

Effects of Acculturation and the Development of Drug Abuse in the Hispanic Community

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Abstract

As of 2019, there are approximately 18.5% of Americans that identify as Hispanic or Latino (The Census Bureau, 2019). Additionally, as of 2019, over 10,000,000 LatinX individuals have immigrated to the United States, and the numbers continue to grow (Israel & Batalova, 2020). When immigrating to a different country there can be a myriad of challenges that one may face, and one may be obligated to want to fit in for example, dressing a certain way, eating different food than one is used to and engaging in risky activities because one's friends want to. The current meta analysis examines acculturation and the effects the process has on LatinX individuals in the creation of substance abuse and whether protective factors may prevent or alleviate the creation of substance abuse. Research shows that young LatinX may be more likely to develop substance abuse due to the difficulties and stresses involved with the process of acculturation than LatinX adults (Blanco, Morcillo, Alegría, Dedios, Fernández -Navarro, Regincos & Wang, 2012; Caetano, Ramisetty-Mikler & Rodriguez, 2008; Guilamo-Ramos, Jaccard, Johansson & Turrisi, 2004; Lara, M., Gamboa, C., Kahramanian, M. I., Morales, L. S., & Bautista, D. E., 2005; Savage & Mezuk, 2014). The results from these studies support previous findings that suggest these protective factors may prevent or alleviate the factors that may lead to the creation of substance abuse in Hispanic communities (Blanco et al., 2012; Burnett Zeigler, 2012; Gil, Wagner & Vega, 2000; Mossakowski, K.N., 2003).

Keywords: Acculturation, Latino, LatinX, Hispanic, Drug, Abuse, Protective, Factors

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Acculturation is the process of adopting to the popular culture in the area an individual lives in that is not their own (Celeste, Meeussen, Verschueren, & Phalet, 2016). Although the United States is a mixing pot of numerous cultures and ethnicities, there is still a “dominant” popular culture that is evident; speak the English language, watch football, eat fried food and drink beer (Lara, Gamboa, Kahramanian, Morales, & Bautista, 2005). The current meta-analysis examines the effects of acculturation on LatinX¹ youth (i.e. those with Latin-American descent; Garcia-Navarro, 2015) and the potential creation of substance abuse. Research shows that LatinX youth may be more likely to develop substance abuse (i.e. an excessive use of drugs) due to acculturation (Blanco, Morcillo, Alegría, Dedios, Fernández -Navarro, Regincos & Wang, 2012; Caetano, Ramisetty-Mikler & Rodriguez, 2008; Guilamo-Ramos, Jaccard, Johansson & Turrissi, 2004; Lara, Gamboa, Kahramanian, Morales, & Bautista, 2005; Savage & Mezuk, 2014). However, protective cultural factors may prevent or alleviate the creation of substance abuse in Hispanic communities (Blanco et al., 2012; Burnett Zeigler, 2012; Gil, Wagner & Vega, 2000; Mossakowski, 2003). This meta-analysis is a way to inform individuals on the negative effects that may occur when forcing or pressuring one’s culture on another individual, while also bringing to light ways one may be able to avoid the negative effects of acculturation and providing treatment options for individuals struggling with substance abuse disorder.

¹ Traditionally, in Latin American countries and around the world, the terms “Latino” and “Latina” are used to identify individuals who descent from Latin American countries (Torres, 2018). The traditional terms “Latino” and “Latina”, are masculine and feminine, but what if an individual does not identify as either? (de Onís, 2017). In 2015, the term “LatinX” began to be used as an inclusive term. “LatinX” refers to all genders including those who identify as nonbinary (Torres, 2018). Ending with an “x” reaches a wider range of individuals and does not restrict people from the confounds of two gender identities (de Onís, 2017). The “X” allows progression and creates a space for acceptance and fluidity (de Onís, 2017). Although many people reject this form of identification (de Onís, 2017), throughout this meta-analysis the term “LatinX” will be used to express inclusivity.

