

## Abstract

This study explored the views of Latinx youth surrounding the intersections of faith, family values, and mental health. Through Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) researchers examined the stories of 15 Latinx young people across three domains: 1) Family and Faith, 2) Spirituality and Mental Health, and 3) Beliefs and Values. Findings from this investigation have resulted in 10 over-arching themes and several sub-themes, namely: 1) Family and Faith are Everything; 2) Functions of Family; 3) Other Forms of Family; 4) Connection to the Land and Animals; 5) Prayer; 6) Spirituality and Feeling Better; 7) Supernatural Beliefs; 8) Hardwork and Persistence; 9) Independence and Empowerment; 10) Questioning God and Finding Purpose. Results shed light on the ways spiritual and cultural wisdom are transmitted within Latinx families. Similarly, findings add to the mental health field's knowledge of cultural and spiritual resources for promoting overall health and wellness for Latinx youth.

## Literature

- Latinx youth are considered an at-risk group in the U.S. for varying mental health concerns, negative school outcomes, increased risk of teen pregnancy, high incarceration rates, elevated rates of poverty, and increased risk of community violence (Williams, 2018; Martinez, DeGarmo, & Eddy, 2004; US Department of Health and Human Services, 2020; Winkelman et al., 2017; Analysis Reference Bureau, 2020; Santacrose, Kia-Keating, & Lucio, 2021).
- Although some research points to strong family support and engagement in extracurricular activities as strengths (Stein et al., 2014; Knifsend & Juvonen, 2022), there is a dearth of research surrounding Latinx youths' resiliency pathways and resources for coping specifically related to family values, spirituality, and religious beliefs.
- Even less is known about the ways Latinx youth engaged familial and spiritual resources in their navigation through the COVID-19 pandemic and resultant stressors (The WHO-UNICEF-Lancet Commissioners, 2020; Penner, Hernandez Ortiz & Sharp, 2021).

## Research Questions

1. What teachings or sacred stories have been passed down within your family?
2. What beliefs do you have about the supernatural world?
3. How do your spiritual or religious values help you understand emotional, physical, and spiritual problems?
4. How does your spirituality or religion intersect with the natural world?
5. Are there parts of your spiritual or religious values and beliefs that you question?

## Setting and Procedure

- Participants recruited through purposive, non-parametric sampling, and word of mouth.
- Semi-structured interviews of three primary research questions, lasting between 30 to 60 minutes via telephone or zoom.
- Interviews were audio or video taped and transcribed.
- Transcripts analyzed using stage-like process of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA, Smith & Osborn, 2003).
- At each stage of analysis, information audited by individual with clinical and cultural knowledge of research area.

## Participant Demographics

- 15 adolescents of Latinx descent (5 males, 10 females)
- Age ranged between 12-18 years ( $M = 15.6$ )
- All participants reported being of Mexican descent, with 26% being Mexican and mixed race
- Most participants reported being 3rd immigrant generation, while smaller numbers reported being mixed generational status.
- 86.67% Catholic, 6.67% Spiritual, and 6.67% Christian non-denominational

## Expected Findings

- *Familismo* will be a value espoused by participants that facilitates the transmission of cultural and spiritual values.
- Religious and spiritual beliefs and practices will provide personal direction and avenues for active coping with life stressors.
- Familial values surrounding hard work and responsibility will be facilitative of academic and other life success.
- Life stressors, particularly those related to loss, may call into question beliefs in God and religious teachings.

## Qualitative Findings

**Domain 1: Family and Faith**  
**Theme 2: Functions of Family**  
**Subtheme 1: Closeness within the Family**

*And so the day after [my cousin] passed away, we were all looking to go to my Auntie's house, ready to help out and everything, and I get the text that my COVID test is positive...I do remember falling to my knees, just devastated, crying, and I was just so, so, so, so distraught and hurt...why did this have to happen right now when my family needs me the most, when I need my family the most... -Eduardo*

**Domain 2: Spirituality and Mental Health**  
**Theme 1: Connection to the Land and Animals**  
**Subtheme 1: Confidence and Calm**

