

Culture, Poverty & Violence: Suicide Risk for Latino Youth

Coming Together to Care

**2008 Texas Suicide
Prevention Symposium**

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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.

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