Stress Management: The Aftermath of the COVID-19 Pandemic for Latino Families

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Presenter: National Hispanic & Latino Mental Health Technology Transfer Center
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Learning Objectives

• Discuss and identify how 2020 stressors have impacted youth and family mental health.
• Identify basic cultural considerations for Hispanic and Latino youth and families.
• Learn brief stress management tools that can be utilized to manage stress.

2020 Highlights

• January – Start of a new year, Kobe Bryant dies
• February – Talks of a new virus, Ahmaud Arbery
• March – School disrupted, Breonna Taylor, toilet paper craze
• April – Schools and workplaces closed or on hold
• May – George Floyd, televised protests, unemployment
• June – Isolation, lockdowns, Rayshard Brooks
• July – Isolation and lockdowns
• August – No clear plan of start of school, CA wildfires, Kenosha protests and killings
• September – School begins with little plans, families units stressed
• October – Continued virtual school and transition to in-person begins
• November and December – Lack of holiday normalcy, grief revisited, unemployment rates still high
Vicarious Trauma  Peer Rejection Fears
Fear of COVID  Increased Isolation
Video/Screen Addiction  Increased Dom. Viol.
Stressed Out Parents  Lack of Basic Needs
Unemployment  
Sleep Disruption  
Nutrition Disruption  

Lack of Routine  Feeling Unsafe
Ethno-Racial Trauma  Regression/Bedwetting
Emotional Instability  Lack of Social Rewards
Irritability/Anger  School Avoidance
Depression/Anxiety  
Lack of family cohesion  
Toxic Stress  

(NOT) READY FOR SCHOOL

(NOT) READY FOR SCHOOL
COVID
and Hispanic/Latino families

The Hispanic/Latino/Latinx Population

What does this population in the United States of America look like?

According to the recent Census:
• U.S. total : 328,239,523 (2019 population estimate);
• 59.9 million (18.3%) self identify as Hispanics and Latinos
• Expected to be 30% by 2060
Cultural Considerations

• Literature has documented some sets of characteristics shared by most Latinos, including:
  • Spanish language;
  • Personalismo (personal contact, positive rapport, formal friendliness)
  • Familismo (familialism or collectivism, unified support)
  • Respecto (respect given to professions, authority figures)
  • Machismo (manliness/protector/provider)
  • Marianismo (womanliness/nurturer/“sainthood”)

(Falicov, 2014; Dana, 1998; Rivera-Ramos & Buki, 2011)

COVID Statistics

Risk for COVID-19 Infection, Hospitalization, and Death By Race/Ethnicity

(CDC, 2021)
Contributions to Increase Rate

• According to the CDC, the following impact rates for exposure to COVID-19.
  • Discrimination
  • Healthcare access and utilization
  • Occupation
  • Educational, income and wealth gaps
  • And Housing.

Concerns and Fears for Undocumented Families

• Financial instability
  • Example: domestic and restaurant workers
  • No stimulus support or unemployment benefits.

• Unsafe work environment
  • Employers directing workers to leave after curfew.
  • Fear of driving during citywide/countywide shutdowns

• Communal restrictions
  • Lack of spiritual support for families
  • Families who are caregivers for elders

• Decrease in college/university motivation of undocumented students
  • Entering workforce earlier to assist with family finances
Distrust of Medical Resources

• Community Resource Hesitancy
  • Undocumented populations

• Medical Experimentation in Communities of Color
  • Tuskegee Project
  • Sterilization of Women
  • Most recently, Georgia detention center

Beliefs and Experiences with Mental Illness

• Stress & depression as body pains - backaches, headaches, or stomach aches

• Fatalismo - Troubles may be attributed to moral conflicts, guilt and shame over poor judgment, punishment from God for one’s ancestors’ indiscretions, or simply fate/fatalism.

• May seek spiritual or other healers as a first step.
Beliefs and Experiences with Mental Illness

• More likely to seek help from a medical professional than a psychologist or psychiatrist due to the stigma.
• Most likely to do so from someone they know and respect, such as a school-teacher or long-time family doctor.