As stated previously, acculturation is the process of adopting the popular culture within an area or country (Celeste et al., 2016). Through this process, the individual adopts a myriad of aspects within the popular culture (e.g. language, dress, food; Lara et al., 2005). However, pushing aside one's culture to adopt another more dominant culture, may be due to social pressures (Gbadamosi, 2012; Lara et al., 2005). This process may become stressful resulting in a variety of negative psychological outcomes including diet/nutrition changes, substance use or abuse and changes in exercise (Gbadamosi, 2012; Lara et al., 2005). According to De La Rosa et al. (2008), one of the biggest factors that may help LatinX individuals develop substance use disorders is the family and personal stress acculturation creates. Though protective factors may be ways to reduce and potentially prevent the process of acculturation in individuals (Blanco et al., 2012; Burnett Zeigler, 2012; Gil et al., 2000; Mossakowski, 2003).

Protective factors differ by individual, however ethnic identity is seen to be one of the biggest factors that prevents individuals from experiencing the negative effects of acculturation (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010). In a study conducted by Ai, Lee, Solis, & Yap. (2016), the researchers found that the participants with a strong social support system, strong sense of ethnic identity and a religious background were less likely to have substance abuse than those who were not religious, did not have a strong social support system or a strong ethnic identity. In addition, those who identified as Latino(a), are proud of their ethnic identity and their heritage may be less likely to develop psychological disorders in their lifetime compared to acculturated individuals (Burnett Zeigler, 2012). Familism is very important in Hispanic culture (Gil et al., 2000). In Hispanic culture, individuals not only live close to each other, but they also lean on each other for emotional and social support (Gil et al., 2000). Having a strong social support and different ways to cope (such as supportive family members and

strong religious beliefs) with the pressures of acculturation are beneficial in combating substance abuse in LatinX communities (Ai et al., 2016). However, without these protective factors, LatinX individuals may succumb to the pressures of acculturation and engage in risky behaviors, such as drug use, to cope with these stresses.

Substance abuse is an increasing problem in the United States (American Addiction Centers, 2019). Substance use disorder is referred to as dependency and repeated use of substances/drugs to the point when there are mental health consequences and the substances keep an individual from completing every day activities (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2020). In the United States, over 7.1% of LatinX individuals have been diagnosed with substance use disorder (American Addiction Centers, 2019). According to De La Rosa, Holleran, Rugh, & MacMaster. (2008), LatinX individuals have the highest percentage of substance abuse due to cultural influences. With the rise of substance usage, it is important to address the critical role acculturation has on the potential development of substance abuse among LatinX (De La Rosa et al., 2008).

Immigrating to another country or moving to a different area may be stressful and there may be pressures for individuals, especially younger people, to try and fit into their new environment and make friends (Celeste et al., 2016). However, substance abuse is one of the negative outcomes of trying to fit in (i.e. acculturation; Blanco et al., 2012; Caetano et al., 2008; Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2004; Lara et al., 2005; Savage & Mezuk, 2014). In a study conducted by Blanco et al. (2012), the researchers examined the relationship between substance abuse and acculturation in LatinX population. To examine the relationship, the researchers gathered over 6000 participants ranging from ages 18-24 and a combination of individuals identifying as African American and Latino (Blanco et al., 2012). In the study, Blanco et al. (2012) used a

myriad of questionnaires to assess acculturation (i.e. Short Acculturation Scale, Ethnic Identity Scale) in addition to the participants meeting a certain criteria to be enrolled into the study. This criteria included a diagnosis of drug abuse, living in the United States for a certain amount of time, immigrating to the United States at a certain age and the languages they speak. The Short Acculturation Scale assessed the participants likelihood of being subjects to acculturation, for example, the language the participant speaks to their friends, and ethnicity of their friend group (Blanco et al., 2012). The Ethnic Identity Scale assessed the participants' ethnicities and their feelings toward their ethnicities. Questions in the scale included the ethnicity the participant identifies as, are they proud of their ethnicity and do they celebrate their ethnicity (Blanco et al., 2012). The results from this study showed that acculturation had an effect on the participants who identified as Latino and who immigrated to the United States at a young age (Blanco et al., 2012). In a meta-analysis conducted by Lara et al. (2005), the researchers examine the physical and psychological effects acculturation has on Latinos. The results from the articles they reviewed showed that Latina women were more amenable to acculturation than Latino men, acculturation negatively affected the individuals nutrition/diet, exercise, birth outcomes and substance abuse (Lara et al., 2005). In addition, those who were more acculturated including pregnant women and adolescents, were more likely to display substance abuse and use behaviors than those less acculturated (Lara et al., 2005). Acculturated Latina women were also three times more likely to drink alcohol than Latino men (Lara et al., 2005). This study not only shows the negative effects acculturation has on the LatinX population, however the study also presents a problematic correlation between acculturation and substance abuse in Latina women (Lara et al., 2005).

