Culture, Poverty & Violence: Suicide Risk for Latino Youth

Coming Together to Care
2008 Texas Suicide Prevention Symposium

Delia H. Saldaña, PhD
University of Texas Health Science Center
Latino Culture:

- Stigma
- Religiosity
- Immigrant Status
- Acculturation
- Sexuality
- Substance abuse
Stigma and Suicide

- Stigma is not culturally bound, but instead varies within a cultural “group”
- Understanding the reasons for a child feeling stigma can serve as preventive avenues for responding to an individual’s risk
- Protective factors for Latinos may include sense of honor, attachment to family, community membership, and faith
Religiosity and Suicide

- Seeking help from those who might extend most judgment places the child at risk
- Traditional Latino families may move to more evangelical churches or those with strict values
- Cross-faith efforts can help promote acceptance of individual differences
- A fragmented treatment system contributes to the lack of information sharing between community “helpers”
Immigrant Status & Risk

- There has been a tremendous growth in Latino immigrants coming from diverse countries, history, trauma, & belief systems.
- Immigrants arrive with less money, few social networks, less employment opportunities and experience more discrimination than ethnic peers.
- Immigrants are at risk especially when they live in isolated social circumstances.
- Isolated immigrants also have less access to mainstream helpers or skills in navigating a way of obtaining help. Language is a big barrier.
Acculturation and Suicide

- Intergenerational differences are enhanced by different beliefs and customs in traditional Latino families.
- Family conflict or dysfunction often exacerbates the isolation of a teen at risk.
- Clash with US culture depends on SES, acculturation, peer influences.
- Important to distinguish between impact (risk or protective status) for individual vs. group.
Sexuality and Diversity

- Generational changes have occurred in how sexuality is being defined and expressed
- Not all good but also not all bad
- Stigma and isolation are the key risks
- Homophobia is particularly acute for Latino boys, while “hanging tough” increasingly apparent in Latino girls
Latino Girls

- Combination of individual and societal factors
- Hispanics have more babies and have them earlier
- Few incentives exist for boys to become responsible fathers
- Boys vent anger about poverty, machismo expectations & no employment on girls
- Worst in areas undergoing residential change
- Don’t alienate; don’t isolate. Understand their reality of distrust & expect repeated problems.
Contact Info:

- Delia H. Saldaña, PhD
- Associate Professor – UT Health Science Center
- saldana@uthscsa.edu