

Destigmatizing Therapy and Maintaining Healthy Connections in the Latinx Community

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Abstract

Mental health has, historically, been stigmatized in the Latinx community. Given the collectivistic culture, family is important; however, feelings and emotions are rarely discussed or processed within the nuclear family due to this stigmatization. Thus, exploring attachments and healthy connections can help promote overall wellbeing and maintain secure healthy relationships. The creation of a bilingual children's book as a therapeutic teaching tool can help open dialogue within Latinx families and discussion of feelings, emotions, and even therapy. This would aid the development of coping skills facilitate familial cohesion within Latinx families as well as the community at large.

INTRODUCTION

- Mental health and therapy has been very stigmatized in the Latinx/Hispanic community (Abreu et al., 2020; Adames & Chavez-Duenas, 2017; Benuto et al., 2019)
- Research shows that developing appropriate coping skills reduces the risk of psychological disorders and promotes overall wellbeing (Narr et al., 2019; Richardson & Jost, 2019)
- Studies show those with positive social relationships develop better coping skills (Richardson & Jost, 2019)
- The Latinx/ Hispanic community collectivistic culture prioritizes family as a unit
 - However, feelings and emotions are rarely discussed or processed (Abreu et al., 2020; De Guzman & Carlo, 2014)
- Strong collectivistic views are influenced by parental/ family values and can affect children in a negative way if not appropriate or healthy (Abreu et al., 2020; De Guzman & Carlo, 2014; Villarruel et al., 2009)
- Racial and ethnic minorities experience greater risk of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2021)

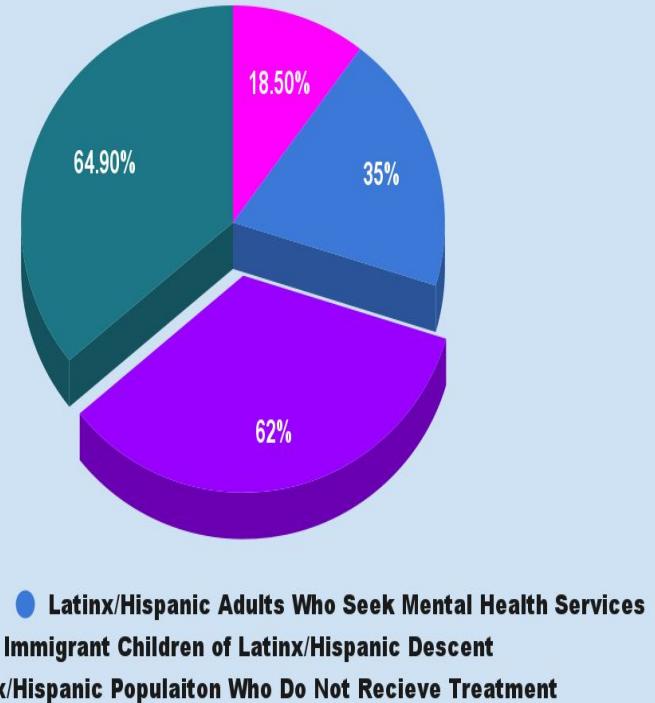
HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS, ATTACHMENTS & COPING SKILLS

- Attachment is an important part of development
 - Each interaction helps further deepen a bond
 - Connections are pivotal and begin the process of attachments (Beduna & Perrone-McGoverne, 2019)
- Thoughts, feelings and behaviors are influenced by attachment security, or a Secure attachment
 - The stronger the bond between child and caregiver the stronger the attachment (Davila et al., 2017)
- Healthy attachments aid and maintain healthy relationships
 - Connections are modeled and carried into future relationships
 - Children view as a guide on how to manage and view their relationships(Grevenstein et al., 2019; Homan & Sirois, 2017; Zessin et al., 2015)
- Promotes security and healthy attachment, leading to both physical and psychological overall well-being and satisfaction with life
(Davila et al., 2017)
- By expanding coping skills children adapt to situations better, which serves as a protective factor and promotes continuous secure attachments (Mishara & Ystgaard, 2006)

