

# Diversity Among Latinos

## Background

High immigration rates and relatively high birth rates have boosted the growth rate of the Hispanic population above that of any other major U.S. racial or ethnic group except Asians. According to the Pew Hispanic Center ([www.pewhispanic.org](http://www.pewhispanic.org)), the Hispanic or Latino population, already the nation's largest ethnic group, will triple in size and will account for most of the nation's population growth from 2005 through 2050. Hispanics will make up 29% of the U.S. population in 2050, compared with 14% in 2005. Hispanics immigrants currently comprise 54% of all Hispanic adults in the United States (Lopez & Minushkin, 2008).

The history of Americans of Spanish heritage predates the founding of the United States (Kandel & Cromartie, 2004). Nevertheless, this population of newcomers is heir to a long, and at times turbulent, history of relations between the ethnic majority — non-Hispanic whites — and the peoples of Mexico and other Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America (Kandel & Cromartie, 2004; Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, & Gallardo-Cooper, 2002).

Latino/Hispanic groups differ in national origin and history; in the particular social formations within each country that shape age, gender and class relationships; in the pressures within each country that have led to migration and the differing waves of migration; and the differing relationships with the United States through time that have affected how those migrants were received. These features have not only created marked differences among the Latino/Hispanic groups, but considerable intra-cultural variation within groups as well. At the same time, changes within United States society and cultures have affected where migrants have gone, how they have been received, the opportunities they have had to develop themselves as individuals and groups, and the cultures of the United States with which the migrants have interacted (Guarnaccia, Martinez, & Acosta, 2005).

Latinos/Hispanics are an ethnic group, not a racial group, according to U.S. government guidelines, but this distinction escapes most Americans. Latinos/Hispanics can be of any race. Most identify as white, a smaller percentage identify as black, many identify with indigenous ancestry/race, and an increasing share identify as "other," which underscores the ambiguity of

race and ethnic-group definitions in the United States (del Pinal & Singer, 1997). Additionally, there is a racism within Latino/Hispanic groups that reflects an ongoing "pigmentocracy" that is documented throughout Latin America.



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According to Pew Hispanic Center (2006), the Hispanic population in the United States is very diverse and includes individuals from Central America and Latin America. For example, according to these statistics, 64.1% of the Hispanic resident population in the United States is Mexican, 9% are Puerto Rican, 3.4% are Cuban, and 3.1% are Guatemalan (see <http://pewhispanic.org/files/factsheets/hispanics2006/Table-5.pdf> for a complete breakdown of this demographic information). Clearly, Latinos/Hispanics in the United States are a heterogeneous population and the diversity within various Latino/Hispanic groups is as pronounced as differences between Latinos/

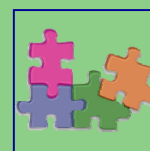
Hispanics and other ethnic groups. These differences include language nuances, cultural values and beliefs, educational attainment, and attitudes towards mental health treatment (Guarnaccia et al., 2007). Additionally, there may be significant differences between individuals from different regions within the same country. For example, while Spanish is the primarily language spoken in Mexico, there are some regions of Mexico where individuals speak indigenous languages (Schmal, n.d.).



Therefore, given the tremendous amount of diversity that exists among Latino/Hispanic individuals, it is important to understand the impact that this diversity has on the Latino/Hispanic family seeking trauma treatment. Each Central American and Latin American country has its own unique history which may impact the trauma experiences of individuals from that country. Additionally, the emotional and behavioral effects of trauma may be as variable as the individuals themselves and should be addressed within an individual and culturally appropriate framework.

## Statement of the Issue

The rapid growth of the Latino/Hispanic population in this country qualifies as one of the most dramatic demographic phenomena of the last century. This segment of our society is growing almost four times as fast as other groups. It is predicted that one out of every four Americans will be of Latino/Hispanic heritage by the year 2050. Given the extraordinary diversity of Latinos/Hispanics that currently live in the United States and are expected to migrate into the United States in the next 30-40 years, it is imperative that service systems increase their capacity and understanding of this diverse population. In particular, the terms "Latino" and "Hispanic" represent a wide range of individuals with unique cultural, language and value systems. Recognizing the diversity of this group and unique needs of each individual client is crucial to providing adequate and appropriate mental health and trauma treatment services to Latinos/Hispanics.



