

Unidos

By: Juan E. Vera

Within our brightly colored Hispanic culture, there is a sad truth hidden. Emotions are what we use to express ourselves as people, and in our culture there are emotions in the way we speak, dress, and cook. It is hard to speak up on certain topics concerning mental health awareness because it is not yet widely accepted within the culture of Latinos. The absence of emotional support within the Hispanic community is never talked about, and more often looked down upon than any other aspect of the community. For example, hearing talk of abuse whether it be physical, emotional, or mental, you are labeled as "loco", or crazy, however, we accept our holistic ways of medicine and traditional methods of cleansing the body from negative ailments with an egg, but the very generation that teaches us those concepts can't comprehend that mental health is just as important as physical health. If that does not sound crazy enough, according to a UT Health study conducted in San Antonio, nearly 80 percent of Latino youth suffer from at least one traumatic childhood experience like poverty, abuse, neglect, or household dysfunction. Although we are not the only ethnic group to experience these tragedies, we ignore them in our culture and never voice a concern because it doesn't align with what we are taught; the attitude we give towards our mental health awareness contradicts the very reason we decided to come and build a better life, for our family. Bottling up emotions is the path most choose, not realizing that suppressed emotions can lead to more stress, depression, and anxiety. Most of the time these issues can also cause physical symptoms including pain, muscle tension, nausea and digestive problems. Not only are these issues not talked about in our culture, but we cease to believe in the existence of them.

Other reasons, such as language barriers, legal status, acculturation and stigma, also play a role in why we don't encourage being open about mental health; we don't want to be judged for seeking treatment, or defined as weak and incompetent or to be seen as someone who can not take care of themselves. Opening up our community to understand that it is okay to not be okay and providing proper access to help cross these barriers can be difficult when these

factors are taken into consideration. When mental health is not openly talked about, people seeking treatment may have limited knowledge about the different types of help available, and oftentimes this will lead the individual to seek their own help, which in turn leads to other problems, such as substance abuse. In order to achieve a better understanding and open a culture that values diversity we need to be open and aware of these issues. Providers and the community should use a compassionate and collaborative approach to help encourage people to seek help for mental health. Incorporating education and symptom monitoring with community resources can be important ways to support a person's decision in how they go about getting treatment.

Encouraging social and emotional help is shown to improve students' mental health and academic achievement, further uniting our nation and educating our culture that seeking help is normal, and not something unheard of. By accepting the idea that it is okay to express emotions, we inclusively become stronger and healthier overall in our culture and community.

Works Cited

“COVID-19 Triggers 25% increase in prevalence of anxiety and depression world wide”, *World Health Organization*, March 2nd 2022.

<https://www.who.int/news/item/02-03-2022-covid-19-pandemic-triggers-25-increase-in-prevalence-of-anxiety-and-depression-worldwide>

“Hispanic/Latinx”, *National Alliance on Mental Illness*,

<https://www.nami.org/Your-Journey/Identity-and-Cultural-Dimensions/Hispanic-Latinx>

Despres, Cliff. “Nearly 80 percent of latino youth suffer childhood trauma”, *UT Health*, San Antonio, November 15th 2017.

<https://news.uthscsa.edu/nearly-80-percent-latino-youth-suffer-childhood-trauma/>