Commonly Overlooked Mental Health Barriers for the Hispanic/Latino Population

• Lack of mental health providers who are clinicians of color (11%, 5%)
• Lack of culturally tailored services and culturally competent mental health professionals
• Shortage of bilingual or linguistically trained mental health professionals
• Lack of access or fear of care if undocumented
• Cultural Stigma

Book suggestion: In the Country We Love by Diane Guerrero
Latina Teen Suicide Concerns

According to the 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey which was administered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to people ages 10 to 24:

- 1 out of 10 Latinas has attempted suicide in the past year;
- 2 out of 10 have made a suicide plan;
- Half have said they felt hopeless.
- Depression, suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts have remained above Latino male youths, and white males and females.

Source: 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey

Suicidal ideation among students in grades 9-12, 2017
Percent of students who seriously considered suicide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Non-Hispanic White</th>
<th>Hispanic/ Non-Hispanic White Ratio</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
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Source: CDC 2019, High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data.
Available at https://nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline. [Accessed 08/02/2019]

Suicidal ideation among students in grades 9-12, 2017
Percent of students who attempted suicide

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CDC 2019, High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data.
Available at https://nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline. [Accessed 08/02/2019]
Privilege Can Create Conflict in Mixed Status Families

Mixed Status = Documented vs. Undocumented
• Documentation status
• Transportation– access to a car and DL
• Language barriers
  • Dependent on translation
• Financial access - credit access, cash pay
• Qualifying for academic aid
• Employment
• Sense of safety/deportation fears

Emotional Backpack
What are we all carrying?
Chaos & Disruption

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs
Ethno-racial Trauma
Toxic Stress
The Amygdala Hijack
Disruption

Which levels were abruptly interrupted in 2020?

Racial Injustice

The Impact Of Racism On Mental Health:
- Feeling disconnected / lonely
- Increase risk of depression and anxiety
- Second-guessing things
- Trauma (both from the present and triggering past instances / generational trauma)
- Decreased hope (in the future, justice, the government etc.)
- Increased "Survival Mode"
- Existential questioning “How can the world be so cruel?”
- Decreased trust
- Worry
- Feelings of powerlessness (You can do the right thing and still end up with a horrific outcome)
- Panic

#BlackLivesMatter
Ethno-racial Trauma

The individual and/or collective psychological distress and fear of danger that results from experiencing or witnessing discrimination, threats of harm, violence, and intimidation directed at ethno-racial minority groups. This form of trauma stems from a legacy of oppressive laws, policies, and practices.

How has this effected our families in 2020?

Being Mindful

Conversations about racial injustice
• Not new for our children
  • Permission for conversations may have changed
• What does your school or agency do to support students/children of color?
Toxic Stress (Over active stress response)

- Stressful events that are chronic, uncontrollable, and/or experienced without support from caring adults. Strong, frequent, or prolonged activation of the body’s stress management system.
- Two brain regions effected
  - Fear, anxiety, impulsive responses = overproduce neural connections
  - Reasoning, planning, behavioral control = produce fewer neural connections
  - A lot of responses and not a lot of thinking!
- Extreme exposure can change the stress system.
  - Responds at lower thresholds
  - Activates more frequently and for longer periods than is needed

TS and Intergenerational Trauma

- Male rat study - 2013
- Cherry blossoms – Electric current on foot – 10 days
- Bred with females
- Up to 3 generations
  - Sensitivity to the cherry blossom smell (jumpy/nervous)
- DNA gene encoding smell receptor (in olfactory bulb)
- Dissected brain
  - Greater number of neurons that detected scent

It is not that fear is being passed down the generations – it is that fear in one generation leads to sensitivity in the next

(Dias & Ressler, 2014)
**Toxic Stress**

- Increases stress hormones
- Increases inflammation
- Decreases neuroplasticity
- Increases cellular aging
- Increases cortisol

(Shonkoff, Boyce & McEwen, 2009)

**Effects of Increase in Cortisol**

- Disrupts sleep
- Stimulates fat accumulation
  - Triggers craving sugar and fatty foods
- Too much cortisol is toxic to the hippocampus
  - Results in a smaller hippocampus over time
  - Decreases the level of **learning and memory**

_Book Suggestion:_

*The Deepest Well by Nadine Burk Harris, MD*

(Brunson, Grigoriadis, Lorang & Baram, 2002)
Sleep Hygiene &
the Amygdala Hijack

Sleep Hygiene

• 1 Cycle = 3 total sleep stages
  • NREM – Non rapid eye movement
    • Two additional stages
  • REM – Rapid eye movement
• 1-1.5 hours per cycle (uninterrupted)
• Need 4-5 Sleep Cycles
• Totals 8 hours

