

Counseling in the latino culture

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Case Study of Mario Abstract Counseling members of the Latino culture who reside in the United States comes with many challenges, as family structure, economic, and social factors influence an individual's ability to cope with his new surroundings. In the case study of Mario, an examination of his US residency and the motivational role his family played in his relocation is crucial in determining his mental state and understanding of support. Latino men are generally hesitant to seek counseling and admit weakness, and the mandate of the court for treatment may even create more resistance in the case of Mario.

While treatment goals would include a complete abstinence from addictive substances, deeper success would come with a realization of his coping mechanisms and the environment factors triggering their defenses. Measures success will be found in the increased ability for Mario to self-disclose during treatment, cooperating in native-language journaling, and attendance and voluntary participation in addiction oriented group counseling. Personal Information When first meeting with Mario, I would like to understand more about who he is.

Since we may not have complete file on his demographics, I would like to know his age, marital status, original residence, if he has children, and current employment situation. I would like to know about his journey to get into the United States, as well as the decision making that went into the process. Considering that he has left his family behind, I would like to know who he is staying with or his current living conditions. Since the ties among family are highly valued in the Hispanic culture, determining whose choice it

was for Mario to enter the United States illegally would assist in understanding his emotional state and stability.

As mentioned by Torres & Zayas (2009), “ Latino men are intensely devoted to their families, take great pride in their ability to provide for and protect their wives and children, and are deeply connected to their extended families and their broader communities” (Torres & Zayas, 2009, p. 206). In light of this, I would like to know the motivation for being in the United States despite the risks associated with his alien status. I would also like to know if he any contact with his family back home. I would also like to know about his family background.

The primary source of identity and self-esteem in a Latino is found in his familial structure (Torres-Rivera, 2004). Additionally, the family culture of the Latino population heavily involves the teaching and cultures of the Roman Catholic church, which is a source of Mario’s social interaction (Hildebrand, Phenice, Gray, & Hinesm, 2008). The family structure and culture also provides understanding of the level of acceptance or tolerance for substance abuse, and whether or not there are any moral objections to such behaviors by relatives and his original community.

This provides an avenue from which to pursue support or determine a weak spot in his associations (Torres-Rivera, 2004). I think it would also be pertinent to follow his journey in the United States for the past five years. How many times has he been unemployed? What different cultures, ethnicities, and attitudes has he been exposed too? How has he learned to communicate with others? Research show the social and economic

conditions play a significant role in substance abuse among Latinos (Black, DeBlassie, Paz, 1991).

Realizing what he has been exposed to may provide insight into his need or decision to abuse alcohol or other substances. Personal Biases and Limitations Having had previous exposure to the Latino community through a non-profit organization, I feel that I am comfortable around their culture. One of the keys to building successful rapport with a Latino client is familiarizing oneself with the Latino community and culture, and I think that my desire to become more education about diversity would allow me to accomplish this (Black, DeBlassie, Paz, 1991).

However, realizing that he is an illegal alien does give me cause for concern and my first inclination may be to question why he is receiving counseling rather than being deported. Since men within the Latino “ seldom present for treatment, and even more rarely do they make the initial request for services themselves” (Torres & Zayas, 2009), I may be predisposed to assume that these sessions would be pointless and his addictions were just a part of his primary culture. I may also question who would be paying for the services, and feel that government funding would be better spent on individuals who had a “ legitimate right” to ur services. Should he have limited English speaking abilities, I may be frustrated and feel that he had a responsibility to learn English if he wanted to a part of our country and just refer his case off to a Spanish speaking counselor so I would not have the challenges that would accompany that barrier. With these thoughts and biases, my understanding of his lifestyle and point of view would be skewed and I do not think that I would look objectively at goals and treatment plans.

