

Latino Youth Suicide *By Pierluigi Mancini, Ph. D.*

What can possibly bring a young person to make the decision to take their life? There is not clear answer for this question but one truth that has been confirmed by some of those that have survived suicide attempts is that they did not want to die, they only wanted to stop the internal suffering that was causing them emotional pain.

Many times we do not we recognize the symptoms of a person who is contemplating suicide and many times we do not even we know what signs to look for. Some studies have indicated that the Latino youth are at a higher risk of suffering serious mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, eating disorders, and behavior disorders, like Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Nevertheless, for the first time, a large scale study, the 2005 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), showed that the Latinos present higher risks of suffering a very serious problem: **suicide**. In this study of thousands of youths, Latinos presented significantly higher risks of suicidal ideation, plans, suicide attempts and suicide attempts that required medical processing that African-American and Caucasian youth.

There are many factors that aggravate the biological vulnerability that Latino youth can have to develop mental health problems. For immigrants, the traumas lived in their native lands before immigrating to the United States (war, terrorism, disasters, poverty, hunger, etc.) and the traumas of the process of immigrating (dangerous routes, witnessing deaths, poor treatment by the smugglers, lack of documentation, separation of the extended family, and even separation from their parents) all increase anxiety and tension.

For all Latinos, immigrants or born in the United States, other stressors include poverty, discrimination and domestic violence. Also, often, due to long working hours, the parents or the re-

mainder of the family cannot supervise and control their behavior or to help the youth bear the difficult task of acculturation, increasing the risk of effective disciplining. This does not it signify that the parents are at fault, it only defines part of the present challenges.

In the case of young people 15 to 24 years old, suicide is the third leading cause of death and represents 64% of all the suicides. Depression in adolescents is one of the most determinant risk factors in the death of young people, particularly if combined with emotional, cognitive or academic development, family problems or the presence of chronic illnesses. Recurring problems such as substance abuse and mental illness, can sometimes be the main cause leading to suicide.

Suicide among Latinos is the third leading cause of death for youth between 10 and 34 years old, affecting males primarily (CDC, 2004). Nevertheless, the 2003 National Household Survey on Drug Use and health reflects a worrying tendency among Latino youth between the ages of 12 and 17 years. Likewise, the survey reveals that the Latinas have a high risk of suicide and collects information on members of this sub group that have thought of or tried to kill themselves. These figures cover the different geographical regions and ethnic subgroups (Mexican, Puerto Rican, Central American, South American and Cuban).

Suicidal behavior risk factors are listed below but these are not the only risk factors that may contribute to suicide:

- Previous suicide attempts.
- Alcohol and drug use or abuse
- History of suicide in the family.
- History of child abuse.
- Sense of despair.
- Impulsive or aggressive attitudes and behaviors.
- Lack of linguistic and culturally appropriate access to mental health services.
- Loss (relational, social, employment or financial).

- Physical Illnesses.
- Easy access to methods of self-destruction.
- Lack of desire to seek aid by the stigma associated to mental health, substance abuse or suicide.
- Cultural and religious Beliefs. For example, the belief that the suicide is a noble solution.
- Epidemic of suicides at the local level.
- Isolation, sensation not belonging.

Warning Signs:

- Depression.
- Guilty feelings or statements
- Tension or anxiety.
- Agitation.
- Impulsiveness.

Critical Signs:

- A sudden change in behavior, especially being calm after a period of anxiety.
- Giving away personal belongings.
- Direct or indirect threats to commit suicide.
- Direct or indirect intents to commit suicide.

What you are you willing to do?

Prevention begins at home. Do not shy away from speaking about suicide you're your children, especially when we have a crisis in our community. This is a great opportunity to begin to talk about this topic.

Do not take threats of suicide or suicide attempts as joke or discount not them with excuses like "he or she was only playing". Attend public forums and other meetings of information that are held in your community. Talk daily with your children and ask them if there is something that worries them or that is bothering them.

Do not hesitate in seeking help is something is bothering you. This is not time to be worried about what *they* are going to think or say— remember it is your children's lives.

To speak with a professional counselor in Spanish or in English please call CETPA at 770 662 0249.

We are located at 6020 Dawson Blvd, Suite 1, Norcross, GA 30093. Please visit our bilingual website at www.cetpa.org

HHC GA Committee Opportunities

Organizational Development Committee: Task is to identify and develop internal systems that will maximize organizational effectiveness.

- Co-Chairs: Jack Kinkade and Maritza Licameli
jkinkad@emory.edu
maritza.licameli@heart.org

Advocacy Committee: Task is to identify advocacy issues, to develop proactive

strategies and to build meaningful relationships in the community.

