UC DAVIS HEALTH SYSTEM

MHSOAC
MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY COMMISSION

Mental Health Disparities and Stigma in Latinos

May 26, 2009

Marbella Sala
Program Manager
UC Davis School of Medicine Center for Reducing Health Disparities

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The UC Davis Center for Reducing Health Disparities (CRHD) works on building relationships with communities, conducting research, and working with policy makers to improve the health of underserved groups in California.

OVERVIEW

1. Center for Reducing Health Disparities and Department of Mental Health: *"Building Partnerships"* Project.

2. What communities across California told us.

3. What the Parent Advocates and Migrant Workers told us.

4. Strategic Latino Disparities Project.

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS PROJECT

In 2006, the Center for Reducing Health Disparities (CRHD) joined with the California Department of Mental Health to reach out to communities that have not been a part of the MHSA process and learn about:

1. their ideas about mental health

2. the mental health problems they see in their communities

3. the kinds of programs that might help prevent mental health problems from developing

4. community strengths and existing resources

WHO PARTICIPATED

30 focus groups were conducted by CRHD in community-based locations in 10 counties across California

- **specific ethnic groups**: African American, Native American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander, Asian (including Hmong, Cambodian, and Chinese), and Latino/a (Mexican and Central and South American);
- **other underserved groups** (LGBTQ, foster youth, young adults with juvenile justice history, and older adults) from rural and urban locations;
- **community-based providers and leaders** that serve these communities.

WHO WE TALKED TO

WHAT COMMUNITIES SAID

- Specific Mental Health Concerns
  - violence and trauma, illicit drugs, depression, stress, and suicide
- Limited Access to Service
  - Scarcity of services, transportation, inability to afford services, lack of awareness regarding mental illness and mental health services, stigma, difficulty accessing services, lack of continuity of community programs, geographic isolation, undocumented or uncertain legal status in the U.S., lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate services, perceptions of mental health system as punitive

What Communities Said

- Living conditions that affect mental health
  - Poverty and discrimination
- Social Exclusion: feeling isolated and neglected by government-run agencies
- Community Strengths
  - individual and community resiliency, community-based organizations, formal and informal support networks, community leaders, and connection to native culture

PARENT ADVOCATES

- 2 focus group were conducted with Asian-American and Latinos in Riverside and San Bernardino
- Interviews with community leaders from the Parent Institute for Quality Education

PARENT CONCERNS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

- depression, suicide, anxiety, drug and alcohol abuse, anxiety
- Lack of communication between generations
- Lack of strong relationships with parents and supportive social connections at school

PARENT CONCERNS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

"There is nobody there to care. There is nobody there when they come home to say, "How was your day? I love you." They don't have the support. So you do have suicide because nobody is there. We all need someone. We need someone to validate us, no matter what age we are"

Parent Advocate

THE PARENT CONCERNS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

"On suicide, almost every month we have cases in different schools, but people don't talk about it, they don't know. Just recently in …. That school has a lot of history of suicide of kids, but nobody knows unless you work in there …Parents don't know, the school doesn't make it public. An I think it's a big, big issue… We can't prevent these **ki**ds from committing suicide"

School-based Counselor

"All of a sudden this kid turns 12 or 13, and he doesn't want to eat. He doesn't want to make his bed, he insults his parents, and the parents don't know how to deal with it. What's going on? My kid is rebelling and they don't understand…These are the adolescent years ..and that's when you find mental issues"

Parent Advocate

WHAT CONDITIONS AFFECT MENTAL HEALTH IN THE COMMUNITY?

- poverty and financial stress
- parents working more than one job
- lack of time and energy to devote to their families
- cultural and intergenerational differences between children and parents
- immigrant parents suffer from depression and stress related to lack of employment and navigating systems in English

WHAT CONDITIONS AFFECT MENTAL HEALTH IN THE COMMUNITY?

