Basic Statistics

- Latino community comprises about 14.8% of the population in the United States or 44,252,278 of 299 million people (US Census 2006)
- Between 2000 and 2006 the Hispanic population accounted for one-half of the nations’ growth
- Hispanic rate of growth was 3x the growth rate of the total population
- Mexican Americans make up the overwhelming majority of the Hispanic population in the United States (64%)
- Puerto Ricans are the next largest group in the US at 9%
- Mexican Americans live predominantly in the Southwestern states, Puerto Ricans in the Northeastern states and Cubans predominantly in Florida.

Latino family cultural values include the following:

- Family is prioritized above individual needs.
- Families have a large network of family, extended family and friends.
- Relationships with family, extended family and friends are highly valued and prioritized.
- Strong patriarchal hierarchy in the family with strong gender roles between husbands and wives.
- Children are to be obedient to parents and elderly and are expected to respect family values and hierarchy.
• Family members are expected to cooperate with the needs of the family rather than compete with the needs of the family.
• Spirituality is a strong influence within the family, which is predominantly Roman Catholic.

Issues faced by Latino children and youth

• Learning to develop ethnic identity which can provide a sense of belonging and a positive self-concept if negotiated effectively.
• Latino youth begin exploring ethnic identity issues in middle school.
• Biculturalism is shown by repeated studies to facilitate a positive self-concept.
• Biculturalism maintains the Latino ethnic identity as well as incorporating aspects of the culture of the US.
• First generation Latino youth have stronger adherence to traditional family values and higher level of academic success than second generation Latino youth.
• Factors contributing to the high drop-out rate of Latino youth from school include: dissatisfaction with school, poverty issues, family obligations, early pregnancy, placement in lower track classes, enrollment in poor quality schools, poor self-concept and poorly developed ethnic identity.
• Latino youth often acculturate more quickly than their parents, especially elderly family members, which contributes to intergenerational conflict.
• The high level of difficulty facing Latino youth is evident in the following findings in research studies:
  • Mexican American teens report more depression and conduct disorders than White teens
  • Small town Mexican American youth have more severe and higher rates of substance abuse problems
  • High level of suicide behaviors in Latinas and Puerto Rican males

Considerations when working with Latino youth and their families

• Engage in a warm and respectful manner.
• Less acculturated parents will expect a more formal relationship with people they do not know well.
• Agency workers are seen as authority figures and will expect appropriate professional attire.
• Work hard to engage the father first before family members since he is seen as the final authority in the family.
Seek an understanding of the “problem” from the client’s perspective and assess possible influences of spiritual beliefs.

Assess the level of acculturation of each family member and the impact of varying acculturation levels with the family system.

Determine the impact of racism, poverty and acculturation stress within the family.

Determine the level of biculturalism within the family.

Explain the nature and duration of services being provided.