

American culture in conflict with traditional values of Hispanic male immigrants

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Traditional family values may be strongest among immigrant men in one of the fastest growing populations of American society. A recent study by researchers at the University of Missouri-Columbia is one of the first to intently interview Hispanic immigrant men in focus groups about their opinions and concerns toward family planning in the United States.

The study found that family values are central to the culture of Hispanic male immigrants and recommends that this concept be used by family planning services to foster communication and safe-sex between a husband and wife.

"Family planning is a sensitive topic," said Marjorie Sable, associate dean of the MU School of Social Work in the College of Human Environmental Sciences. "One of the things that we found with the men that we interviewed was their focus on building on their cultural value of 'familismo' and their desire to protect their families."

Sable said this would translate into encouraging condom use and husbands speaking openly with wives on the future expectations of the family. Several respondents in the study said they understood family planning was important and that couples should agree on how many children they can support.

Whereas men reported struggling with their cultural definition of masculinity and its association with large families, they understood that having fewer children meant they could provide better education and

livelihood to each. Some respondents were defensive toward the perceived stereotype of a lack of equality in the family. One participant said "We aren't a herd of machismos [male chauvinists] anymore."

Some of the men discussed the intense social pressure they felt in adjusting to the fast-paced, wealth-driven culture of America. In one case, they wanted to be the traditional breadwinners of their households, but economic necessity required that their wives also work. Sable found that the men respected the hard-working, egalitarian culture, but wished for more time to spend with family and missed the sense of community they once had.

Sable said that she believes the research will help family planning providers understand the concerns of Hispanic men and understand 'familismo' as the lynch-pin in encouraging family planning among Hispanic men – especially toward the use of contraception and condoms.

Family planning services have focused more on the Hispanic immigrant community in Missouri in the past decade, since the population has grown by 92.2 percent during that time, larger than the 56.6 percent increase nationwide. The rate of first births in Missouri among Hispanics living in Missouri increased from 27.1 per 1,000 in 1991 to 40.1 in 2002, a reflection of the growing Hispanic population in the state; the rate was only 34.6 nationally.

"The Hispanics who come here work very hard and are single-minded in providing money for their families, both here and back in their home country," Sable said. "In this study, we were trying to find out what they thought might help them access family planning services in this community."

Source: University of Missouri-Columbia

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