## Recommendations from the Field



- **Treatment providers should conduct a thorough assessment of the client.** This includes gathering information on the client's country of origin (if they are first-generation) or his/her family's country of origin (if they are second-generation or more). Treatment providers should seek to understand the cultural values, beliefs, and language nuances within a client's country of origin and how each client has made sense of these values and beliefs (see the "Assessment" and "Cultural Values" priority areas for more information).
- **Treatment providers and organizations should incorporate a "life course approach" when working with Latino/Hispanic families** (Blank & Torrecilha, 1998). This will enable professionals to understand the cumulative effects of racism, discrimination, resource disparities and other hardships on the families with whom they work.
- **Treatment organizations should gather information on the Latino/Hispanic clientele they serve** (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). In particular, it is important for organizations to understand the demographic information on the Latino/Hispanic clients they serve, including their country of origin (if first-generation) or their family's country of origin (if second-generation or more), historical and political trauma that may have occurred in their country of origin, social factors that may impact the family's response to current trauma (i.e., discrimination, oppression) and provide trainings for their staff on these particular countries and regions.
- **There is a critical need for an increased number of culturally-and linguistically-relevant Spanish speaking mental health providers at all levels of mental health care** (González & Ramos-González, 2005). Service providers should receive training on the different nuances of language that exist within the Latin American and Central American countries (see the "Therapist Training and Support" and "Linguistic/Communication Competence" priority areas for more information).
- **Providers must be trained to understand the perception of mental health problems and service seeking among Latinos** (Guarnaccia et al., 2005). In particular, it is important for treatment providers to understand that seeking mental health treatment may be perceived negatively by some families, but seen as the "norm" for others.

*Cada cabeza es un mundo.\**

- **Providers should be cautioned against making assumptions about a client based on his/her Latino heritage** (Guarnaccia et al., 2007). As stated previously, Latinos/Hispanics represent a diverse group of individuals with unique beliefs and values. Treatment providers should seek to understand their clients as individuals, rather than making assumptions about a client based on his/her ethnicity.
- **Expand outreach efforts to better include the community. This may include social marketing efforts, such as health fairs and community workshops.** Such efforts should occur within the diverse communities and can help to reduce stigma, increase understanding, reduce likelihood of misinterpreting psychological distress as somatic illness, and provide information about how therapy can help.

### Resilience

- Service providers need to understand the important role that resilience plays in public health promotion for Latino communities (Delgado, 1995). In particular, service providers should understand the innate strengths present in individuals, families, communities and systems and work with those strengths in creating programs designed to address Latino/Hispanic families who have been affected by trauma.
- Organizations should be encouraged to create and disseminate informational materials, from a strengths-based perspective, that describe the impact of trauma and important family strengths that can help counter trauma's negative effects for Latino/Hispanic children and families (Galan, 1998).
- Service providers should seek to understand the unique demographic characteristics of the populations that they serve and the strengths present in the families who they serve based on their country of origin, including their cultural values and spirituality (see the "Cultural Values" priority area for more information) and incorporate them throughout the treatment and intervention process.



### Family/Youth Engagement

- Treatment providers should utilize the type of outreach that *promotores* (community members who promote health in their own communities) use to educate Latinos/Hispanics regarding mental health and trauma issues. This way effective community outreach can be conducted immediately and treatment referrals can be followed up with greater initiative (Delgado, 1995).
- Once treatment providers have gathered information on the client's country of origin (if first-generation) or his/her family's country of origin (if second-generation or above), it is important to investigate the most appropriate ways to incorporate the family in the treatment process based on the unique cultural values and beliefs of the client's heritage.