- Co-Chairs: Susy Martorell and Mayira Bunting
mayirab@yahoo.com
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Program Committee: Task is to identify and develop educational, leadership and networking opportunities for the member-

ship and for the broader community.

- Co-Chairs: Maria Isabel Castaneda and Paola Salazar
mcastaneda@sjha.org
pasalazar@univision.net

We encourage those HHC GA members who would like to participate on a committee to contact the co-chairs. We guarantee that your labor will be most appreciated and will contribute to the better health and well-being of Latinos in Georgia!

The Hispanic Health Coalition of Georgia is funded by National Council of La Raza (NCLR), Healthcare Georgia Foundation, and the Funds for Southern Communities.

The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) Annual Conference *by Mayira Bunting*

HHCGA Board member Debora Furce and Program Manager Mayira Bunting attended the 2008 NCLR Annual Conference on July 12-15 in San Diego, a conference that involved more than 2,000 participants from grassroots organizations from across the country. After four intensive days of workshops and presentations, Debora and Mayira obtained certificates of professional development with a focus in Community Building/Advocacy and Affiliate/Nonprofit Management respectively. They had the opportunity to learn about ongoing and emerging issues in the Hispanic community and network and share with other Hispanic community-based organizations.

The workshops included topics in: best practices in leadership development, community engagement and volunteerism, how to keep institutions safe, importance of printed media, effective program evaluation, successful advocacy strategies, innovative tools to refine your organization's reach, information on *promotores de salud*, and the dangers of pesticides for farm workers, among others.

This year was not only a celebration of the Annual conference but a very special event because it was the celebration of the 40th anniversary of NCLR creating an impact in the Latino Community and being a voice on the issues that affect the community. The event featured important speakers including Janet Murguía, President and CEO, National Council of La Raza, Senator Barack Obama (Democratic Presidential Candidate); Senator John McCain (Republican Presidential candidate); Raul Yzaguirre, Former President and CEO, NCLR; Antonio Villaraigosa, Mayor of City of Los

Angeles; and Samuel Betances, nationally renowned educator and motivational leader.

Each day had a town hall presentation or a special session; one of the town hall presentations, "Providing Health Care for All: Making a National Priority Reality", focused on current health care reform proposals, their impact on the community, and innovative proposals and strategies to diminish health disparities health. The panelists for this informative session were Maria Gomez, President and CEO of Mary's Center for Maternal and Child Care and NCLR Board Member; Garth Graham, MD, MPH, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Minority Health, Office of Minority Health; Douglas Holtz-Eakin, Senior Policy Advisor to Senator John McCain, and Tom Perez, Campaign Representative, Obama for America. One of the more intriguing Special Sessions was "Protecting the Public Discourse: Taking Hate Out of the Immigration Debate" based on the NCLR experience implementing the Wave of Hope campaign and providing tools to address the presence of hate group in the immigration debate. You can find links to more information about these topics at www.nclr.org.

As part of the celebration, NCLR hosted the *NCLR Lideres* Summit, where more than 400 students and young Latino leaders between the ages of 14 and 25 from all over the country developed leadership and teamwork skills, learned about Latino community issues, and discussed community involvement, and empowerment. There was also The Latino Expo USA, which was open to the public; it included more than 200 exhibitors; a Housing Fair where the public could attend a mortgage clinic and get advice. Other events included a citizenship application session for 500 eligible legal permanent residents and a Health Fair where bilingual health professionals provided safety demonstrations, free health



Janet Murguía, NCLR President and CEO

screenings, blood pressure checks, glucose and cholesterol levels readings, and tests for HIV/AIDS, as well as information on access to health programs and services.

The conference provided much relevant and timely information, and their attendance allowed both Deborah and Mayira to network with a range of professionals in related fields from many different states. HHCGA's participation at the conference was sponsored as one part of the *Emerging Latinos Initiative* grant from NCLR.



Save the Date

November 10th HHCGA Lunch N Learn, Location/Speaker TBA

November 17th HHCGA Access Open Call, Topic/Call in Details TBA

December 5 HHCGA Networking Fair. Latin American Association. 9am-12N

January 14, 2009 HHCGA Quarterly Meeting. Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, Tullie Location.. 9am-11am

February 27 to 28 2009

LATINO HEALTH SUMMIT

Emory Conference Center

Partially funded by the Healthcare Georgia Foundation

For more Information about the above events please contact Mayira Bunting at hhcga.membership@yahoo.com

**Annual Membership Drive
October-December
Invite New Members to Join
For membership valid through
December 2009**

<http://hhcga.org/contribute/index.cfm?Fuseaction=contribute§ion=contribute>

**NEW MAILING ADDRESS!
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