack of access to mental health services continues to be the most serious problem in the Hispanic/Latino community. Hispanic Americans also use mental health services far less than other ethnic and racial groups. According to recent report, less than 10 percent of Hispanics/Latinos with a mental disorder seek the services of a mental health specialist. They also constitute the largest group of uninsured in the U.S.—further limiting access to care.

While insurance plays a large role in accessing health care, culture and language are also significant barriers. The lack of interpreters and bilingual professionals can interfere with appropriate evaluation, treatment, and emergency response.

Hispanics/Latinos often have different attitudes about accessing mental health services, and may feel highly stigmatized for doing so. For example, Hispanics/Latinos often mistake depression for nervousness, tiredness, or even a physical ailment, and may see it as something that is temporary. Affected individuals may not recognize their symptoms as those that require the attention of mental health specialists.

The scarcity of bilingual or Hispanic mental health professionals also make it more difficult for Hispanics with mental illnesses to receive proper care. Access to culturally appropriate and effective care is critical given that Hispanics/Latinos have been shown to suffer from mental illnesses or emotional disturbances at a higher rate than other groups.

Conclusion

Traditionally, Hispanics/Latinos rely on community support and an extended family network during times of adversity. By drawing on the natural strengths of the Hispanic community and by including family members in treatment, community-based mental health services have been successful in addressing the mental health needs of many Hispanics/Latinos.

Mental health services for Hispanics/Latinos need to be responsive to cultural needs, and also provide appropriate linguistic support. With proper treatment, most symptoms of mental illnesses can be treated or controlled. If the possibility of mental illness is a concern for you or someone you care about, treatment is available. Mental health information is available in Spanish and can be obtained through your physician, a clinic, or online.

Mental Health in the Hispanic/Latino Community

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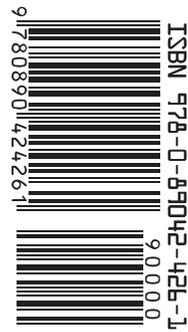
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Resources

For more information, please contact:

American Psychiatric Association (APA)

1000 Wilson Blvd.
Suite 1825
Arlington, VA 22209
703-907-7300
www.healthyminds.org

Mental Health America (formerly NMHA)

2000 N. Beauregard Street
6th Floor
Alexandria, VA 22311
800-969-NMHA (6642)
www.nmha.org

National Alliance for Hispanic Health (NAHH)

1501 Sixteenth Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036
202-387-5000
www.hispanichealth.org

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

1 Choke Cherry Road
Rockville, MD 20857
240-276-2420
<http://www.samhsa.gov/>

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

Colonial Place Three
2107 Wilson Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201
703-524-7600
www.nami.org

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