

Substance Abusing Latinos

Current Research
on Epidemiology,
Prevention,
and Treatment

Mario R. De La Rosa
Lori K. Holleran
Shulamith Lala Ashenberg Straussner
Editors



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*Pre-publication
REVIEWS,
COMMENTARIES,
EVALUATIONS . . .*



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International Aspects of Social Work Practice in the Addictions, edited by Shulamith Lala Ashenberg Straussner, DSW, CAS, and Larry Harrison, MA, CQSW (Vol. 2, No. 3/4, 2002). *"Provides valuable insight into one of the most significant changes in social life during the last fifty years and indicates some of the likely direction for changes in the first half of the twenty-first century." (Tony Clamp, DipCouns, DipSW, MA, Lecturer in Applied Social Studies, University of Durham, United Kingdom)*

Neurobiology of Addictions: Implications for Clinical Practice, edited by Richard T. Spence, PhD, MSSW, Diana M. DiNitto, PhD, and Shulamith Lala Ashenberg Straussner, DSW, CAS (Vol. 1, No. 3, 2001). *Presents the neurobiological theories of addiction in a psychosocial context and connects the theoretical information with practical applications.*

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Dr. Straussner is Regional Director, Project MAINSTREAM, a HRSA/CSAT/AMERSA sponsored national project to expend interdisciplinary AOD training within 17 different health and mental health professions. She has served on the National Center on Substance Abuse Treatment and is a founding board member of the New York State Institute for Professional Development in Addictions. Dr. Straussner is the past chair of NASW Section on Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs. She received the Social Worker of the Year Award from the NASW ATOD Section in 2000 and Award for Individual Distinction in Addictions Education and Training from NY State IDPA in 2003.

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Preface

During the past fifteen years there has been a concerted effort to understand the growing problem of substance abuse among Latino populations in the United States, yet information about the substance abuse behaviors of Latinos and the effectiveness of culturally relevant drug treatment and prevention services is still limited. Even more limited is information on the factors associated with substance abuse behaviors among vulnerable Latino subpopulations such as gang members, homeless women, and juvenile delinquent Latinos. What role does membership in gangs have on the onset of substance abuse among Latino gang members? What impact does childhood sexual abuse have on adult drug use among low-income urban Puerto Rican women? What relationship do acculturation and healthy family role models have with substance abuse behaviors of Cuban juvenile offenders?

Information on the effects that cultural, familial, and environmental factors have in the provision of effective drug prevention and treatment services to vulnerable Latino populations is similarly limited. Numerous poignant questions loom in this regard. What impact would the possibility of choosing provision of services in English or Spanish have on the effectiveness of substance abuse prevention services among Latino adolescents? How do parenting skills and their level of acculturation to the values and beliefs system of the United States affect the utilization of outpatient drug treatment counseling by substance abusing Latino adolescents? How does lack of health insurance, prior mental health care history, and involvement with the criminal justice system affect drug using Latino women's utilization of methadone maintenance program?

The purpose of this volume is to augment the extant literature on the extent and nature of substance abuse among vulnerable Latino subpop-

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ulations and to increase the knowledge base regarding the role that cultural, familial, and environmental factors have in the development of effective drug abuse interventions for these subpopulations. In this regard, the articles included in this special issue focus on providing information on the patterns of substance abuse among Latino gang members, Cuban juvenile offenders, and Puerto Rican homeless women. This volume also includes articles that discuss the role that acculturation factors, parenting skills, availability of insurance, and prior experience with mental health care and the justice system have on the provision of effective drug prevention and treatment services to vulnerable Latino populations.

The first article by De La Rosa, Holleran, Rugh, and MacMaster, provides a comprehensive review of research on the extent and nature of substance abuse among Latinos in the United States and the provision of culturally competent drug abuse prevention and treatment programs to Latino populations. The authors found that while significant progress has been made in understanding the drug using behaviors of Latinos and the importance of developing culturally competent substance abuse intervention programs, there are significant gaps in this area of research. The next article, by De La Rosa, Rugh, and Rojas, focuses on documenting the onset and progression of drug abuse in a cohort of Puerto Rican and Dominican gang members living in a small city. The findings from this research indicate, not surprisingly, that the onset of drug use among Latino gang members comes at a very early age and that progression to serious drug use occurs rapidly.