"Something else that happens in our community and especially among new immigrants, they have very low wages and in order to survive they have to have 2 or 3 jobs. So that leads to not enough attention for children. The television is in charge. The game, the games. So really, it is also a socioeconomic issue"

Parent Advocate

"Many parents get depressed. Many parents make this into a big situation because of the language barrier. And also the culture. Our culture is totally different from the one in this country and this is also a problem for us Latinos"

Parent Advocate

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES FOR THE COMMUNITY IN RECEIVING SERVICES?

- scarcity of services available to address Latino youth's life experiences
- lack of counselors in schools
- lack of schools and parents understanding of mental illness
- Fear that their children will be labeled as "crazy"
- inability to obtain treatment due to lack of money, insurance, transportation and taking time off work
- undocumented immigrants reluctance to seek help for fear of detection and deportation.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES FOR THE COMMUNITY IN RECEIVING SERVICES?

"A lot of anxiety in teenagers. Completely ignored even from parents. ….When you talk to counselors about this, they always refer you to a place where you have to wait probably six months to have the first visit to discuss the issue, or maybe just to fill out papers, and teenagers that suffer from anxiety and depressive symptoms cannot wait six months"

Parent Advocate

"All of a sudden the referrals (for mental health care)…One is in Los Angeles, One is in Bakersfield. You can see…how ridiculous it is. You know what their transportation is a stroller, that's all they got…They're shutting down the only places that they have available that was close by to them. It's disappear, there's not money"

Parent Advocate

COMMUNITY STRENGTHS AND ASSETS (parents)

- Trust and support that the community expresses for each other
- Support within the neighborhood and the school environment is fundamental
- Community-based organizations, faith-based organization and school-based mental health services for youth that people can resort to in case of need

COMMUNITY STRENGTHS AND ASSETS

"You are going to have to find non-traditional organization like the Parent Institute where communities have established a trust. They established a trust in you and they is why you can go"

Parent Advocate

"(A program) that I think that will work is the Promotoras program…I worked with them for years. We work in the city of Montclair here in San Bernardino, and the program in five years grew from 30 ladies that were leaders in the community to 205. And they are people from the community, lay workers, and they got thousands of people trained"

Parent Advocate

WAYS TO PREVENT MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS

- increase parental awareness about mental health and drug and alcohol abuse prevention
- creating awareness to recognize the causes of mental illness
- strengthening the family bond and providing youth with healthy role models
- creating support groups for parents in order to increase their involvement
- development of vocational centers for youth
- encouraging youth and providing them love and support

MIGRANT WORKER PARTICIPANTS

- focus groups were conducted with Migrant Workers in Imperial Valley and San Diego
- interviews with community leaders

MIGRANT CONCERNS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

- Depression, stress, drugs and alcohol and domestic violence
- Obtaining and maintaining employment, housing and transportation
- Coping with oppressive conditions that leads to drug and alcohol use
- Discrimination
- Isolation

MIGRANT WORKERS CONCERNS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

"Always stress and depression. Not knowing what will happen tomorrow. You never know if your care will start tomorrow, if the kids will go to school or anything like that….

Migrant Worker

"With men you see lots of alcohol…Those who live in the "canyons"…(it is) as if the only escape is the alcohol"

Community Leader

MIGRANT WORKERS CONCERNS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

"But you do not belong. You are not Mexican, you are not American. You are discriminated because of the first and you are discriminated because of the latter. If your opportunities are limited, you do not relate well to your parents. You do not fit with them so you end being what? Someone who suddenly accepts you and is a gang, that is to make violence, takes drugs as an escape"

Community Leader

WHAT CONDITIONS AFFECT MENTAL HEALTH IN THE COMMUNITY?

- oppressive social conditions
- discrimination
- racism
- lack of power
- isolation
- vulnerability due to uncertain legal status

WHAT CONDITIONS AFFECT MENTAL HEALTH IN THE COMMUNITY?

"Because of the way the law treats you, you cannot be comfortable because you cannot go about normally as any other person because you are fearful of immigration"

Migrant Worker

"Several complete families live in one trailer where they have minimum access to water. Therefore to wash, take baths, do laundry—simple things that for any person living in the US is part of their comfort zone—the Migrant can't have. Therefore, it is a great stress on the children and on their parents that their children can be discriminated because of body odor because they can't take showers"

Community Leader

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES FOR THE COMMUNITY IN RECEIVING SERVICES?

