



# SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESS (SMI) AND SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER (SUD) AMONG HISPANIC AND LATINO COMMUNITIES

March, 2023

## INTRODUCTION

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, Serious Mental Illness (SMI) is described to be a mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder that causes functional impairment and debilitates a person's ability to participate in everyday life.<sup>1</sup>

SMI includes disorders such as bipolar disorder, major depressive disorder, schizophrenia, and schizoaffective disorder.<sup>2</sup>

In the United States, an estimated 14.2 million adults live with an SMI.<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately, society has more recently become open to discussing topics related to depression and anxiety. However, much stigma and taboo surround more severe mental conditions, making it extremely difficult for those suffering from an SMI to seek a diagnosis, support, and treatment, especially members of the Hispanic and Latino communities.



## MENTAL HEALTH AND THE HISPANIC AND LATINO COMMUNITIES

Research has indicated that only 20% of Hispanics and Latinos with a mental disorder in the United States discuss it with their primary care doctor, and only 10% follow through with treatment.<sup>3</sup>

In the Hispanic and Latino cultures, many view mental illness as an indication of weakness and a personal fault that must remain private for fear of shame and being labeled crazy.<sup>3</sup>

For example, those diagnosed with schizophrenia are often viewed as violent and unpredictable due to symptoms such as hallucinations, delusions, affective dysregulation, and cognitive dysfunction.<sup>4</sup>

The harsh stigma associated with this SMI can enhance its symptoms by triggering relapse episodes and psychosis, worsening their already compromised state of mind and well-being.<sup>4</sup>

## References

1. [Mental Health Information - Statistics](#)
2. [What is Serious Mental Health Illness?](#)
3. [Overcoming Mental Health Stigma in the Latino Community](#)
4. [The Burden of Mental Illness Beyond Clinical Symptoms: Impact of Stigma on the Onset and Course of Schizophrenia Spectrum Disorders](#)
5. [Alcohol and Drug Abuse Among the Hispanic Population](#)



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## MENTAL HEALTH AND THE HISPANIC AND LATINO COMMUNITIES (CONT.)

Because of suppressing these severe mental conditions, many Hispanics and Latinos resort to unhealthy coping mechanisms like substance use. An estimated 7.1% of Hispanic and Latino Americans have a substance use disorder, compared to a total population rate of 7.4%.<sup>5</sup>

Drugs and alcohol make it easy to temporarily escape the pain and suffering of an SMI, urging substance use to be a more desirable outlet for those choosing not to receive appropriate treatment. However, developing a substance use disorder because of an SMI could result in life-threatening consequences.

Encouraging others to be more open in having conversations regarding highly stigmatized and taboo mental health conditions will normalize these shared experiences and inspire those suffering from an SMI to receive appropriate support and treatment, paving the road to recovery!

**Click here to visit our website to access more information.**

**[National Hispanic and Latino Prevention  
Technology Transfer Center](#)**

### References

1. [Mental Health Information - Statistics](#)
2. [What is Serious Mental Health Illness?](#)
3. [Overcoming Mental Health Stigma in the Latino Community](#)
4. [The Burden of Mental Illness Beyond Clinical Symptoms: Impact of Stigma on the Onset and Course of Schizophrenia Spectrum Disorders](#)
5. [Alcohol and Drug Abuse Among the Hispanic Population](#)

### Helpful Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

5600 Fishers Lane

Rockville, MD 20857

Toll-free: 1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727)

TTY: 1-800-487-4889

Email: [samhsainfo@samhsa.hhs.gov](mailto:samhsainfo@samhsa.hhs.gov)

SAMHSA Store: <https://store.samhsa.gov>

SAMHSA Disaster Technical Assistance Center

Toll-free: 1-800-308-3515

Email: [dtac@samhsa.hhs.gov](mailto:dtac@samhsa.hhs.gov)

Website: <https://www.samhsa.gov/dtac>

SAMHSA Disaster Mobile App

Website: <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/samhsa-disaster>

SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline

Toll-free talk or text: 1-800-985-5990

Español: Llama o envía un mensaje de texto 1-800-985-5990 presiona "2".

American Sign Language (ASL): Click on the "ASL Now" button on the website or call 1-800-985-5990 from your videophone.

Website: <https://disasterdistress.samhsa.gov>

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call or text: 988

Chat: [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org)

(Español) Línea de Prevención del Suicidio y Crisis: 988

For TTY users: Use your preferred relay service or dial

711 and then 988.

Website: <https://988lifeline.org>

Website (español): <https://988lifeline.org/help-yourself/en-espanol>

SAMHSA's National Helpline

Toll-free: 1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357) (24/7/365

treatment referral information service in English and español)

TTY: 1-800-487-4889

Website: <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>

National Latino Behavioral Health Association **NLBHA**

**SAMHSA**  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration