

LATINOS/ HISPANICS



Some people prefer the term Latino to describe their ethnic heritage because it emphasizes a geographical area and is inclusive of many cultures. Others prefer the term Hispanic, which emphasizes the Spanish heritage and parallels the Census term. Most probably identify themselves by their country of origin.

Most Latinos/Hispanics come to the United States as immigrants, with the exception of Cubans, some Columbians, El Salvadorans, Nicaraguans, and Guatemalans who may have refugee status. Mexican immigrants, the largest of the Latino/Hispanic groups, typically come to this country escaping difficult economic conditions in their homelands. They come to the United States looking for jobs in order to earn enough to support their families back home and to escape life-threatening poverty. Many Mexican men travel thousands of miles to work dangerous low-paying jobs with no benefits, living for months away from their families and returning to Mexico perhaps only twice a year to visit their loved ones.

South American immigrants often come to the United States as students or with work visas. Though they, too, desire to improve their economic status, the majority of South American immigrants are of a more



• DID YOU KNOW?

- Latino/Hispanic is an ethnic group, rather than a racial group, comprised of individuals from over 20 different countries.
- Latinos/Hispanics are the largest minority in the country. According to the U.S. Census Bureau there are 35.3 million Latinos/Hispanics in the United States, and 15,985 in Guilford County.
- Nationally, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans make up 75% of the Latino/Hispanic Population (National Council of La Raza NCLR.1998). In North Carolina over 70% of the Latino/Hispanic population is from Mexico, and most have arrived in the last decade.
- Latinos/Hispanics play a vital role in our society by contributing to the diversity of our communities and to our economy.

- Information included here is provided to help you become more aware of the culture and traditions of your clients, students and co-workers. Please use this only as a guide, keeping in mind that all people within a culture are not the same. Be sure to ask your clients and their families about their specific beliefs, practices and customs. Showing respect and openness toward their traditions will help you build better relationships and provide more effective services.

• CULTURE

wealthy social class than those immigrants coming from Central America and Mexico.

Indigenous peoples are common throughout Latin America. Many Latinos/Hispanics have indigenous heritage and for some it is their primary heritage. Most Mexicans are considered Mestizo, a combination of Spanish and indigenous heritage.

LANGUAGE The most common language spoken by Latinos/Hispanics is Spanish. Indigenous Native American languages and dialects are still spoken in many countries, especially in rural areas. There are Latinos/Hispanics in the Triad who speak a native language first, Spanish as their second language, and English as their third. Literacy in any of these languages cannot be taken for granted. Not all Latinos/Hispanics are Spanish speakers, nor can it be assumed that all Spanish speakers will be able to communicate perfectly with one another. There are many words and phrases that have different usages and meanings in different countries. Though, for example, Belize, Brazil, and Haiti are all considered Latin American countries, Portuguese is the official language in Brazil, English is the

official language of Belize, and Haitians speak French or Creole as their primary language. These issues are of particular importance when service providers require an interpreter to communicate with their Latino/Hispanic clients.

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES &

BELIEFS The vast majority of Latinos/Hispanics are Catholic. Catholic religious traditions have a powerful influence on perceptions of accepted norms and behaviors. Beliefs about appropriate social interaction between men and women stem from the Catholic faith. Spiritual ideas about fate and faith impact many areas of life including perceptions about the causes and treatment of poor health and illness. Church and the Catholic religion provide powerful sources of support, hope and strength within Latino/Hispanic communities. Issues for which many Americans seek mental health counseling are dealt with through mediation by ministers in the church.

The Protestant Evangelical Christian movement is making major in-roads in the Latino population. It serves as a significant organizing force within the immigrant community.

SOCIAL CLASS Social class is an important factor to consider

when working with the Latino/Hispanic population. Service providers may observe a greater dissimilarity between members of different socioeconomic classes than between Latinos/Hispanics from different countries of origin. Hence, an indigenous person from Mexico will likely share more in common with a poor Peruvian farmer than a member of the Mexican middle class. Though poverty certainly does not restrict itself to the rural areas of Latin American countries, Latinos/Hispanics that emigrate from rural areas tend to be of the lowest socioeconomic status. It is important to consider that immigrants from rural backgrounds are more likely to be illiterate – even in their native language(s) – and may have a limited understanding of social service systems and modern



medical health concepts.

Predictably, individuals coming from rural backgrounds may also have lower levels of formal education, limited

employment experience, and less financial resources on which to draw. There are comparatively fewer middle- and upper-class immigrants from Latin American countries immigrating to Guilford County. The majority of Latinos/Hispanics in the area are working-class Mexicans from rural areas. Latinos/Hispanics themselves are very class conscious. Members of different social classes do not typically socialize together. Because of the concern with class and status within the Latino/Hispanic community, people are particularly attentive to good hygiene and physical appearance. Latinos/Hispanics are concerned with maintaining, and ultimately improving, their social class status. Though still an incredible challenge, individuals from the working and middle classes, eager to achieve higher class status, find this feat easier to accomplish in the United States than in their native countries.

EDUCATION Education for Latinos/Hispanics means not only what one learns in school, but also at home. Education includes manners and behaviors. Formal education plays an important role, as higher degrees are a source of respect. People have different levels of access to education depending on their

social class. A majority of the Latinos/Hispanics in the Triad have a basic elementary-level education. Some have college education or advanced degrees.

Traditionally, Latino/Hispanic parents are not heavily involved in their children's formal schooling and are accustomed to minimal contact with teachers and other school staff.

TIME ORIENTATION

Latinos/Hispanics are not overly concerned with time. Being late is not considered rude or disrespectful. Instead it means that a person is giving priority to a more urgent situation. Latinos/Hispanics are less rigid with time and appointments than are Americans. It is worthwhile to take into account how the type and availability of transportation impacts punctuality as well.

• FAMILY & RELATIONSHIPS

Family is extremely important and family needs are highly prioritized. Latinos/Hispanics typically live in extended family groups that may consist of the mother, father, siblings, grandparents, children, cousins, nephews, nieces, aunts, uncles, in-laws, and grandparents. Children

are highly cherished and their immediate needs are given top priority within the family. Parents often make many sacrifices for their children and, in turn, grown children make sacrifices for their parents as well. Nursing homes



and day cares are two services that are inconsistent with traditional family values in Latin American countries. Elderly members of the family are cared for by their children and grandchildren. Children are cared for by extended family members. Family well-being takes precedence over financial gain, convenience, or individual desires. Children typically live at home until they are married. In their countries of origin it is not uncommon for newlywed couples to live with the groom's family.

Families provide financial and emotional support for each other. The father is traditionally the leader and main financial provider. In some families, the father makes the decisions in matters outside the home. In

other families, members make decisions together. The mother is in charge of maintaining the home and overseeing the children's education.

Latinos/Hispanics who immigrate to the United States lose the support provided by the extended family. Economic stress often necessitates that women find jobs to contribute to family incomes. This presents the problem of accessing daycare for young children. Women tend to acculturate faster than men. They learn to speak English more quickly, are equally successful at earning money and are better received by the dominant society. Shifting gender roles, as women become more acculturated and more independent, can cause stress on married couples. Similarly, generational conflict is not uncommon as children acculturate more quickly than their parents, and parents are not always able to retain their position of authority.

GENDER ROLES In their home countries, Latino/Hispanic women are traditionally not allowed to go out without a chaperone, whether it is a group of friends or an older relative. Activities for unmarried women, especially younger women, are closely monitored. Women are expected to remain

virgins until they are married. This stems directly from Catholic religious beliefs but does not extend to the sexual expectations of men. Latino/Hispanic women express difficulty in maintaining cultural attitudes and behaviors regarding their relationships with men because of the vast difference between the cultural expectations of their native countries and those of American society. In their native countries it is unusual and frowned upon for a man and a woman to live together or to have a sexual relationship before marriage. Living conditions, economic hardship, lack of strict enforcement of traditional values, and feelings of isolation may result in behaviors that are contrary to these more traditional cultural norms. Many individuals express feelings of anxiety and guilt as they attempt to live by the cultural rules of both societies because they sense that they are betraying their own culture through their actions.

Latino/Hispanic men, who are accustomed to exuding a sense of pride and masculinity, experience a great deal of frustration as they attempt to reconstruct their lives in America. Being a minority, often discriminated against, can take a toll on the ego and self-esteem of the Latino/Hispanic male who is more accustomed to

having control and respect. Shifting gender roles may cause difficulties for couples as women become more independent and men struggle harder to assert the authority they have traditionally had over their wives and children.

The Latino/Hispanic population in Guilford County is relatively young and largely male, although as more people are successfully settled in this area other family members often come to join them. Men typically immigrate in order to generate earnings to send to relatives who remain behind in the country of origin. Families may send large portions of their income to other family members who continue to live in impoverished conditions back home.

