

SUICIDE & THE HISPANIC COMMUNITY

Question: Are suicide risk factors different for the Hispanic population than other groups?

Answer: While the majority of risk factors apply to all ethnic groups, there are additional risk factors that can sometimes appear in the Hispanic community. These include:

- Generational differences, beliefs, and customs. Differences between generations can increase family conflict and problems, which can increase risk of suicide.
- Added stress for recent immigrants. Hispanic immigrants tend to arrive with less money, fewer social networks, less employment opportunities, and experience more discrimination than other immigrant groups.
- Reduced access to professional mental health assistance.

Question: Are there specific segments of the Hispanic population that seem to be more “at risk” than others?

Answer: Research indicates Hispanic female teens are particularly vulnerable to suicide attempts. According to the Youth Behavioral Risk Survey, high school-age Hispanic females reported:

- Nearly 20% higher rates considering suicide attempts
- 25% higher rate of having a plan to commit suicide
- Nearly double rates of having attempted suicide compared to Caucasian female teens
- Nearly double rates of suicide attempts requiring medical treatment

Dr. Luis Zayas (founder of the Center for Latino Family Research, School of Social Work at The University of Texas) reported Hispanic female teens who had attempted suicide were more likely to have conflict with their parents and reported lower levels of affection, support, and communication with their parents. Dr. Zayas’ research also found that overwhelming emotions such as feeling trapped, helpless, and agitated often acted as “triggers” for suicide attempts.

Q&A: Texas Suicide Fact Sheet: Hispanic Americans

DATA: CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

- Suicide was the 12th leading cause of death for Hispanics of all ages and the 3rd leading cause of death for Hispanic males ages 15-34.
- Hispanics born in the US have higher rates of suicidal thoughts and attempts than Hispanic immigrants.
- Immigrants who came to the US as children have higher rates than those who came as adolescents and adults.

- Hispanic high school students report higher rates of suicidal behaviors than the general population of US high school students.

SUICIDAL BEHAVIOR AMONG HISPANICS

- Family needs are placed above individual needs and respect to the parents and elders' is of major importance.
- Suicidal behavior among Hispanic females may be related to the stress caused by the expectations and obligation of the family.
- Culturally, Hispanic adolescents may also experience stress with the conflict between placing family needs above individual needs.
- Recently immigrated Hispanic families may not fully understand the health care system and how to access medical services.
- Recently immigrated Hispanic families may be reluctant to seek help in fear of being reported as undocumented.
- Hispanic families may avoid seeking mental health help because they feel that suicide should be dealt with by the family or faith community first.
- Language differences are a barrier to seeking mental health help.

TREATMENT AND PREVENTION

- Involving the family in treatment is very important since Hispanic culture places importance on the whole family.
- Professionals need to remember that cultures express distress in different ways.
- Immigration, acculturation, collectivism, and interdependence should be considered in treatment.
- It is essential to eliminate language barriers and provide trained interpreters.
- The availability of mental health services for minorities is essential.

REFERENCES, RESOURCES TO CONTACT & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- NAMI Multicultural Action Center – Latino Community Mental Health Fact Sheet (www.nami.org/content/navigationmenu/find_support/multicultural_support/annual_minority_mental_healthcare_symposia/latino_mh06.pdf)
- Mental Health America of Texas – Texas Suicide Fact Sheet: Hispanic Americans (www.texasuicideprevention.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/TexasSuicidePrevention-FactSheet-HispanicAmericans-07sept2012.pdf)
- Mental Health America – Latino Hispanic Communities and Mental Health (<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/issues/latinohispanic-communities-and-mental-health>)
- Suicidal Thoughts and Attempts More Common In Hispanic Teens, by: Hope Gillette (<http://huffingpost.com/2013/01/29/suicidal-thoughts-common-hispanic-n-2573148.html>)
- Report: Suicide Prevention Resource Center: Hispanics: Suicide Among Racial/Ethnic Populations in the U.S. (www.sprc.org)
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center: Hispanic-Latino (www.sprc.org/populations/racial-or-ethnic-groups/hispanic-latino)

**If you need immediate assistance contact the
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-8255
Colorado Crisis & Support Line 1-844-493-8255**