

MULTICULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR LATINX FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

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Introduction

- Autism spectrum disorder is a neurological and developmental disorder that can be characterized by difficulties with social skills, repetitive behaviors, extreme interest, poor eye contact, and late developments in speech (ASHA, 2021).
- The majority of evidence based ASD interventions have been administered on participants who were white, mid-upper class, and only spoke English (DuBay et al., 2018). However, there is an increase in the identification of Latino children with ASD, as well as other minorities in the United States (DuBay et al., 2018). Cultural minorities are also less likely to receive evidence-based interventions, and often start receiving treatment later. The purpose of this paper was to bring awareness to possible considerations to take into account when providing services to the Latinx population.

Multi-Cultural/Bilingualism

- Multi-cultural relates to an individual who identifies with two or more cultural or ethnic groups within a society (Marek, 2019). Therapists are often exposed to many kinds of multi-cultural families. Therefore, there should be a certain level of awareness about different cultures.
- Bilingualism is defined as the use of two languages. Parents of typically developing (TD) children may refrain from raising their child bilingual, due to the fear of the child becoming confused or experiencing language development delays. This fear in parents with children whom have ASD is more often, than not, heightened due to language and communication challenges already present in children with ASD.
- However, current research has found raising a child to be bilingual does not cause confusion or language delays, and could, in fact, have cognitive benefits for the child (Beaucham et al., 2017; Hampton et al., 2017).

Common Latinx's Views on ASD

- In the literature, some of the Latinx population reported knowing little to nothing about ASD prior to their child's diagnosis.
- Some families stated that in the Mexican communities, some people do not believe autism exists (Zuckerman et al, 2014).
- Latinx families have very strong family ties; therefore, are heavily influenced by family members' thoughts and opinions.
- Some families reported religion-based explanations for their child's disability, such as it is a punishment from God, a gift from God, or a test from God (Cohen et al., 2018).
- The Latinx population often relies on Fatalism. Fatalism is a way to deal with things that are out of ones control by giving ones troubles to God (Salkas et al., 2015).
- It is not uncommon to hear Latinx families put a positive spin on their child's disability, such as children with autism are a positive sign from God, a blessing, or part of God's plan (Salkas et al., 2015).
- Some parents believe special children are given to special parents.
- Also, it is important to note not all Latinx families have this point of view in regards to how religion relates to autism.
- Some families report they believe having a child with ASD is a negative sign from God.
- Other parents report they do not believe their child's disability has a spiritual meaning (Salkas et al., 2015).
- Another problematic factor for the Latinx community is that many people in their communities perceive disabilities and mental health problems as embarrassing or shameful (Zuckerman et al., 2014).
- Parents reported that with the ignorance of ASD in their communities and the gap in the education and healthcare system, they often feel stuck.

SLP Perception

- Results of a study indicated most SLPs are uncomfortable assessing ELL children.
- SLPs felt reasons they are not equipped to work with this population included ineffective pre-service education, lack of support for professional development, and lack of educational programs that support culturally responsive curriculum.
- Language is another barrier for many professionals when it comes to communicating with culturally diverse families (Maul, 2015).
- SLPs were also asked about cultural differences they see; two differences mentioned were Latinx expectation for small children are not as elevated as expectations other parents tend to have for their children and dependent on the culture the tendency of some cultural groups to be highly protective of children with disabilities (Maul, 2015).

Discussion

- The literature shows that there is a major gap between what SLPs and other professionals think of the Latinx population versus what the Latinx population is actually feeling and thinking.
- Not all Latinx families think the same or have the same beliefs; therefore, it is crucial these conversations are had with each family.
- Due to the Latinx population often not fitting the normative sample in assessments, finding other ways to assess this population using observations, informal assessment such as language samples, and dynamic assessment may be a useful way to get the most valid information.
- Latinx often feel their needs are not being met from service providers, but they have many barriers that often stop them from attaining the resources and information they need.
- They feel that professionals often are not professional with them and do not take into consideration what is important for them and their families