CHILDREN & YOUTH Many Latinos/Hispanics may not have the same beliefs as other Americans about appropriate ways to discipline their children. Parents may not be aware of American laws that regulate this practice. Problems may arise between Child Welfare and Social Service workers and Latinos/Hispanics due to cultural misunderstandings. Common disciplinary practices include taking away privileges, giving additional chores and responsibilities, spanking, and

practices similar to “time out.” Occasionally punishment is more physically severe and marks may be left. In these incidences behaviors should be addressed as a cultural issue with clear communication about American laws regarding appropriate disciplinary measures to use with children, as well as discussion about the legal consequences of behaviors that conflict with these laws. Members of the Latino/Hispanic community have expressed that, as their children learn of the differences in American laws, parents’ ability to discipline their children is diminished. Without empowering parents through teaching new, effective strategies to control their children’s behavior, parents begin to lose authority over their children.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Latinos/Hispanics are not generally confrontational. They try to avoid open conflicts and are cordial even to those with whom they have a problem.

GREETINGS & SHOWING

RESPECT Respect plays an important role in achieving a successful relationship with Latinos/Hispanics. Respect is shown by listening when people speak and by following their

advice. The elderly have a special place in society because of their wisdom and their experience.

Teachers and religious leaders are highly respected and traditionally have the authority to correct and discipline children. Children never call adult family members by their first names.

Latinos/Hispanics sit and stand closer to each other than is considered normal in U.S. culture. When introduced to a new person a handshake is appropriate. Women may kiss one another on the cheek.

Latinos/Hispanics are friendly and affectionate, although their culture is more formal than that of the Americans. In general, when addressing someone, use “Mr.” or “Ms.” “Please,” “thank you,” and “excuse me” are frequently used with everyone.

GESTURES & CUSTOMS

Gestures and body language have been called “the silent language” (R. Axtell 1991). Many gestures have more than one meaning. Gestures and non-verbal communications may be easily misinterpreted and for this reason it is wise to be cautious about making judgments or forming impressions based on uninformed perceptions of indirect communications. Latinos/Hispanics consider touch as a gesture of friendship.

Some common gestures do not translate well from one culture to another. The “Okay” hand signal used in the United States has a vulgar meaning in some parts of South America. The American gesture used to call a person to come closer, using the index finger, is insulting in some Latin America countries. In Colombia, when using the hand to demonstrate how tall things are, the flat palm is held downward to show the height of animals but sideways for people.

• HEALTH & WELLNESS

HEALTH BELIEFS Preventive health care or health promotion, as it is known in the United States, is not consistent with traditional Latino/Hispanic health practices. This may partially be the result of spiritual beliefs about fate, but can also be seen to relate to economic status and assumptions that annual check-ups incur additional and unnecessary costs. Latinos/Hispanics go to the doctor when they are sick and when prayer, home remedies and endurance fail to produce acceptable or adequate results. The lack of preventive care in this population puts Latinos/Hispanics at high risks for life threatening

diseases and contributes to the prevalence of chronic diseases such as diabetes, obesity, and hypertension.

Latinos/Hispanics commonly believe that people who go to the hospital get sicker instead of better. The hospital is the place you go to die. There is a mistrust of the excessive amount of paperwork and signatures required at medical care facilities and hospitals, as well as a discomfort with the personal nature of many of the questions that are routinely asked. Latinos/Hispanics will often wait until symptoms are severe to seek outside medical treatment. Immigration status also affects access to care. High costs of medical care and inaccessibility of insurance is also prohibitive.

Curanderos are individuals who are believed to have special expertise at administering to the spiritual conditions often believed to be the cause of disease. These healers act as mediators between the afflicted person and the spiritual realm from whence the problem is thought to originate. In fact, many Latinos/Hispanics believe that spirits frequently interact with people creating both positive and negative repercussions. Latinos/Hispanics believe that curses can be cast that inflict illness, distress or bad luck on someone by a person who wishes

to cause them harm. Common home remedies involve the use of rituals and the consumption of combinations of various herbs and teas.

MENTAL HEALTH Mental health services are seldom used by Latinos/Hispanics. In traditional Latino/Hispanic cultures symptoms of mental health issues such as stress, depression, or anxiety, would be addressed by consultation with a Priest. Latinos/Hispanics are generally unfamiliar with the American concepts of mental health and mental illness. There is a stigma in Latino/Hispanic communities surrounding mental health treatment. Only “crazy people” are believed to need the type of services rendered at mental health centers.

OBSTACLES TO ACCESSING CARE Some barriers for the Latino/Hispanic community in accessing care are the cost of insurance, language barriers between the patient and the provider, and sometimes a lack of information and/or awareness of services available. Facilities are open at inconvenient hours for families with limited transportation. Other obstacles include fear of deportation and the client’s cultural beliefs. Latinos/Hispanics consistently report specific ways

in which breakdowns in rapport and good communication occur between clients and service providers. A common complaint is that service providers’ body language and facial expressions convey a negative and judgmental attitude. In particular, gasps of shock and surprise at large family size is considered very rude and likely to damage rapport. Many Latinos/Hispanics report feeling unnecessarily interrogated at social service appointments because they are not made aware of the purpose of the questions being asked, or they feel that they are being treated in a condescending way. Questions may be asked that they find rude or intrusive, the purpose of which is never explained. Often people are shuffled through several processes, answering repetitive questions for several providers without ever receiving an explanation of the process in which they are engaged.

