

Suicide Among Hispanic And Latino Communities 2.0

Published by The National Hispanic and Latino PTTC
Date of publication: July 2022



Introduction

The mini e-book was developed to provide information and resources to prevention professionals, providers, and community members on the topic of suicide prevention, the impact in the Hispanic and Latino communities, specific data on suicide among Latino men and women, risk, and protective factors.

There is also information on the relationship between substance use and suicide, warning signs of suicide, tips for providers, family members, friends, and resources to better support our communities on the issue.

We hope this resource is useful for you, and we hope you can share the information with your family, friends, and colleagues.

Inclusivity Statement: The National Hispanic and Latino PTTC understands that there is a lot of important discussion focusing on the terminology individuals choose to use for racial, ethnic, heritage, and cultural identification. There are different terms such as Latinos, Latinas, Hispanics, Latinx, Latine, Chicano, and others, all equally valuable. We advocate for self-identification for every person. For purposes of this resource and additional materials, our Center will be using the term Latina and Hispanic.



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THE FACTS

As one of the leading causes of death, suicide is a significant public health issue. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), suicide is death by the intentional injuring of oneself with the intention of death ¹. A suicide attempt is when an individual takes steps to harm themselves, but they did not die from their actions ¹. Furthermore, the interpersonal theory of suicide (ITS) states that in order for individuals to die by the act of suicide, they must demonstrate two core components: the yearning to kill one's self, and the capability of performing fatal behaviors ².

Suicide has become a significant issue within the United States by being ranked the 10th leading cause of death within the nation ³. In 2020, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) reported nearly 45,979 from suicide, averaging out to almost 130 deaths each day ². Suicidal desire includes thoughts, feelings, and behaviors relating to a poor self-concept, lack of interpersonal relationships, social withdrawal, isolation, and feelings of being a burden to others ². According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, the desire to belong and experience love is an essential need that surpasses safety and physiological needs.

SUICIDE IN THE HISPANIC AND LATINO COMMUNITY

The Hispanic and Latino community is the fastest growing population within the United States and makes up 18.5% of the total population ⁴. Although Hispanics and Latinos maintain the lowest suicide rates in the United States among other racial/ethnic groups, that does diminish the adverse effect it has on this community ⁵. Suicide ranks as the 11th leading cause of death for the Hispanic and Latino community. However, suicide is the third leading cause of death for Hispanics and Latinos ages 15-24 ².

There are four determinants of suicide risk among Hispanics and Latinos: suicidal behaviors, depressed mood/suicidal thoughts, substance abuse, and engagement in violence. It has been found that substance abuse, violence, and depression often co-occur in most Hispanics and Latinos that attempt suicide.

SUICIDE AMONG HISPANIC AND LATINA WOMEN

Research suggests that Hispanic and Latino females, particularly adolescents, are considered a high-risk group for suicide and report higher levels of suicidal thoughts and attempts than Hispanic and Latino males ⁶.

This could be due to their increased exposure to poverty, high crime rates, low-quality housing/schooling, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, low self-esteem, family conflict, and acculturation ⁷.

SUICIDE AMONG HISPANIC AND LATINO MEN

Men are taught and socialized to NOT be vulnerable and to NOT share their emotions. As a result, men often face challenges when it comes to recognizing, seeking help for, and/or accessing care for behavioral health. Hispanic men are less likely to seek



professional help because of barriers like stigma, gender role conflict, cultural beliefs, economic restraints, and more [8](#).

COVID-19 has disproportionately affected our communities. Historical issues before the pandemic worsened during COVID-19, including substance abuse, job loss, poor access to care and the stigma of mental illness in the Latino community. According to Salud America, the suicide death rate for Hispanic and Latino men is more than four times the rate for Hispanic and Latina women. In fact, more Latino men are dying by suicide, even as the national rate declines [9](#).

RISK FACTORS

There are many risk factors that are associated with suicide. These risk factors include poor mental health, Familismo, social determinants of health, and acculturation. Studies indicate that more than 16% of the Hispanic and Latino population in the United States suffer from a mental health condition, and only 5% willingly choose to seek professional treatment [4](#) [6](#). Individuals may choose not to seek treatment due to the negative stigma attached to mental health in the Hispanic and Latino culture, in which they do not want to bring shame to the family unit. Furthermore, poor mental health conditions may be caused acculturation stress and language barrier issues [6](#).

Familismo is a cultural value involving loyalty, unity, and obligation to nuclear and extended family [2](#). Family may be a substantial risk factor for suicidality amongst the Hispanic and Latino community. Hispanic and Latino children are raised to strongly value the family unit and prioritize the family's needs over their own [two](#). If one does not live up to the family's expectations, feelings of being a burden may arise and lead to depression [2](#).

Additionally, the role of sacrifice in the family may have an adverse effect on the those that choose to leave their family unit in order to improve overall family wellness and conditions back home [2](#). This sacrifice may result in loss of social support, perceived isolation, and ambivalence toward how their departure will improve family conditions [2](#).

