

**Mexican Culture and It's Influence on Healthcare**

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N432: Maternal-Newborn Care

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July 26, 2023

## **Local Prevalence**

The article discusses the significance of Hispanic Heritage Month in Illinois, where the state has the largest Hispanic and Latino population in the Midwestern region and the fifth-highest in the nation, with about 2.24 million residents. However, while the numbers are high, the rate of growth has slowed in recent years. The majority of the Hispanic and Latino population in Illinois is Mexican-American, and much of it is concentrated in the Chicagoland area, particularly in Kane County and Cook County (Emery, 2022). Spanish speakers are prevalent in Illinois, with 14 counties reporting that English is spoken in less than 90% of households. Overall, the Hispanic and Latino population in the United States has experienced significant growth, making up more than half of the nation's total population growth between 2010-2020. The influence of this population is also seen in popular culture, with Spanish-language television channels Univision and Telemundo ranking high in viewership in 2020 (Emery, 2022).

## **Religion**

Mexican religious beliefs are diverse and influenced by a mix of traditions, including Catholicism, indigenous beliefs, and syncretic practices. The predominant religion in Mexico is Roman Catholicism, which was introduced during the Spanish colonial period and remains deeply ingrained in Mexican culture. Many Mexicans also incorporate elements of indigenous spirituality and rituals, creating a unique blend of religious practices (Mann et al., 2020). The relationship between Mexican religious beliefs and healthcare can be significant. In general, spirituality plays a crucial role in the lives of many Mexicans, and it often extends into their

experiences with healthcare. Patients may seek comfort, support, and solace in their religious beliefs during times of illness or when facing challenging medical situations (Mann et al., 2020).

Regarding the preference for male or female healthcare providers, Mexican cultural norms can influence patients' comfort levels with certain provider genders. Traditionally, some Mexican patients may feel more at ease with healthcare providers of the same gender, especially in intimate or sensitive medical situations. For instance, some female patients may prefer female healthcare providers for obstetric or gynecological care (Mann et al., 2020). However, it is important to note that attitudes and preferences can vary significantly among individuals, and modern healthcare practices are becoming increasingly gender-neutral. In professional healthcare settings, providers are generally trained to respect patients' preferences and cultural sensitivities when it comes to gender preferences for care. Ultimately, healthcare providers should always prioritize patient comfort and well-being while delivering culturally sensitive care. Open communication and understanding patients' beliefs and preferences can help foster trust and enhance the patient-provider relationship, leading to better health outcomes (Mann et al., 2020).

### **Healing Beliefs and Practices**

In Mexican culture, pain and suffering are often viewed as part of life's challenges, embraced through the concept of "la lucha," or the struggle. Family support and a sense of solidarity within the community play a vital role in coping with difficulties. Religion, particularly Catholicism, holds significant influence, offering comfort and solace through prayer and religious practices during times of hardship. In traditional Mexican childbirth practices, labor and delivery are considered sacred and communal events. Family members, especially older women, and midwives are involved in providing support during the birthing process. Some

families prefer home births and may use natural techniques and herbal remedies (Mann et al., 2020).

The postpartum period, known as "cuarentena," is highly regarded for a new mother's recovery. This time lasts 40 days and involves customs to promote the mother's well-being and bond with the newborn. Family members assist with chores and childcare, while traditional practices like dietary restrictions and herbal remedies are observed to ensure the mother's health. Ceremonies are also held to welcome the baby into the family and community during this period (Mann et al., 2020).

### **Family Life**

In Mexican culture, the family holds great importance, and the common structure of the family is often extended and close-knit. The traditional family unit typically includes not only the nuclear family (parents and children) but also extended family members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. This extended family structure fosters strong bonds and a sense of interconnectedness among relatives (Mann et al., 2020).

The role of elders in Mexican families is highly valued and respected. Elders are often regarded as the foundation of the family, representing wisdom, experience, and guidance. They play a significant role in passing down cultural traditions, values, and stories to younger generations, contributing to the preservation of Mexican heritage (Gast et al., 2018). In many Mexican families, it is common for elders to live with their adult children and grandchildren. This living arrangement reinforces the sense of familial unity and ensures that elders receive care and support from their loved ones as they age. The practice of multi-generational living is

considered an essential aspect of Mexican culture, promoting a strong sense of family responsibility and solidarity (Gast et al., 2018).

