

Therapist Training and Support

Background

Despite research showing that significant numbers of Latino/Hispanic children experience trauma and that Latinos/Hispanics are over-represented in public welfare, child welfare, and the criminal justice systems, Latinos/Hispanics continue to be under-represented in health and mental health services (Ortiz Hendricks, Mason, & Valoy, 2008). One of the main barriers to service utilization by Latinos/Hispanics is the lack of available and accessible services that are culturally appropriate for Latinos/Hispanics (Carrillo, Trevino, Betancourt, & Coustasse, 2001). Although Latinos/Hispanics account for over 13 percent of the total U.S. population, they comprise only 4.6 percent of physicians, 4 percent of psychologists, and 7 percent of social workers (Institute of Medicine, 2004). "The majority of psychologists and social workers in the nation, who are the primary care providers in both the mental health and substance abuse fields, in 1998, were non-Latino/Hispanic whites, 84 percent and 65 percent respectively" (National Hispanic-Latino American Agenda Summit [NHAAS], 2004, p. 7). In addition to low rates of Latino/Hispanic service providers, there are also low rates of Spanish-speaking therapists who are knowledgeable and experienced in working with Latino/Hispanic families (Ortiz Hendricks et al., 2008).

*Lo que bien se aprende, nunca se olvida.**

Many graduate and post-graduate training programs have begun to incorporate issues of diversity and culture into their curricula over the past 20 years. However, there are very few programs that provide an in-depth focus on Latino/Hispanic issues to prepare therapists to work with this growing and diverse population (i.e. how to provide culturally competent services,

how to effectively engage Latinos/Hispanics to use services, how to work with Latino/Hispanic cultural values and belief systems at varying levels during the acculturation process). Many faculty in schools of social work and psychology may have doctoral degrees but may not have extensive field experience working with Latino/Hispanic communities.

There is a great need for educational and training programs that teach about cultural values and culturally appropriate practices for Latinos/Hispanics, including training on providing therapeutic services in Spanish. Bilingual clinicians in almost all programs in the United States are trained to provide services in English only and

often find it difficult to translate concepts and terminology of the therapeutic process into Spanish while working with clients (Castaño, Biever, González, & Anderson, 2007). Conversational fluency in social or family settings may not adequately prepare clinicians to provide professional services in Spanish, especially when clinicians are not supervised by a bilingual professional (Castaño et al., 2007).



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Continuing and professional education for current providers who work with Latino/Hispanic children affected by trauma is also needed, with a focus on culturally sensitive approaches to providing mental health services to Latinos/Hispanics (including awareness of and training on cultural adaptations to existing treatment models).

There is currently a lack of research on what methods of treatment work best with Latinos/Hispanics, and how to incorporate new modalities of treatment like evidence-based practices with Latinos (González & Ramos-González, 2005). Therefore, Latino/Hispanic children affected by trauma may not be benefiting as fully from the array of best practices that exist in the field.



Because of the low rates of bilingual and bi-cultural therapists compared to the needs of Latino/Hispanic populations, these providers are often over-utilized (i.e. higher caseloads, being asked to translate for other clinicians or to translate written materials), under-supported, and under-compensated. The additional time and energy required to provide treatment in two languages, access appropriate resources for undocumented families, and orient families to unfamiliar systems is not usually taken into account when determining caseloads (Engstrom & Min, 2004). Spanish-speaking clinicians are often isolated and do not receive supervision around issues of linguistic or cultural competence or opportunities to practice new skills or consult with colleagues or supervisors in Spanish. The challenges faced by bilingual clinicians and how they work with their Latino/Hispanic clients have not been adequately studied (Engstrom & Min, 2004).

Statement of the Issue

It is a national crisis for the Hispanic community when there are 29 Hispanic mental health professionals for every 100,000 Hispanics (Arias, 2003). Access and barriers to health/mental health care for Latinos/Hispanics include linguistic and cultural barriers to care (Carrillo et al., 2001). Most mental health providers do not speak Spanish and do not receive in-depth training in culturally appropriate services for Latino/Hispanic families. There is a need for greater focus among graduate and post-graduate training programs, as well as professional organizations and agencies, to better prepare clinicians to serve this growing population effectively. There is also a need for schools and institutions to promote research on best practices for Latino/Hispanic children affected by trauma. Clinicians who have developed specialized skills to work effectively with Latinos/Hispanics need more support in the field and need to be adequately compensated for their specialized skills, experience, and any additional workload or duties.



