

The Use of Intercultural Competency and Culture-Bound Syndromes in Mental Health Services for Latino Americans

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By 2050, it is estimated that 97 million people or one-fourth of the U.S. population will be of Latino descent. Yet, often mental health therapists have inherently Western approaches to treatment that may not effectively aid culturally diverse groups. This presentation is a literature review of successful therapies for treating Latino Americans. It investigates empirical studies that have been peer reviewed and are published in scholarly journals. The findings indicate two essential concepts: intercultural competence and culture-bound syndromes for Latino American mental health services. Intercultural competence includes recognizing how migratory and acculturative stress may play a role in a person's mental condition. It implies that the therapist should realize how another society has distinctive values, such as the importance of collectivism or maintaining masculinity and femininity. Also, intercultural competency demonstrates that no culture is monolithic; cultures have group differences within and are nuanced. Included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Text-Revision) is the model of culture-bound syndromes. These are diseases that are widespread in a specific culture but are unfamiliar to those outside of the culture. For treatment of Latino Americans, therapists should be able to diagnose culture-bound syndromes such as *coraje*, *susto*, and *nervios*.

Information about the Author:

As a psychology major, Tina Siganporia is interested in cross-cultural aspects of the field and is empathetic towards ethnic minorities because she is a "first generation" American. This made her cultural identity complex as she had to understand the interplay between two cultural influences. Someday, she would like to be able to practice therapy in Spanish and use culturally competent methods of treatment. She completed this project for her Spanish for the Service Professionals class.

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