The social determinants of health greatly influence suicidal ideation among this population. Based on survey results from a research study, Hispanics and Latinos are less likely to have a college degree, more likely to live in a lower-income household, and more likely to lack healthcare insurance compared to their White counterparts [10](#). Some social determinants of health that specifically impact this population include poverty, discrimination, and lack of access to healthcare. Nearly 5 million Hispanic and Latino children live in poverty in 2020 [11](#). Poor living conditions are a high-risk factor for suicide due to the exposure of neighborhood violence and substance abuse, resulting in decreased life satisfaction [10](#).

Acculturation acts as a major risk factor for suicidality among Hispanic and Latinos. It is reported that second-generation Latino adolescents with immigrant parents are nearly



three times more likely to perform a suicide attempt than first-generation youth due to immigration status and demonstrating difficulty adapting to a new culture ⁷. Research indicated that Latina women are more likely to suffer from suicidal ideation due to language barriers and failing to master the English language ⁶.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

While there are risk factors associated with suicide, there are also protective factors, including Familismo, faith, resilience, and collectivism. A strong family unit (Familismo) is a protective factor against suicidality among both male and female Hispanics and Latinos ². Individuals feel a sense of belonging, support, and solidarity with family members, resulting in better mental health outcomes ². Additionally, parent connectedness and bonding are resiliency factors for suicide ideation in Hispanic and Latino youth ².

Another factor offering protection against suicide risk is religion or faith. Religious faith is an important value in the Hispanic and Latino culture, and individuals often turn to their religion as a coping mechanism for feelings of distress ¹². Religious communities also often offer support and services that may not always be available to Hispanic and Latino individuals.

Resilience is another protective factor that may impact one's risk for suicide. Hispanic and Latino youth demonstrate the capability of academic success, but due to low SES (socio-economic status), many youth are more susceptible to academic failure and drop-out, resulting in poorer life satisfaction ¹³. Fortunately, resilience acts as a protective factor in academic settings regardless of potential risk factors such as low SES ^{thirteen}. Resilience-building occurs in school and classroom settings where students can experience quality teaching and learning, effective leadership, collaborative relationships, and emotional support from educators. Resilience among Hispanic and Latino youth offers them meaning and guidance in their schooling experiences, which contribute to overall academic success ¹³.

However, many Hispanic and Latino youth do not receive high-quality schooling experiences that build upon resiliency skills, which urges a need for academic programs that aim to foster resiliency among disadvantaged students.

Collectivism is the interdependence of members within a group including social roles, duties, and obligations, which strongly ties into the value of Familismo in the Hispanic and Latino culture ¹⁴. Collectivism also serves as a protective factor against suicide. Through collectivism within the family unit, members are able to experience feelings of devotion, reliability, and mutual obligation, which all contribute to greater life satisfaction ¹⁴. Research suggests that the transition of going to college is typically more difficult for minority students, particularly members of the Hispanic and Latino population ¹⁴. However, these students are able to utilize their protective factor of collectivism within their family unit to form strong social relationships with peers to cope through the stress of being a first-time college student ¹⁴.



THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUBSTANCE USE AND SUICIDE

Research indicates that Hispanics and Latinos experience more issues pertaining to substance abuse than non-Hispanic Whites [15](#). It is reported that alcohol is the most widely used substance for Hispanics and Latinos living in the United States due to reasons such as acculturation stress and anxiety-related issues [15](#). Using alcohol as a coping mechanism increases the risk of developing an alcohol-related disorder, furthering the risk for suicidal thoughts [15](#). In 2019, 8.9 million Hispanic and Latino adults had a mental illness and/or substance abuse disorder, which increased 3.7% from 2018 [16](#).

Research indicates that marijuana use disorder (MUD), in addition to other illegal substances, has a strong correlation with mental health problems and suicidality [21](#). Marijuana use is highest among Hispanic and Latino youth and could become a gateway drug to other illicit drugs [17](#).

Illicit drug use increases among immigrant generations status for U.S. Hispanic and Latino adolescents as a result of acculturation stress [18](#). According to SAMHSA, in 2018, 1.7 million Hispanics and Latinos engaged in opioid misuse (heroin prescription opioids) [19](#).

KNOW THE SIGNS OF SUICIDE [20](#)

- Talking about the yearning to die or kill oneself
- Talking about feelings of hopelessness or having no purpose
- Talking about feeling burdensome toward others
- Substance use: increased or excessive use
- Feelings of anxiety, depression, agitation, or rage
- Social withdrawal and isolation
- Recklessness and excessive risk taking
- Frequent mood changes

SUICIDE PREVENTION TIPS FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

- Check in with your loved ones
- Ask them questions regarding their feelings and experiences
- Offer them emotional support
- Raise suicide awareness within your community
- Break down stigma attached to mental health and treatment services

SUICIDE PREVENTION TIPS FOR PROVIDERS

- Provide Hispanics and Latinos with culturally sensitive medical and treatment services
- Increase access to bilingual services
- Hire healthcare professionals from different ethnic/racial backgrounds to promote diversity



THERAPEUTIC APPROACH

Emphasis on creating culturally appropriate therapy services for Hispanic and Latinos [17](#).

- Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)
- Dialectical behavior therapy
- Mindfulness CBT
- Relapse prevention CBT

COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS

[Life is Precious](#): Suicide prevention program geared toward Latina youth and adolescents [7](#).

Rosa M. Gil, the president and CEO of Comunilife led the development of the Life is Precious (LIP) program. Community-led focus groups met with Latinas and their mothers to discover what areas of support were needed to reduce suicidality rates among adolescent Latinas. Areas of support include promoting family relationships, academic support, creative expression, acculturation, and wellness education regarding body positivity and healthy foods. Referrals for this program may come from mental health clinics, schools, hospitals, and self-referrals.

Programs from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

[Talk Saves Lives](#): Talk Saves Lives is AFSP's standardized education program that provides participants with a clear understanding of this leading cause of death, including the most up-to-date research on suicide prevention, and what they can do in their communities to save lives.

Participants will learn common risk factors and warning signs associated with suicide, and how to keep themselves and others safe. The standard Talk Saves Lives presentation is available in Spanish.

[More than Sad](#): More Than Sad has taught over a million students and educators how to be smarter about mental health. There are specific programs tailored to high school students, parents, and teachers. Presentations and materials are available in English and Spanish.

MESSAGE OF HOPE

Together we can overcome suicidality among the Hispanic and Latino population by putting an emphasis on culture within communities and healthcare settings. Education is power and culture is prevention! It is essential to rely on protective factors including collectivism and faith to strengthen the hope and resilience within you to defeat suicidal thoughts and tendencies.

Are you feeling alone? We encourage you to search for professional help, prioritize your health, look for support centers, talk about your challenges with someone you trust, and know that you are not alone. You are worthy!



Additional Resources

You can visit the following websites for additional support and information.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Toll Free: 1-888-628-9454 English: 1-800-273-TALK (8255) (TTY): 1-800-799-4TTY (4889) Spanish: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/en-espanol/>
English: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

SAMHSA's National Helpline

Toll-Free: 1-800-662-HELP
24/7/365 Treatment Referral Information Service in English and Español
Website: <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>

SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Helpline

Toll Free: 1-800-985-5990 (español e inglés)
Text in Spanish: Envíe "Háblanos" al 66746
Text in English: "TalkWithUs" al 66746 (TTY): 1-800-846-8517 English
English: <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline>
Spanish: <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline/espanol>

SAMHSA Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator: <https://findtreatment.gov>

[Resources on Suicide Prevention](#): List of resources compiled by the National Hispanic and Latino PTTC.

[CDC - Preventing Suicide](#): A Technical Package of Policy, Programs, and Practices



References

1. [CDC: Facts About Suicide](#)
2. [Examining the effect of ethnicity in the interpersonal theory of suicide](#)
3. [NIH Suicide](#)
4. [What to know about mental health conditions and the Latinx community](#)
5. [Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#)
6. [Factors in major depressive disorder and suicidality among Spanish-speaking Latino patients](#)
7. [Life is precious](#)
8. [Hispanic Men's Attitudes Toward Mental Health Treatment](#)
9. [Salud America: More Latino Men Are Dying by Suicide, even as the National Rate Declines](#)
10. [Discrimination in the United States: Experiences of Latinos](#)
11. [Latino Child Poverty Rose During the COVID-19 Pandemic, Especially Among Children in Immigrant Families](#)
12. [The Role of Religion and Spirituality in the Association Between Hope and Anxiety in a Sample of Latino Youth](#)
13. [Fostering an environment for resilience among Latino youth: Characteristics of a successful college readiness program](#)
14. [Identifying the role of sociodemographic factors in major depressive disorder and suicidality among Spanish-speaking Latino patients in a federally qualified health center](#)
15. [Emotion dysregulation as a mechanism linking anxiety and hazardous drinking among Latinos in primary care](#)
16. [2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Hispanics](#)
17. [A brief report on Hispanic youth marijuana use: Trends in substance abuse treatment admissions in the United States](#)
18. [A Cross-National Comparison of Suicide Attempts, Drug Use, and Depressed Mood Among Dominican Youth](#)
19. [The Opioid Crisis and The Hispanic/Latino Population: An Urgent Issue](#)
20. [Opportunities to intervene? "Warning signs" for suicide in the days before dying](#)
21. [Marijuana Use, Recent Marijuana Initiation, and Progression to Marijuana Use Disorder Among Young Male and Female Adolescents Aged 12-14 Living in US Households](#)



Acknowledgment

Published in 2022 by the National Hispanic and Latino Prevention Technology Transfer Center (PTTC), National Latino Behavioral Health Association (NLBHA) P.O. Box 1360, Pena Blanca, NM 87041.

PTTCnetwork.org/hispaniclatino

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The opinions expressed herein are the view of PTTC Network and do not reflect the official position of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), SAMHSA. No official support or endorsement of DHHS, SAMHSA, for the opinions described in this document is intended or should be inferred.

This work is supported by grants 1U79SP023012 from the Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Published 2022.