BACKGROUND

- According to the United States Census Bureau (2019) 18.5% reports being Latinx/Hispanic
- 62% of Immigrant Children are of Latinx descent (Perreira et al., 2006).
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- The National Alliance of Mental Health [NAMI] (2022) stated that 35.1% of adults with mental illness receive treatment, compared to 2007 statistics of <9%
- However, 64.9% have not received mental health services despite potential need (Mental Health America [MHA], 2022)

Latinx Statistics



BACKGROUND

The Latinx/Hispanic community face disparities due to systemic and institutional limitations. As a result treatment is not accessible or sought after.

Barriers Include:



Socioeconomic
Status

- **Poverty**



Access to Health
Insurance

- **Treatment
Coverage**



Cultural
Issues

- **Legal Status**
- **Acculturation Issues**
- **Language Barriers**



Stigma

- **Religion**
- **Shame about
feelings**

- Without treatment mental health conditions worsen
- Stigmatization can lead to prolonged effects to overall well-being

(Benuto et al., 2019; Barrio et al., 2008; Lopez et al., 2008; NAMI, 2022; MHA, 2022; SAMSHA, 2022)

BACKGROUND

Barriers continued

- On average 17% of the Latinx/ Hispanic population in the U.S. live in poverty
- 18% of Latinx Hispanixs in the U.S. do not have access to healthcare
- Research shows that in the Latinx/ Hispanic population, older adults and youth are more susceptible to mental distress relating to immigration and acculturation.
 - *Fears of deportation*
- Language barriers and fears of cultural competencies are also results in minimal treatment seeking for concerns with misdiagnosis and issues with communication

- Mental Health of America (MHA) 2022, reported that individuals prefer to monitor themselves or seek help from peers.
- *Only 5% of Latinx/Hispanic population seeks treatment from specialist as they request assistance from primary care physician*
- Although religion serves as protective factor, it may also result in stigma, due to beliefs of lack of faith
 - *Fears of shame and embarrassment*
 - *Fears of being seen as "Loca/o"- "Crazy"*
- Lack of knowledge on where or how to seek help

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

- The creation of a Spanish and English bilingual children's book as a therapeutic psychoeducational teaching tool for children aged 6-11.
- Help open dialogue within Latinx families and discussion of feelings, emotions, and destigmatize therapy. As well as, aid in the development of coping skills to formulate and maintain healthy relationships, attachment and family cohesion



PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

- Spanish and English (translated) book for children aged 6-11
 - Beginning of academic journey
 - Usually when children's behavioral problems ensue or are better recognized
 - Social and cognitive capabilities begin to change
(Huffman et al., 2000; McLeod & Kaiser, 2004)
- "Little Books" - Narrow text of difficulty with bright colorful illustrations (Hoffman et al., 2006; Menon & Heibert, 2005),
- First grade reading level
 - Highest variable range of reading level, per the Scholastic Guided Reading Level (Hoffman et al., 2006).
- Reading is a form of coping
 - Children will learn if they remain engaged, and intrigued (Lowe, 2009; Wong, 2008)
- Children's book with relatable characters and families of Latinx/Hispanic cultural norms can help with emotions, normalize situations for them, while developing additional coping skills (Nathenson-Mejia & Escamilla, 2003; Villaruel et al., 2009)

SIGNIFICANCE TO THE FIELD

- In need of specific, tailored tool for Latinx communities.
 - Specific to children, to help reduce mental health stigma, engage families in mental health services, and aid in the development of coping skills
- Provide additional knowledge to the field and fill the existing gap for working with Latinx communities.
- Development of a therapeutic tool as a children's book that's engaging and can help open up dialogue to destigmatize having feelings, emotions & therapy as well as aid in coping skills early on in life would be beneficial to the community.
 - Provides a therapeutic tool / psychoeducation available to youth, clinicians, teachers, and family members to aid with the development of coping skills to teach children healthier ways to deal with life stressors. As well as maintain and strengthen connections into adulthood.
- Provide insight to other cultures on how to help healthy relationships flourish

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