(Eugene & Masiak, 2015)
Important because…

• Sleep acts as a garbage collector that comes during the night and removes the waste product left by the brain.
• Eliminates toxins
• Flush out the cellular trash in the body
• Repairs brain cell damage
• Important for physical and brain growth

(Eugene & Masiak, 2015)

Effects of Lack of Sleep

• Temporal lobe – language processing
• Behavior, mood, cognitive performance
• Hippocampus - Long term memory cannot consolidate learned tasks from previous day
• Lapse in attention span
• Decreased reaction time
  Depends more on the amygdala/emotional reaction

(Eugene & Masiak, 2015)
Roads Lead to the Amygdala

- FIRE ALARM SYSTEM
- There is a BEAR IN THE ROOM!
- Amygdala = Flip the lid
  - Blood/Oxygen push
    - Adrenaline rush
  - Fight/Flight/Freeze
  - Logic shuts down

Reversing the Amygdala

- Ventral Vagal Network
  - #1 Function – NOT to respond in an extreme way
  - Deep breathing – activates VVN
  - More blood directed to logic brain to enter back in to state of social engagement.
  - Tells the brain we are safe again
- Hippocampus – Files memory away as SAFE!
Learning stress management tools that can be utilized in a school setting

**Time Matters**

- 15 minutes to go from emotional/amygdala brain back to logic/learning brain
- 14-21 days to create a new habit
- 68 days to rewire the brain
Today’s Take Home Toolkit

Tool 1: Assess for Basic Needs & Concerns

Start the conversation:
• Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs
• GAD-7 Assessment
• PHQ-9 Assessment
• CFI: Cultural Formulation Interview
• Toxic Stress Buffer Checklist
Explore Needs

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

Explore Worry: GAD-7

GAD-7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems?</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Several days</th>
<th>More than half the days</th>
<th>Nearly every day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Not being able to stop or control worrying</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Worrying too much about different things</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Trouble relaxing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Being so restless that it is hard to sit still</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Becoming easily annoyed or irritable</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Score = Add Columns

If you checked off any problems, how difficult have these problems made it for you to do your work, take care of things at home, or get along with other people?

Not difficult at all  [ ]  Somewhat difficult  [ ]  Very difficult  [ ]  Extremely difficult  [ ]
Explore Concerns: PHQ-9

PHQ-9P

Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Several days</th>
<th>More than half the days</th>
<th>Nearly every day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Little interest or pleasure in doing things</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Feeling tired or having little energy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Poor appetite or overeating</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Feeling bad about yourself — or that you are a failure or no one cares</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading or working in general</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Moving or speaking so that other people couldn’t have heard you unless you were really trying to talk</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Thinking you would be better off dead or of hurting yourself in some way</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Score: __________________

If you checked off any problems, how difficult have these problems made it for you to do your work, take care of things at home, or get along with other people?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulty Level</th>
<th>Not difficult</th>
<th>Somewhat difficult</th>
<th>Very difficult</th>
<th>Extremely difficult</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Explore Buffers

Checklist to reduce over active toxic stress response

✓ Healthy Relationships
✓ Nutrition
✓ Sleep
✓ Exercise
✓ Mental Health
✓ Meditation/Mindfulness
Use of the CFI: Cultural Formulation Interview

- DSM-5
- Evidenced Based
- Series of questions
- Person centered
- Cultural approach
- Informs treatment planning

Use of the CFI: Cultural Formulation Interview

Four domains:
- Domain 1: Cultural definition of the problem
- Domain 2: Cultural perceptions of the cause, context and support.
- Domain 3: Cultural factors that affect self-coping and past help seeking.
- Domain 4: Cultural factors that affect current help seeking.
Tool 2: Tuning in to the Body

How can we identify when our amygdala (fire alarm) starts to hijack our thinking/logic brain?

Body Scan

Belly Breathing

What is going on with my body?

Amygdala sends signals to release cortisol and adrenaline

Heart pounds, airways open, pupils dilate, blood to big muscles for running and jumping

Turns logic brain down, executive judgement and impulse control decrease
Body Scan Activity

• Imagine a BEAR comes in to your office/room RIGHT NOW!