I may go through the motions of listening, but lack a sincerity and empathy in my approach and response. Latino individuals, especially men, need to develop strong rapport with their counselors or therapist, as self-disclosure is extremely difficult for them (Torres & Zayas, 2009). My attitude may be easily sensed, which would lead to confrontation and hostility from the initial introductions (Black, DeBlassie, Paz, 1991). Goals In working with Mario, I think the primary goal would be abstinence from alcohol.

Instead of explaining the evils of alcohol or the effects on his physical health or even the legal consequences of abuse, it is more critical that I engage him in a decision to abstain from alcohol for a specific period of time as we discuss the implications of his abuse on his family and community. Although he is separated from his family, deriving treatment goals from what is culturally acceptable behavior highlights one of the strongest values in the Hispanic culture- protecting and providing for the family (Maddux, Phan, Roberts-Wilbur, Torres-Rivera, & Wilbur, 2004).

Realizing that his dependence on alcohol may be a coping mechanism for his loneliness and having him explore avenues to become more socially engaged will be another goal that I pursue with Mario. In Latino men, “ substance abuse is often used to cope with the discomfort and unmet emotional needs of the individual” (Maddux, Phan, Roberts-Wilbur, Torres-Rivera, & Wilbur, 2004, p. 31). Despite the need for change, it is plausible that Mario will not support these goals.

In fact, “ resistance should be expected at with every intervention when working with Latino clients” (Maddux, Phan, Roberts-Wilbur, Torres-Rivera, & Wilbur, 2004, p. 36). One suggestion for combatting this resistance would be

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to have Mario participate in a group counseling setting where he can examine the importance of cultural beliefs and values, as well as provide him a more “familiar face” environment where he can be honest with other Latino participants (Maddux, Phan, Roberts-Wilbur, Torres-Rivera, & Wilbur, 2004). Theoretical Approach

Because of the strong need for Latino men to feel in control and exude their masculine identity, I will have to carefully approach my discussions or plan for Mario (Torres & Zayas, 2009). I would develop a better relationship if I share ideas and allow him to discuss it and offer input. The Latino population is generally not interested in lengthy, theoretical discussions and often prefers action. ‘Hispanic clients were found to be tolerant of early goal setting in the counseling process’ (Black, DeBlassie, Paz, 1991, p. 229). My style should be direct, and include an understanding of the problem from their perspective (Diller, 2011).

It would also be important to incorporate a spiritual component to his treatment, “since spirituality for Latinos is an important part of their identity” (Maddux et al, 2004, p. 37). Latino individuals are known to terminate counseling prematurely (Madduz et al, 2004). With the fact that counseling has been mandated by the courts, I would establish a minimum of four sessions. Since the primary session will mainly gather information about his background, that leaves three sessions to work through what I have discovered and found to be important to him.

Since this will be combined with attendance with a support group, I do not want to scare Mario or smother him in his treatment and progress. If there is a language barrier, it may be easier for Mario to communicate on a deeper

emotional level in his native language (Black, DeBlassie, Paz, 1991). If this is the case and he is comfortable doing so, I would have him journal in Spanish or outwardly speak his thoughts occurring when he has a desire to drink or when he is lonely. This may be more effective than me trying to tell him how he might feel in English.

Therapeutic Progress and Success While success would be for Mario to become more integrated into his present community and maintain control over his alcohol intake, measuring success for Mario may be difficult if he is unable to remove the depression, fear, and stress that often accompanies Latinos residing in the United States (Maddux et al, 2004). However, smaller signs of success will be a noticeable change in his effort to participate in therapy and increase in the depth of his disclosures during sessions.

Once Latino men are more comfortable and engaged in the therapeutic process, their walls come down and they are more willing to be personal and open in their revelations (Torres and Zayas, 2009). Further success would be shown in his willful participation in the group therapy that he has been required to attend. References Black, C. , DeBlassie, R. , & Paz, H. (1991). Counseling the Hispanic male adolescent. *Adolescence*, 26(101), 223-32. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/195933761?accountid=12085> Diller, J. V. (2011). *Cultural diversity: A primer for the human services* (4th ed.).

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