



Brightening lives. Building futures.

## Mental Health Issues among Hispanic Immigrants

Mental health disorders affect almost one-third of Americans during their lifetime.<sup>1</sup> Although research among Hispanic immigrants has been limited, data show that of those who suffer from mental health problems, only 1 in 20 use mental health services. Although the percentage of Spanish-speaking mental health professionals is unknown, only about 1% of APA-licensed psychologists identify as Latino. Immigrants from Mexico who have lived in the U.S. less than 13 years have a lower prevalence of mental health problems than those of Mexican heritage who were born here, suggesting that factors associated with living in the U.S. may be related to increased risk of mental health disorders.<sup>2</sup>

Based on the experiences of Mattie Rhodes Center's programs, as well as similar programs in California,<sup>3</sup> a number of aspects of the immigration experience may contribute to mental health problems. Some Hispanic immigrants may encounter unexpected stress associated with adapting to a new environment and culture. A faster pace of life, unstable housing, language barriers, difficult work conditions, and separation from family and friends may begin to take their toll. Despite the fact that immigrants often work long hours or more than one job, some continue to live in poverty and have difficulty making ends meet. For those who have come to the U.S. illegally in search of education and employment opportunities, living with the chronic fear of being discovered only adds to the stress. Some immigrants have come to the U.S. to flee violence and conflict in their own countries, often traumatizing them with psychological wounds that have not yet healed.

For many Hispanic immigrants, such hardships and feelings of isolation may lead to depression, anxiety, substance abuse, fatigue, difficulty concentrating and sleeping, sexual dysfunction, domestic violence, child abuse or neglect and eating disorders.

Some immigrants may not seek help for a number of reasons. Because awareness and knowledge of mental disorders may be limited in this population, they may not recognize these problems or describe them in different ways. They may feel ashamed or worried about the stigma associated with mental health problems and family dysfunction. In addition, they may have limited access to mental health services if they are not covered by health insurance and can not afford to pay for services out of pocket. Although they may qualify for government subsidized and non-profit mental health services, a lack of awareness regarding community resources may limit access. Lastly, distrust of the health care system may stem from fear of the unknown, difficulty communicating with providers, or past experiences of discrimination and racism, negatively impacting a Latino immigrant's decision to seek assistance.

As the U.S. Hispanic population continues to grow, public health and health care professionals must begin to address the issues outlined above through prevention and clinical research, as well as offering culturally and linguistically appropriate mental health evaluation and treatment.

### **Our Mission**

Mattie Rhodes Center bridges cultures and communities through arts, mental health and social services.

We empower individuals and families through culturally competent, bilingual services in a respectful and compassionate environment.

<http://www.mattierhodes.org>

### **Our Programs & Services**

Mattie Rhodes Center offers a continuum of culturally competent social and mental health services, as well as visual arts programs, all of which are offered in Spanish and/or English.

**Counseling and case management** for individuals, couples and families

**Nuevo Amanecer/New Dawn** offers substance abuse treatment, outreach and education.

**Promotora Program** includes parent education & support groups.

**Nuevo Día/New Day** offers domestic violence therapy, case management & advocacy.

**Visions with Hope 360°** assists Latino children with developmental disabilities and their families

**G.L.O.B.E.** is a youth development program for urban middle and high school students.

**Visual arts education and gallery** for children & adults

#### Sources:

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- California Policy Research Center, 2004. *Tales of Coming and Going and Mental Health: Manual for Health Promotores/as*. Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California, California-Mexico Health Initiative. [www.ucop.edu/cprc/cmhi.html](http://www.ucop.edu/cprc/cmhi.html).

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