## Community Examples/Best Practices



- **La Clínica del Pueblo** - La Clínica del Pueblo was founded in 1983 in response to the growing medical and mental health care needs of Salvadoran and Guatemala refugees escaping their war-torn countries during the 1980s. For the past 25 years, La Clínica del Pueblo has provided culturally appropriate health services in the Latino/Hispanic community. 86% of La Clínica's clients are recent Latino/Hispanic immigrants from Central and South America; 55% are originally from El Salvador, representing a diverse clientele of Latino/Hispanic children and families.  
⇒ Website: [www.lcdp.org](http://www.lcdp.org)  
⇒ Address: La Clinica del Pueblo, 2831 15th St. NW, Washington, DC 20009-4607
- **DePelchin Children's Center** - Delivers screening, assessment, case management, and mental health services to children affected by trauma residing in four southeast counties in Texas. DePelchin focuses on children who are the victims of complex trauma or who suffer from trauma related to traumatic loss, abuse (physical, psychological, or sexual), maltreatment, or neglect. DePelchin works with the community to provide information and training on best practices in child trauma treatment, and to increase the availability of and improve access to mental health services in the Greater Houston metropolitan area. DePelchin's clientele are ethnically diverse and representative of the larger Houston community.  
⇒ Website: [www.depelchin.org](http://www.depelchin.org)  
⇒ Address: 4950 Memorial Dr., Houston, TX 77007
- **Latin American Health Institute** - Provides treatment and intervention services for Latino/Hispanic children and their families living in the Greater Boston area who have been impacted by traumatic events. The program is also focused on working with mental health providers that serve a diverse group of Latinos/Hispanics in Greater Boston and in other areas of Massachusetts to increase their knowledge of evidence-based interventions. The intended population has experienced losses, domestic and community violence, disasters, severe and chronic neglect, physical and sexual abuse, and chronic trauma.  
⇒ Website: [www.lhi.org](http://www.lhi.org)  
⇒ Address: 95 Berkeley St, Ste. 600, Boston, MA 02116-6246
- **Puerto Rican Family Institute** - The Puerto Rican Family Institute, founded in 1960, is a nonprofit, multi-program family oriented health and human service agency whose primary mission is to prevent family disintegration and enhance the self-sufficiency of the Latino/Hispanic community. The Puerto Rican Family Institute offers a comprehensive array of social and health care services that are culturally and linguistically relevant. Their services include mental health treatment, crisis intervention, placement prevention, residential care, and education. Their programs operate in the continental United States and in Puerto Rico. We serve a large immigrant population and have a solid record of success.  
⇒ Website: [www.prfi.org](http://www.prfi.org)  
⇒ Address: 145 W. 15th St., New York, NY 10011
- **Roberto Clemente Center** - An Outpatient Mental Health Clinic, The Roberto Clemente Family Guidance Program provides counseling and psychotherapy services with an emphasis in family counseling and family therapy. Other services provided are: individual therapy, group therapy, marital therapy, play therapy, and pharmacotherapy. Mental health professionals (Psychiatrists, Psychologists, Social Workers, and Counselors), all bilingual and bicultural, provide services for an active caseload of over 300 clients who represent the diversity of the Latino/Hispanic population.  
⇒ Website: [www.clementecenter.org](http://www.clementecenter.org)  
⇒ Address: 540 E. 13th St., New York, NY 10009

## Resources

National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention; website: [www.promoteprevent.org](http://www.promoteprevent.org)

National Council of La Raza; website: [www.nclr.org](http://www.nclr.org)

Population Reference Bureau; website: [www.prb.org](http://www.prb.org)

National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, Office of Technical Assistance; website: [www.nasmhpd.org/ntac.cfm](http://www.nasmhpd.org/ntac.cfm)

Buchanan, N. T., & Martinez, M. (2005, February). *Contextualizing mental health and resilience among Latina women: Negotiating in/visibility, acculturative stress, and identity politics*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Association for Women in Psychology, Women of Color Caucus, Women of Color: Reaching high, Going Far: A conference on Psychological Issues, Tampa, FL.

Pew Hispanic Center; website: [www.pewhispanic.org](http://www.pewhispanic.org)



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*\*Dichos translation: Each head is a world of its own.*

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