Although acculturation has some negative effects, some protective factors including the religious beliefs and family values aspects within Hispanic culture may help alleviate or prevent the creation of substance abuse (Blanco et al., 2012; Burnett Ziegler, 2012; Gil et al., 2000; Mossakowski, 2003). In a research study conducted by Burnett Ziegler. (2012), the researcher examined the correlation between ethnic identity, acculturation and psychological disorders in minorities including LatinX. Burnett Ziegler. (2012), gathered over 13,000 participants, including 5,000 who identified as Latino from a survey in the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol Related Conditions. Results from this study showed that those who scored higher on the ethnic identity questions were less likely to develop psychological disorders than those who scored low on the questions regarding ethnic identity (Burnett Ziegler, 2012). In addition, those who scored higher on questions regarding acculturation were more likely to develop psychological disorders than those who scored low on the acculturation questions (Burnett Ziegler, 2012). This study shows that those who had a strong ethnic identity and who were proud of their culture may protect them from developing psychological disorders than those who are not as proud of their cultural identity (Burnett Ziegler, 2012). In another study conducted by Gil et al. (2000), the researchers examined the effects of acculturation and the use of alcohol on Latino adolescent males in the United States. The 2,019 participants were differing grades ranging from sixth to seventh grade and were checked up on every year for three years until the participants were in either in eighth or ninth grade (Gil et al., 2000). Different surveys and measures were used to examine acculturation and alcohol consumption in the participants; alcohol involvement scale, an acculturation questionnaire that included the amount of English the participants use, how much they are discriminated against or bullied because of their ethnicity, and if they had any trouble with acculturation in the past or if their families had any

experience with acculturation (Gil et al., 2000). In addition, the participants received questionnaires to examine the importance family is to the participants (i.e. familism) and whether the participants disobey their families or involve themselves in dangerous or inappropriate behavior (i.e. disposition to deviance; Gil et al., 2000). The researchers found that the participants who were born in the United States were more likely to drink alcohol than participants who were immigrants (Gil et al., 2000). Additionally, participants born in the United States were statistically higher in their lifetime alcohol use than participants who immigrated to the United States (Gil et al., 2000). Furthermore, the more years the participants lived in the United States, the more likely they were to drink alcohol (Gil et al., 2000). Finally, those who scored higher on the questions regarding acculturation were more likely to use English and were more likely to be bullied and discriminated against (Gil et al., 2000). The results from this study show that the participants who expressed the importance of family may be less likely to use alcohol as a coping mechanism to the stressors of acculturation, as well as the longer an individual experiences the dominant culture of another country, there may be a higher chance of them acculturating (Gil et al., 2000).

In addition to ingrained protective factors such as religious beliefs and cultural identity, developing programs to further help prevent the process of acculturation in LatinX individuals may be necessary (Marsiglia, Kulis, Wagstaff, Elek, & Dran, 2005). For example, the Drug Resistance Strategies Project, specifically a program in the project called “keepin’ it REAL”, was created in Arizona to help middle school children who have experienced situations where they were offered drugs and the ways one is able to refuse taking drugs (Marsiglia et al., 2005). The project has shown to have a tremendous impact on young individuals, especially those who identify as Latino(a) (Marsiglia et al., 2005). Programs like the Drug Resistance Strategies

Project may be important to help young individuals, especially LatinX, from developing dangerous habits such as substance abuse and help them gain strategies and ways to prevent themselves from succumbing to peer pressure (Marsiglia et al., 2005).