- accessing needed care
- non existent services
- numerous obstacles to accessing services
- cost of treatment
- geographic isolation
- fear of losing their jobs, being deported
- lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate services

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES FOR THE COMMUNITY IN RECEIVING SERVICES?

"When you go to the clinic, they are asked about their residence, and I understand that is a requirement but people do not want to answer all of those questions"

Community Leader

"English is spoken at the clinics and we don't know since we don't speak it. We cannot tell them"

Migrant Worker

"You don't have a way to go out. You don't have a car. You have nothing. You feel desperate because there is no way to get to town…If you get sick or you need something all that you can do is squeeze your hands together because there is no way of getting out"

Migrant Worker

COMMUNITY STRENGTHS AND ASSETS

- trained community outreach workers
- informal support networks
- existing health services for migrant workers
- hard-working and self-sacrificing community
- inner strength and great determination to improve their condition

COMMUNITY STRENGTHS AND ASSETS

"We developed a manual of mental health for the immigrant…with this manual developed three years ago, Promotoras have been trained on both sides of the border in Mexico and California to have a common ground to talk. It does not pretend to (make them) psychologists, only to give tools so they can talk about mental health with the community"

Community Leader

"We organized different kinds of events, especially health fairs. Training where we facilitate services, information on health to the Latino community, especially the most vulnerable in San Diego"

Community Leader

"But we have to try to push ourselves and say you can. Never tell someone that they are too dumb. As Mexicans we have to say that we can. Never say that you can't"

Migrant Worker

WAYS TO PREVENT MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

- education/awareness on mental health issues and ways to access treatment
- school and after-school programs to engage youth in health activities
- spaces for recreation to decrease isolation through interaction with neighbors and to build a sense of community
- culturally and linguistically appropriate mental health services that understand the needs and living conditions of migrants
- increased accessibility of services in hours of operation, increased transportation and affordable services

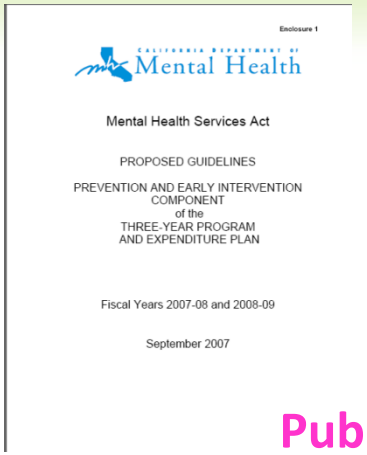
BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS: ACCOMPLISHMENTS

To ensure that community voices were heard, the CRHD:

- Worked and continues to work with policy makers at state and county levels, informing them of the results of our project and advocating for changes in policy that address the needs of underserved communities.

FULL CIRCLE: FROM RESEARCH TO PUBLIC POLICY AND SERVICES TO RESEARCH

Research Results



Public Policy

Services

60 Million California Reducing Disparities Project

MHSOAC approved **$60M** over four years to support a statewide project for Ethnically and Culturally Specific Programs and Interventions.

Source: Guerrero, 2009

Moving from Defining Disparities to Seeking New Solutions

- Investment in communities most impacted by health disparities
- Supporting "Community Defined Evidence" vs. Adapting and Adopting Evidence Based Practices for California underserved multicultural communities
- A 9 year investment in identifying new community defined approaches to reduce disparities.
- Include solutions coming from communities most impacted by disparities
- Willingness to invest in community-based participatory evaluation.
- Solutions that are inclusive across the life span

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was successful because of the dedication and commitment of our community partners. We would like to express appreciation for their collaboration in this process and our deepest gratitude for their willingness to share their stories.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

UCD School of Medicine Center for Reducing Health Disparities Project Team:

Sergio Aguilar-Gaxiola, MD, PhD
Natalia Deeb-Sossa, PhD
Katherine Elliott, PhD., MPH
William M. Scribney, MS
Cristiana Giordan, PhD