

# *Depression, Self-Esteem, and Childhood Abuse Among Hispanic Men Residing in the U.S.–Mexico Border Region*

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*Hispanics experience health disparities in mental health and HIV infection when compared to non-Hispanic Whites, which may be related to childhood abuse. The purpose of our cross-sectional study was to examine the relationship between childhood abuse and depressive symptoms in a sample of Hispanic men (N = 103) living in a metropolitan U.S.–Mexico border area. Secondly, we examined the role of self-esteem in mediating this relationship, and the moderating role of sexual orientation. Gay/bisexual men (n = 53) were more likely to report childhood abuse than heterosexual (n = 50) counterparts (47.2% vs. 32%). Self-esteem mediated the relationship between childhood abuse and depression for men who have sex with men, but not heterosexual men. Nurses should increase knowledge of mental health disparities that impact Hispanic men to ensure that appropriate treatment can be provided to reduce the risk of co-occurring health risks to these men, including risk for HIV infection.*

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The World Health Organization (WHO, 2014) defined mental health as “a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work

productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community” (p. 1). Mental health can be affected by poverty, low levels of education, stressful environments, violence, and adverse events (WHO, 2014). Childhood adverse events include childhood abuse (physical, psychological, or sexual abuse), family dysfunction, and other types of childhood trauma. These childhood adverse events have been linked to psychiatric symptoms across the lifespan (Chapman, Dube, & Anda, 2007). A number of research studies have shown that these experiences and events have been linked to health issues later in life. These include depressive disorders (Chapman et al., 2004), intimate partner violence (Whitfield, Anda, Dube, & Felitti, 2003), sexual violence

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(Ports, Ford, & Merrick, 2016), sleep disorders (Chapman et al., 2011), and risk for sexually transmitted infections (Hillis, Anda, Felitti, Nordenberg, & Marchbanks, 2000).

Despite what is known about the relationship of adverse childhood experiences and events on health outcomes as an adult, little is known about these in Hispanics. Approximately 11% of Hispanic children will experience one or more adverse childhood experiences or events. This is identical to that of non-Hispanic White children, whereas Black children have a slightly higher rate of 15%. These rates increase in all groups in the context of poverty (Child Trends Data Bank, 2014).

It is important to consider the impact of adverse events and experiences on Hispanics for several reasons. First, Hispanics are the largest and fastest growing ethnic group in the United States. As this population continues to grow, it is more likely that health care providers will need to provide care to members of this population (Pew Research Center, 2008). Second, Hispanics experience higher rates of mental health disorders (odds ratio [OR] = 4.5) and lower rates of treatment for mental health issues (OR = 55.6), when compared to non-Hispanic Whites (OR = 1.4 and 72.0). The death rate from suicide is higher in Hispanic males than females (10.3 vs. 2.5/100,000). In addition, Hispanic males are three times more likely than non-Hispanic Whites to be diagnosed with HIV infection (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Minority Health, 2016). Because of the documented disparities in mental health and mental health treatment, suicide, and HIV infection rates, it is essential to identify factors that could help Hispanic men who experienced adverse childhood events mitigate the effects of childhood abuse.

In order to provide the foundation for our study of mental health of Hispanic men residing in the U.S.–Mexico border region, a critical review of the literature was conducted. The literature review focused on depression, self-esteem, and childhood abuse among Hispanic men. These areas were noted as important in addressing the intersection of mental health issues and sexual risk among Hispanic men (De Santis, Arcia, Vermeesch, & Gattamorta, 2011; De Santis, Colin, Vasquez, & McCain, 2008).

## Review of the Literature

### Depression

One of the major mental health issues for Hispanic men is depression (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Minority Health, 2016). Although the majority of studies on depression in Hispanic men have been conducted with gay and bisexual men (De Santis et al., 2011; De Santis et al., 2008; De Santis, Gonzalez-Guarda, & Vasquez, 2012), a significant amount of research has been conducted with the general population of Hispanic men. Compared to non-Hispanic White men, English-speaking Mexican-American men had a 4.35-times increased risk of depression. However, Spanish-speaking Mexican-American men had a 10.4-times increased risk of depression. In addition, it was noted that Hispanic men had more gaps in depression care (expressed in terms of successful diagnosis and treatment) compared to non-Hispanic White men (Hinton et al., 2012).

A study of 125 Hispanic immigrant men noted that drug use was associated with a risk for depression (Kissinger et al., 2013). Other predictors of depression for Hispanic men in another study ( $n = 160$ ) included a lack of American acculturation, lower education, lower income, and substance use behaviors (Vasquez, Gonzalez-Guarda & De Santis, 2011).

A qualitative study of 66 Hispanic immigrant men reported that newly arrived immigrants were likely to experience depression because of social isolation, which resulted in negative health outcomes (Documet et al., 2015). Another qualitative study of 55 immigrant Hispanic men reported that Hispanic men did not seek care for depression because of knowledge deficits about psychotropic medications and depression treatment in general. These men preferred counseling rather than medications, and attempted to use faith and family as a buffer against depression (Cabassa, 2007).

### Self-Esteem

Compared to depression, fewer studies are available that focus on self-esteem among Hispanic men. The majority of the studies that focused on

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