Recommendations from the Field



- **Increase recruitment of Latinos/Hispanics into graduate and post-graduate mental health programs.** Recruitment efforts can be aimed at undergraduate psychology, social work, and related programs as well as focusing on Latino/Hispanic student organizations. This includes advising and mentoring Latino/Hispanic students in higher education and developing scholarships, internships, and work-study opportunities for Latino/Hispanic students.
- **Graduate/post-graduate programs should incorporate culture-specific curricula.** Latino/Hispanic psychology, theories of multicultural counseling, Spanish language class for mental health providers (to develop proficiency in professional spoken and written Spanish and understand regional dialects), translating and applying psychological theories and interventions into Spanish, cultural values, acculturation, diversity among Latinos/Hispanics, and engaging Latino/Hispanic families in services. More schools should also offer the opportunity to earn a certificate in bilingual mental health services, and develop standards for bilingual certification.
- **Educational and training institutions should assess the cultural appropriateness and relevance of curricula, systems, policies, and practices.**
- **Schools of Social Work, Counseling, and Psychology should recruit and hire practitioners who have extensive experience working with Latino/Hispanic communities to teach or co-teach graduate courses.**
- **Practitioners should receive training in bilingual setting with culturally competent supervision.** Practitioners should have opportunities to practice providing services in Spanish and receiving bilingual supervision incorporating cultural issues at practicum sites (Lee et al., 1999).
- **Cultural and professional exchange programs should aid developing practitioners by providing opportunities for training and experience in a Latin American country** (i.e., a summer institute for bilingual clinicians.)
- **Schools, professional organizations, and agencies should provide more opportunities for training, continuing education, and consultation in cultural values and trauma-informed treatment for Latino/Hispanic children, including cultural adaptations of evidence-based practices.** Professional workshops and conferences should include more content related to working with Latino/Hispanic families.
- **Educational and professional institutions should promote research on best practices for Latino/Hispanic children affected by trauma** (i.e., incorporating cultural issues into research classes, supporting theses and dissertations related to Latinos/Hispanics, children, trauma, and treatment outcomes) **and special challenges faced by bilingual therapists working with this population.**
- **Clinicians and agencies should become familiar with and adhere to APA and NASW Cultural Guidelines.** Clinicians need to examine their own cultural attitudes, beliefs, and biases and understand the importance of multicultural responsiveness; educators/programs need to incorporate diversity into graduate programs and internships and ensure safe learning environment that promotes open discussion of cultural issues.
- **Clinicians and agencies should incorporate multicultural counseling competencies into practice.** These competencies include awareness and knowledge of the therapist's and client's cultural values and beliefs, experiences of discrimination, cultural history, and cultural identity, and how these factors impact treatment (Arredondo, et al., 1996). Competencies also include developing skills to work with diverse populations effectively.
- **Training and professional institutions and agencies should utilize instruments to assess multicultural training competence** (see Ponterotto, Rieger, Barrett, & Sparks, 1994, for review of several available measures).
- **Agencies should provide more linguistic resources for bilingual providers and adjust workloads to reflect additional duties performed by bilingual clinicians and complexities of their cases** (Engstrom & Min, 2004).
- **Increase opportunities for bilingual providers to participate in supervision/consultation in Spanish to increase support networks for bilingual providers and enhance professional proficiency across Latino/Hispanic sub-groups.**

Resilience

- Mental health training programs should highlight Latino/Hispanic cultural values (i.e., *familismo*) that serve as strengths and help buffer the impact of acculturative stress, discrimination, and trauma (see "Cultural Values" priority area for more information).
- Educational and research institutions should promote research on resilience among Latino/Hispanic children and families who are thriving despite trauma and/or child welfare involvement.
- Increase recruitment of more Latinos/Hispanics into graduate programs in mental health as students and faculty. This promotes opportunities for professional advancement and mentoring.

- **Salaries/compensation to be commensurate with experience and specialized skills, such as the ability to provide culturally appropriate services in Spanish and translation services.**

Family/Youth Engagement

- Engage Latino/Hispanic families/consumers in the process of identifying what additional cultural training is needed in graduate programs as well as continuing education for professionals.
- Hold focus groups with consumers to inform institutions on how to improve training on cultural issues in the field of mental health and trauma treatment.

Community Examples/Best Practices



- **Our Lady of the Lake University, Department of Psychology: Psychological Services for Spanish Speaking Populations** - Provides a certification program that incorporates bilingual and culturally relevant coursework, a cultural and language immersion program taught in Mexico, and bilingual practice opportunities in the U.S. and Spanish-speaking countries. Specific information on the program can be found at www.ollusa.edu/s/346/images/editor_documents/Psych/PSSSP%20program.pdf.
⇒ Website: <http://www.ollusa.edu>
⇒ Address: 411 SW 24th St., San Antonio, TX 78207
- **University of Connecticut, Puerto Rican and Latino Studies Project in the School of Social Work** - Helps prepare social workers to competently serve the Latino community and to advocate and promote changes that safeguard and enhance the quality of life of Latino individuals, families, and communities locally, regionally, and nationally.
⇒ Website: <http://web.uconn.edu/prlsp>
- **Learning Collaborative Approach** - This approach focuses on spreading, adopting, and adapting best practices across multiple settings and creating changes in organizations that promote the delivery of effective interventions and services, including effectively adapting interventions to fit the needs of Latino/Hispanic clients. The Learning Collaborative Toolkit can be downloaded from www.nctsn.org/nctsn_assets/pdfs/lc/module_all.pdf.
- **National Latina/o Psychological Association** - Provides opportunities for consultation and networking among Latino psychologists with diverse backgrounds, professional development workshops and conferences, and resources.
⇒ Website: <http://nlpa.ws>

Resources



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**Dichos translation: A lesson well learned is never forgotten.*

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