Elders in Mexican culture are generally held in high regard and respected for their wisdom and life experience. Their advice and opinions are often sought after in family matters and decision-making. Their presence is valued, and they are treated with honor and care. This respect for elders extends beyond the immediate family and is often seen in interactions within the broader community as well. Overall, the family structure in Mexican culture places a significant emphasis on intergenerational relationships, fostering a sense of unity, respect, and support among family members across different age groups (Gast et al., 2018).

### **Communication**

In Mexican culture, communication is generally warm, expressive, and highly valued. Both men and women are allowed to speak to strangers and express themselves freely. While traditional gender roles may have influenced communication dynamics in the past, modern Mexican society has evolved to embrace more egalitarian values, granting both genders the right to participate in conversations and express their opinions (Gast et al., 2018). Verbal communication among Mexicans often involves a degree of formality, especially when interacting with elders, authority figures, or business settings. Politeness and respect are essential aspects of communication, and using appropriate titles and greetings is customary. Mexicans tend to be expressive and use gestures, intonation, and facial expressions to convey emotions and emphasize points during conversations (Mann et al., 2020).

Nonverbal communication plays a significant role in Mexican culture. Physical touch, such as handshakes, hugs, and cheek kisses, is common among close acquaintances and family members. Maintaining eye contact during conversations is seen as a sign of attentiveness and respect. Mexicans tend to stand closer to one another during interactions, reflecting the importance of personal connections and relationships in their culture. Mexican communication norms emphasize respect, warmth, and a sense of community. While gender roles might have influenced communication in the past, both men and women are now encouraged to engage in open dialogue and express themselves freely with others, including strangers. Verbal and nonverbal communication are instrumental in building and maintaining strong interpersonal relationships in Mexican culture (Mann et al., 2020).

## **Diet**

Food holds immense significance in Mexican culture and is deeply intertwined with family, community, and celebrations. Mexicans take pride in their rich culinary traditions, and meals are often seen as opportunities for social bonding and sharing. Food is used to celebrate special occasions, religious holidays, and family gatherings. It plays a vital role in expressing cultural identity and passing down traditional recipes from one generation to the next. After the birth of a child, certain foods, such as "atole" (a warm, thickened drink) and "tamales" (steamed corn dough filled with various ingredients), may be consumed during the postpartum period to support the mother's recovery and nourishment (Gast et al., 2018).

Culturally specific diet requirements can significantly impact hospitalization, as certain foods may be essential for patients' physical and emotional well-being. In the case of Mexican patients, adherence to traditional dietary practices, like consuming specific foods during recovery

or religiously significant meals, may be crucial for their sense of comfort and healing. Hospitals and healthcare providers need to be sensitive to cultural dietary needs to ensure patient satisfaction and overall well-being. Understanding and accommodating culturally specific diets can foster trust and rapport between healthcare providers and patients, ultimately leading to better health outcomes and patient experiences (Gast et al., 2018).

### **Description of Core Values**

When working with Mexican patients during the childbearing experience, healthcare providers need to be mindful of the core values of Mexican culture that have implications for healthcare. Family-centered care is crucial, as Mexican culture places great importance on the involvement of family members in healthcare decision-making, including during childbirth. Healthcare providers should engage and respect the input of the family, seeking to understand their beliefs and preferences. Encouraging family members to be present and supportive during labor and delivery can enhance the patient's sense of comfort and emotional well-being (Gast et al., 2018).

Respecting cultural beliefs and traditions is essential to providing sensitive care. Understanding practices like the "cuarentena" postpartum period and accommodating cultural dietary preferences demonstrates respect for the patient's background and helps create a positive healthcare experience. Effective communication is another key aspect of caring for Mexican patients. The culture values warm, expressive, and respectful communication. Healthcare providers should use nonverbal cues, active listening, and interpreters when needed to ensure clear communication and avoid misunderstandings (Mann et al., 2020).

For fellow students working with Mexican patients, it's crucial to develop cultural awareness and familiarity with the core values and traditions of Mexican culture. This knowledge will enable them to provide more culturally sensitive and patient-centered care (Mann et al., 2020). Building trust with patients is also vital; showing respect for their culture and beliefs and taking the time to listen to their concerns and preferences will foster a strong patient-provider relationship. Additionally, involving the patient's family in healthcare discussions and decision-making will make them feel valued and included in the care process. By applying cultural awareness, building trust, and engaging the family, fellow students can deliver more compassionate and effective healthcare to Mexican patients during their childbearing experience (Mann et al., 2020).

## References

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