Individuals who may have limited English language proficiency are insulted when they are treated as though they lack intelligence. Some Latinos/Hispanics have reported that service workers mistakenly assume that their clients’ are unable to understand them and make comments about them to other workers as if they are not

there. For some medical appointments there may be people in the room whose presence is required but who are not introduced.

Latino/Hispanic clients frequently do not understand the purpose of having several people present in the room.

Some tabooed topics of discussion for most Latinos/Hispanics include gay and lesbian issues, substance abuse, domestic violence, child abuse, and sexual abuse.

OUTREACH TIPS

- Use pictures to help in explaining the importance of health care.
- Be consistent with visits and persistent in stressing the importance of health care.
- Use basic language and photos or pictures on informational materials.
- Do not translate verbatim, but use translators trained in medical terminology.
- Always test the translations with members of the target community to be sure they can be understood.
- Use bright colors for printing flyers and brochures.
- Place announcements in places where Latinos/Hispanics frequent: grocery stores, Latino/Hispanic stores, laundromats and churches.

- Word of mouth is the main form of communication in this community.
- Spanish language radio and newspapers are also a good method of advertising and communicating information.

THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN PROVIDING SERVICES

- Always greet people.
- Address people as “Mr.” or “Ms.”
- Try to assign the same staff member to a client each time they come for services.
- Always say goodbye and wish them well, no matter what.
- Latinos/Hispanics not only use traditional folk medicine to treat Western recognized illnesses, but also to treat folk illnesses that are not recognized by Western medicine.
- In the Latino/Hispanic community prayer is the most important “remedy” for any kind of disease.
- There are different types of traditional healers, such as “spiritists” and “santeros” who focus on the spiritual factors of health. “Sobadores” treat pains and muscles through different kinds of massage. “Curanderos” work with the patient on the spiritual, emotional and physical aspects of illness.

- “Decaimientos” is fatigue, sometimes from a spiritual cause.
- “Mal de ojo” is the “evil eye” which may affect infants or women. It has a spiritual or mystical origin.
- “Nerviosismo” means “Sickness of the nerves” and is common. It may be treated spiritually and/or medically.
- “Susto” is a fright resulting in “soul loss.” The consequences are insomnia, loss of appetite, drowsiness, and general depression.
- “Fatalism.” Latinos/Hispanics classify illness as either “natural” or “unnatural.” Natural illness is thought to be caused by God’s will or fate, while unnatural illnesses originate from evil actions. Life and health are controlled by divine will, fate and environment (Neff 1998) because of faith among members.

• | SCHOOLS

Smith High School
Aycock School
Allen Middle School
Page High School
Our Lady of Grace
Irving Park Elementary School

PLACES OF WORSHIP

Iglesia Bautista Puerta Abierta

803 McCormick Street

Greensboro

(336) 379-0730

Primera Iglesia Pentecostes

Unida Cristo Rey

Triad Hispanic Ministry

Our Lady of the Highways

St. Mary's Catholic Church

1412 Gorrell Street

Greensboro

(336) 275-8377

Our Lady of Grace Catholic

Church

207 S. Chapman Street

Greensboro

(336) 274-6520

Christ the King

1505 E. Kivett Drive

High Point

(336) 884-0244

HOLIDAYS & CELEBRATIONS

COUNTRY	DATE	EVENT
Argentina	July 9th	Independence day
Bolivia	Aug. 6th	Independence day
Chile	Sept. 18th	Independence day
Colombia	July 20th	Independence day
Costa Rica	Sept. 15th	Independence day
Ecuador	August 10th	Independence day
Guatemala	Sept. 15th	Independence day
MÉxico	May 5th	Cinco de Mayo
Mexico	Nov. 1st	All Saints' Day
Puerto Rico	Nov. 19th	Discovery of America
Peru	July 28th	Independence day

Since many Latino/Hispanic countries have their independence dates between July and October, Bill Clinton proclaimed on September 15, 1998, September 15 through October 15 as National Latino/Hispanic Heritage Month to honor Latinos/Hispanics for their many contributions to the nation and the culture, and he invited people of the United States to honor this observance with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities.

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- Researcher: María Inés Robayo. Compiled by: Jodi Dodson and María Inés Robayo, IHAP Project of ACCESS Program, UNCG. 2001, Kathy Hinshaw, Debby Kelly, 2003.
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