Other outpatient therapies may include, cognitive-behavior therapy, multidimensional family therapy, motivational interviewing and motivational incentives (National Institute of Drug Abuse, 2020). Research has shown that cognitive-behavioral therapy is one of the best treatment options for those struggling with substance abuse (Mastroleo, Humm, Williams, Kiluk, Hoadley, & Magill, 2020). In a meta-analysis review on cognitive-behavioral therapy, over 2,000 drug dependent participants entered in the study and approximately 60% of these participants reported that they were clean well beyond the end of the research study (McHugh, Hearon, & Otto, 2010). Cognitive-behavioral therapy is important for strategizing and thinking about ways to handle events where they would use drugs (National Institute of Drug Abuse, 2020). In addition, cognitive-behavioral therapy implements numerous strategies and coping skills to help prevent individuals from relapse as well as increasing the individual's participation in non-substance related events and activities such as going to a coffee shop or exercising (Mastroleo et al., 2020).

Multidimensional family therapy is used to help young individuals and their families who have a history of substance abuse and figure out ways to improve family dynamics and address the consequences drugs have on the family (National Institute of Drug Abuse, 2020). This therapy type may help individuals speak with their parents or other family members and discuss the support that they need and brainstorm strategies to help the individual receive the support that they need (Liddle, Dakof, Turner, Henderson, & Greenbaum, 2008). However, multidimensional family therapy also interacts with the parents to help them improve and think

of more ways to become more involved with their child's life, become more emotionally invested and limit giving adverse consequences to their child (Liddle et al., 2008).

Motivational interviewing is used for motivating individuals with substance abuse to want to enter treatment and help themselves (National Institute of Drug Abuse, 2020). Motivational interviewing can help motivate and encourage individuals with substance abuse to try and continue engaging in activities that are non-substance related events even if the individual is nervous or scared (McHugh et al., 2010). Finally, motivational incentives are used to help individuals stay absent from drugs by giving them positive reinforcement, typically encouragement or a token (National Institute of Drug Abuse, 2020). Though in order to be treated for substance abuse, individuals must have the opportunity to receive help. Unfortunately, LatinX individuals face discrimination in treatment centers and other institutions that provide help for individuals with substance abuse (Alvarez, Jason, Olson, Ferrari, & Davis, 2007). In healthcare, there is a bias toward LatinX individuals and other minorities that may be a result of the limited access of resources and treatment programs, in addition to having to wait longer to receive the care they need compared to individuals who identify as White (Alvarez et al., 2007). It is important that everyone is capable of receiving the accommodations and help they need and deserve. Developing programs and treatment specifically toward certain vulnerable groups, such as LatinX communities, has been seen to be an effective way to provide help and help these individuals develop strategies to be resilient when faced with risky behaviors such as substance abuse (De La Rosa, 2008).

Along with treatment programs, group therapies like Alcoholics-Anonymous or Narcotics-Anonymous or other inpatient programs may be helpful with increasing or gaining a healthy support system (Alvarez et al., 2007). Talking to other individuals that understand and

have gone through similar situations may help in recovering (Alvarez et al., 2007). As well as hearing survivors may be encouraging for other individuals to get the help that they need (National Institute of Drug Abuse, 2020). Short-term clinics may also be helpful for individuals to go through drug detox to remove the substances from their bodies (National Institute of Drug Abuse, 2020). Additionally, recovery housing may be helpful for those needing guidance and structure before entering back into the world on their own (National Institute of Drug Abuse, 2020). Finally, speaking to a social worker may also be helpful in discussing treatments and other programs that fit well with the individual (De La Rosa, 2008).

Although the United States prides itself for being a theoretical “melting pot” (Wilson, 2014), people should not set aside their beliefs and culture in order to fit in with those around them and be successful (i.e. acculturation; Celeste et al., 2016). The process of acculturation has shown to increase the risk and creation of substance abuse among young LatinX individuals (Blanco et al., 2012; Caetano et al., 2008; Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2004; Lara et al., 2005; Savage & Mezuk, 2014), though protective factors including religious beliefs and family values within Hispanic culture may be able to alleviate and prevent substance abuse in the Hispanic community (Blanco et al., 2012; Burnett Zeigler, 2012; Gil et al., 2000; Mossakowski, 2003). With the knowledge of the effects acculturation has on the Hispanic community, more protective measures and prevention are important and pertinent to implement into numerous treatment facilities and programs (Gil et al., 2000). This information is important to potentially prevent substance use disorders and other psychological disorders from being developed (Gil et al., 2000).

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