• What areas of the body do you feel it in and what symptoms do you notice?

Body Scan Activity

• Used as a teaching tool

• Common signals in children
  • Heart races
  • Stomach hurts
  • Legs/hands shaking
What do we do with this?

- Safely engage in energy depletion
- Fight/Flight = Hands/Feet

Belly Breathing

- To reverse the amygdala switch
  - Activate the Ventral Vagal Network
- Deep Diaphragm Belly Breathing
  - Place one hand on the belly
    - 4-5 seconds in – Nose
      - Stomach pushes up against hand
      - Chest remains still
    - 5-6 seconds out – Mouth O shape
      - Pursed lips
      - Tighten ab muscles
      - Stomach falls downward
Birthday Cake Activity

• Image your favorite birthday cake flavor
• Writing/drawing activity
  • Five senses
  • Sight, touch, hear, taste, smell
• Practice Deep Belly Breathing while imagining this delicious birthday cake.
  • Close eyes
  • Inhale - SMELL THE CAKE
  • Exhale – SLOWLY BLOW OUT TONS OF CANDLES

Tool 3: Connect to Five Senses Grounding

5 4 3 2 1
GROUNDING TECHNIQUE

5 things you can see
4 things you can feel
3 things you can hear
2 things you can smell
1 thing you can taste
Tool 3: Connect to Five Senses

Creative writing

• Creating my safe space by writing a story.

Practice

• Write a short story while incorporating the five senses.
  • Identify a character
  • Sight/See
  • Hear
  • Taste
  • Smell
  • Touch/Feel
Activity: Creating my safe space...

- Identify a character, pick a location and write a 5 senses story.
  - Mrs. Grapejuice was at home and lost her crayons.
  - She had purple hair, purple lipstick and a purple dress.
  - She wanted to go to the store but she needed to find her crayons on the way to the store. The crayon colors were yellow, blue, green and red.
  - As she walked to the store she heard birds chirping. The birds were chirping and singing happy songs.
  - When Mrs. Grapejuice walked by a bakery she smelled delicious cookies. Her favorite cookie is chocolate chip.
  - She went inside and tasted the chocolate chip cookie.
  - It felt warm and gooey as she tasted it.
  - It made her feel happy and calm.

Tool 4: Using Technology

- Mindfulness Coach – Practice Daily
- Colorbox
- Insight Timer
- Mood Trackers – Daylio

- Favorite App – List in the chat box
- Look for local virtual support groups
Additional Considerations
Language Considerations for Schools

• When doing these activities, it’s okay for the student to do it in their preferred language.
• Language assistance when parents/caregivers call for information.
• Coping, mental health and crisis communication offered on sites in multiple languages
• Informed consent documents in various languages

School-based Telemental Health

**Advantages:**
• greater efficiency (decreased commute time, easier scheduling)
• capacity for higher volume
• increased access to care for students

**Disadvantages:**
• patient concerns about their own privacy
• concerns related to the ability to effectively engage families in care without being face to face with them in person

(Stephan S, Lever N, Bernstein L, Edwards S, Pruitt D., 2016)
COVID Era Concerns

- Students tired of zoom
- No internet
- Patient privacy – everyone is home
- Adjustments:
  - Hard of hearing
  - Vision of students
  - Language deficiencies
  - Need for physical action for some

Policies: Stay up to date

- Create a way to keep up with local policies regarding undocumented persons.
  - Helps connect when concerns arise.
  - Opportunity to find connections and resources.
  - Local Immigration Non-Profits – good resource
Partnering with the School Nurse

- Mental health comes out as somatic symptoms
- Latino families are more likely to seek help from a medical professional than a school social worker or counselor

Resource Specialists/Partnerships

Assign staff to help with basic needs, COVID needs and economic hardships
Partner with:
- Agencies who offer intervention that don’t require additional information from undocumented people.
Last thought of the day:

- Building relationships
- Personalismo
- Therapeutic Rapport

References

References


• Mental Health Disparities: Hispanics and Latinos

• Data Source: Data reported by state and territorial jurisdictions (accessed 03/10/2021).


Website: http://www.mhttcnetwork.org/hispaniclatino/
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Mental Health Educational Resources

School Mental Health Educational Resources
Educational Resources

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