Vera, Alegría, Pattatucci-Aragón, and Peña's article examines the relationship between childhood sexual abuse and adult drug use among a cohort of drug using and non-using low-income urban Puerto Rican women. The results from this article provide further proof of the direct relationship between childhood sexual abuse and adult drug use found in other drug abusing populations. The article by Dévieux, Malow, Ergon-Pérez, Samuels, Rojas, Khushal, and Jean-Gilles examines the sexual and drug using behaviors of a much understudied vulnerable population: African American and Cuban American juvenile offenders. The results indicate that Cuban American adolescents showed higher levels of unprotected sex, higher levels of sex while using drugs, and higher levels of drug/alcohol use three and six months prior to confinement. These differences may be explained by multiple factors, including differences in acculturation levels among the Cuban

American adolescents, differences in health messages targeted at the two groups, and family mores and norms.

Culture, acculturation, and language are powerful issues in Latino/a research. The articles by Marsiglia, Kulis, Wagstaff, Elek, and Dran and by Crunkilton, Paz, and Boyle both focus on exploring the role that acculturation and Latino family beliefs and attitudes have in the effective delivery of prevention education services to Latino adolescents. The article by Marsiglia et al. addresses a major research gap in the literature: the role of language preference as a significant element in the provision of effective delivery of drug prevention services to Latino adolescents. This article's findings suggest that providing prevention education services in the language preferred by the Latino adolescents increases the effectiveness of the intervention in reducing or preventing their drug using behaviors. English speaking Latino adolescents showed the most favorable outcomes in reducing their drug using behaviors while Spanish speaking adolescents increased their negative attitudes toward the use of drugs. Similarly, Crunkilton, Paz, and Boyle's article also found that the incorporation of culturally appropriate language, beliefs, values, and principles improved the effectiveness of prevention programs providing substance abuse education to families. Both of these illustrated the importance of using a cultural approach in the provision of prevention education programs to Latino adolescents or their families.

Improving drug treatment utilization by drug using Latino adolescents and adult women is the purpose of the last two articles in this volume. Santisteban, Dillon, Mena, Estrada, and Vaughan focus on addressing the vexing problem of engaging Latino substance abusing parents and their families in drug treatment services. This study's findings indicate that Latino adolescents with lower levels of mental health disorders and parents with better parenting strategies were more likely to be engaged in drug treatment services than those who did not have such characteristics or conditions. Lundgren, Amaro, and Ben-Ami also examine drug treatment utilization by another vulnerable population: drug using Puerto Rican women. This article's findings suggest that lack of insurance, prior history of involvement with mental health services, and involvement with the justice system were the best predictors of drug treatment service utilization by Puerto Rican women.

In order to illuminate how the research topics and findings of this edition overlap with clients' and clinicians' experiences, this volume features two pieces that strike "where the rubber hits the road." A special topics interview by Holleran with Jennifer Herrera, Director of Pre-

vention Programs for AIDS Services of Austin, in Texas, elucidates issues related to Latino/a clients, such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, mental health concerns, substance abuse problems, gender issues, and barriers to getting help. Outreach and intervention strategies are shared including peer educators, the use of “Platicas,” and two evidence-based interventions: VOICES/VOCES behavioral change group and Reducing AIDS Risk Activities (RARA). The volume concludes with an autobiographical story of a bi-cultural Latina alcoholic and drug addict in recovery.

Mario R. De La Rosa

Lori K. Holleran

Shulamith Lala Ashenberg Straussner

August, 2004

Substance Abuse Among U.S. Latinos: A Review of the Literature

Mario R. De La Rosa
Lori K. Holleran
Douglas Rugh
Samuel A. MacMaster

SUMMARY. Latinos have recently become the largest minority in the United States. High fertility and high immigration rates suggest continued high rate of growth. Alcohol and illicit drug use within this population give reason for concern. Beginning in early adolescence, Latinos and Native Americans lead the nation in alcohol and illicit drug use. They also have a high need for alcohol and illicit drug treatment compared to Whites and African-Americans. Research concerning ethnic differences is reviewed in order to gain an understanding of the patterns and trajectories of substance use within the Latino community. Prevention and treatment interventions specific to Latinos are described, and gaps in the literature are noted. Finally, implications of the current re-

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