*She [my aunt] was like, "If you talk to animals, they listen, they don't talk back, of course, but they'll listen, and you'll feel really great." So I remember talking to the horse, and I remember telling him all my family problems, you know...I had petted him...he looked at me, like he understood and like he was listening. -Guadalupe*

**Domain 2: Spirituality and Mental Health**  
**Theme 3: Spirituality and Feeling Better**  
**Subtheme 1: Strength and Coping**

*It's like sometimes stuff occurs, like bad stuff, and all of a sudden you have something good happen in your life. For a while we were kind of doing bad at our old house. And it took us a few months, but we started doing better, and now we have a brand new house. I think that's a good example. We weren't doing too good, and then we prayed a lot, and now I think we're doing better than we were. -Miguel*

**Domain 3: Beliefs and Values**  
**Theme 1: Supernatural Beliefs**  
**Subtheme 1: Help from the Spirits**

*Not too long ago, my cousin passed away, and she had a really young daughter—I think she was around two-ish at the time—and, like, I was told that one day the daughter was in her mom's room, and then her grandma went in there and found her, and she told her grandma, "Mommy's okay. She's up there, and she's in a pretty blue dress...mom's okay, that she's up there, and she's safe." -Trinidad*

**Domain 3: Beliefs and Values**  
**Theme 2: Hardwork and Persistence**  
**Subtheme 3: Why You Work Hard**

*My grandma would tell me stories like that he [my grandfather] would leave early in the morning, he would walk to his job on the farm, he would work all day and come back at night so it's just kinda like, you already know you have to work hard cause that's what everybody did before you. There's no such thing as slacking when you know there are needs, like you know this job needs to be done and you're the only one can get it done. -Mateo*

**Domain 3: Beliefs and Values**  
**Theme 4: Questioning God and Finding Purpose**  
**Subtheme 3: Finding Purpose**

*Why did God take someone so important to me, you know? Because me and my cousin were close we showed animals together...It's like, what is He trying to send?... Sometimes I feel like it's God telling me that's the way of life, that's how it's supposed to happen. Like there are bigger plans, you know? -Josephina*

## Discussion and Implications

- **Family and Faith**
  - Feelings of empowerment, personal acceptance, and increased self-worth from family support is consistent with notions of *Familismo* and positive familial relationships' impacts on coping (Stein et al., 2014; Masten & Narayan, 2012)
- **Spirituality and Mental Health**
  - Engaging in coping within and outside of faith is consistent with literature surrounding the positive impact of extracurricular activities and psychosocial well-being in diverse youth (Knifsend & Juvonen, 2022).
  - Enjoying a spiritual connection with the land and animals as sources of lessons, inner peace, and connection with the divine is similar to notions of the Mestizo perspective and the importance of harmony and respect for the physical environment and all living things (Ramirez, 1983, 1998).
  - Participating in prayer and other aspects of spirituality to find strength and cope with concerns was consistent with previous literature surrounding the power of spiritual capital (Perez Huber, 2009; Park, Dizon & Malcolm, 2020).
  - Communicating with God to determine direction and ease loneliness is in line with research surrounding religious identity and positive youth development (Furrow, King & White, 2004; Bowers et al., 2020).
- **Beliefs and Values**
  - Supernatural beliefs, namely the power of dreams, signs, and help from deceased loved ones is consistent with notions of Mestizo spirituality and belief in a transcendent force facilitating balance in relationships with community, family, and self (Cervantes and Ramirez, 1992). This is also connected to the potency of Latinx traditional healing and connecting clients with deceased loved ones to find direction, comfort, and resolution of concerns (Ocampo Hoogasian, Chavez & McNeill, 2020).
  - Hard work and persistence as core values intersecting with education, athletics, and other extracurricular activities, is in line with previous research surrounding parent encouragement and academic success (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016) as well as the value of hard work to achieve goals (Kenny, et al., 2022).
- **Questioning God and Finding Purpose**
  - Persistent beliefs about everything in life happening for a reason is similar to previous research linking belief in God's plan to academic and career goal advancement in African American college students (Constantine et al., 2006). This is also consistent with research surrounding the protective effect of *fatalismo* for Latinx college students with financial stress (Donner, 2021).