

Recognizing Depression in Latino Adolescents

Strategies for Pediatric Nurses to Reduce Health Disparities

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Introduction

A major public health goal in the United States is to eliminate health disparities in minority populations. The National Institutes of Health has prioritized reduction of health disparities as one of its top 3 goals. Recent evidence shows that Latino adolescents have a higher incidence of depression than Non-Hispanic Caucasians and other ethnic groups. However, Latino adolescents face extensive barriers in obtaining mental health services. The impact of depression is a major health concern for the Latino family and community at large. Untreated depression significantly increases the risk of suicidal ideations and suicide. Suicide is the third leading cause of death among adolescents. The latest gold standard, evidence based recommendations, state that adolescents should be screened for major depressive disorder. Pediatric nurses have long been on the vanguard of health sponsorship, including mental health promotion. They are in a prime position to assess and screen for depression and suicidal ideations and reduction in health disparities; and thus create a linkage with health care and community partners.

Prevalence

- Latinas are at high risk for depression
- Latinas between the ages of 14 and 15 years have the highest risk of depressive symptoms
- 30 - 40% of Latinas report suicidal thoughts
- 14 - 19% of Latinas report suicide attempt
- 11% of all Latino students state they have attempted suicide
- Latinos are more likely than their African American and Caucasian counterparts to make a suicide plan and to attempt suicide
- Latinos consistently demonstrate a higher prevalence of depression and suicidal ideation than their Latino counterparts
- Latinos have twice as high a risk of depressive symptoms compared to Non-Latino Caucasians
- 1 in 5 Latino high school students have had suicidal thoughts in the past year
- 1 in 5 Latinas have attempted suicide nationally
- U.S. born Latinas have higher risk of suicide

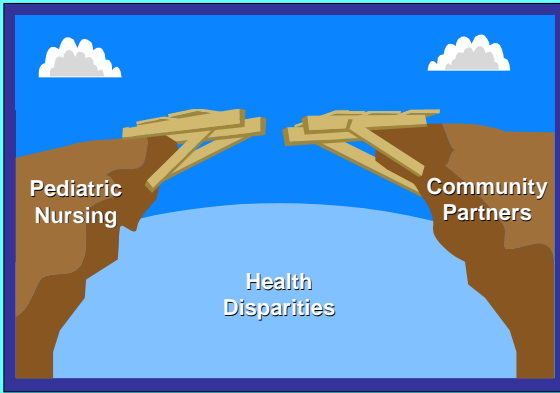
Risk Factors for Depression

- Poor support system at school
- Single parent household
- Competition for grades
- High stress levels
- Low acculturation
- School violence
- Latino ethnicity
- Female



Signs and Symptoms	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Irritability or crying Anxiety Poor school performance Social isolation Use of alcohol and drugs Low energy levels Less inclined to develop supportive relationships with parents, peers and teachers Inability to perform normal activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aggression Attempts at harming self Difficulty getting along with others Loss of interest in activities Change in sleep or eating habits or physical appearance Recklessness Skipping school Constant complaining Unresolved physical complaints

Treatment Partnerships: Bridging the Health Disparities Gap



Strategies

- Identify Latino cultural preferences
- Adapt traditional treatment approaches
- Incorporate cultural values and attitudes
- Ease access to primary care settings
- Spanish speaking language service
- Bilingual therapist and support staff
- Community Resources
 - Outreach to community leaders
 - Involve schools counselors
 - Involve religious leaders

Cultural Barriers May Prevent Seeking Help

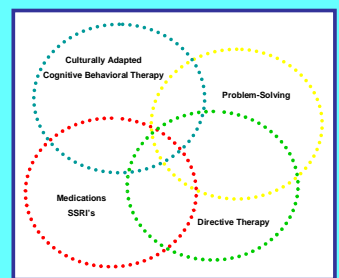
- Mistrust
- Communication barriers
- Medication addiction concern
- Cultural values and fear of stigma
- Life experiences
- Belief that problems should not be discussed outside one's family
- Religiosity
- Supernatural beliefs



Underutilization of Mental Health Services

- Cultural insensitivity by healthcare providers
- Lower socio-economic status
- Lack of insurance
- Lower educational levels

Treatment Options



- Can involve one or any combination
- Latinos are less likely to use medication secondary to fear of addiction

Conclusion

Latinos are the largest minority group of children in the U.S. but there are few studies which include this population. Latino adolescents have a higher incidence of untreated depression which can lead to suicide. The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports an increasing prevalence of suicidal behavior among Latino adolescents. Latinos are more likely than their African-American and Caucasian counterparts to make a suicide plan and attempt suicide. There is a paucity of nursing and medical research studies focused on Latino youths related to depression and suicide. Several studies show that Latino youth receive lower quality of health care. This impacts their accessibility to needed resources. In order to decrease the health disparity observed in this population more research is needed to identify the magnitude of this problem and target effective interventions. The role of the pediatric nurse is essential in bridging the gap for health equality.