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Why are Latinxs Underrepresented in Medical Professions?

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Abstract

Between 1960 and 2013 the number of Physicians in the United States with Latinx background increased by 3.8%. For example, 7% out of 70,000 bachelor’s degrees in 1986 were acquired by Latinxs. This research examined will address why the health industry is lacking Latinxs in medical professions, along with what factors are impeding them to get into the Medical Field. The methods used will consist of scholarly and peer reviewed articles. Based on preliminary research, the factors contributing to this underrepresentation include lack of role models and resources, as well as urban schools that are infested with violence, drugs, and poverty as they are not equally funded, and financially not able to succeed. Lastly, the Latinx students that do get a higher education, they feel discouraged attending predominantly white institutions. Some solutions proposed include placing methods used by Hispanic Serving Institutions in Universities and placing more programs like Gear Up, AVID, or Excelencia in Education into schools; so that from an early age a successful college mindset is established in Latino students.

Key Words: health industry in America, Latinos, Underrepresentation, Hispanic Serving Institutions, Latino doctors,
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Health Industry in America

The health industry in the United States is one of the biggest industries running the economy. In fact, it impacts each and every one regardless of where you live. That does not mean that the health industry provides equal opportunities for everyone. There is a lack of health care to certain demographics, specifically Latinx communities all across America. In addition, there is a lack of representation of Latinxs in health care professions. Latinos are the second fastest growing minority in America. So why is there a lack of Latinxs occupying medical professions?

Growing Minority

When you attend the doctor, dentist, optometrist, or therapist, what ethnicity is your medical professional? The odds are that they are most likely white. Now that the Latinx population is growing more than ever, it is time to do something about this underrepresentation.

This world is rapidly turning into a multicultural place where the health industry needs equal representation, similarly to what is seen every day. The graph on the left shows the prediction of how much of the United States population will the Latino population hold. In 2015 according to the United Stated Census, 28% of the population will be Hispanic compared to only 8% in 1980. There
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have been measures taken with other minorities such as the African-American population. So now is the time to bring awareness and do something about this issue.

Latinx Statistics

The underrepresentation of Latinxs is an issue that has been around for too long. In the article *Increasing the Representation of Hispanics on the Health Professions*, it states that in the year 1968 the underrepresentation of Hispanic American compared to White Americans was a ratio of 23 to 9,450 students (Trevino, Sumaya, Miranda, Martinez, Saldana, 1968-89). The majority of the time there is no thought given to this issue because being medically assisted by an Anglo has become the norm in America. As you can see from the 1991 graph, only about 4% of Hispanics were Physicians and about 3% were Dentists. (Trevino, Sumaya, Miranda, Martinez, Saldana, 1991) The space between Latinxs and non-Latinos had gotten bigger and bigger over time because of the bigger steps non-Latinxs have taken. Latinxs have been left behind especially educational-wise. Not to mention the graduation rate of Latinxs is significantly low. In the year 1991, only 51.3% of Latinxs over the age of 25 had completed 4 years of high school and have received higher education (Trevino, Sumaya, Miranda, Martinez, Saldana, 1993, P. 551). Out of that 51.3% less and less went onto achieving higher degrees. Between the years of 1975 and 1990 the percent of high school completion rates increased for
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both African Americans and white Americans but decreased for Latinxs (Trevino, Sumaya, Miranda, Martinez, Saldana, 1993, P. 551).

No Change & No Role Models

There are many factors that have lead to this point. No change has been implemented into the education system nor the health care industry to hire more diversely. As you can see depicted in the graph on the left, there is a big gap between Hispanic’s and white’s in the Medical field. Most of the population in the white category hold a position in either teaching, law, or medicine. As for Hispanics, the teaching, law, or medicine professions are not held by at least half of the population. Almost 80% of the white population are in the medical field compared to less than 10% of the Latino population in medicine. (US Census Bureau, 2010) The lack of Latinos holding these professions cause a ripple like effect onto the Latinx youth because they have no one to look up to. In many situations, Latinos have no one to look up to if they are interested in pursuing higher education which discourages them because they are unsure of the steps to take. Also, Latinxs in medical occupations there is a higher possibility that they
will reach communities that are in need and can communicate and connect with urban areas where the population of Latinos is high. Compared to their white counterparts, they would not practice in these areas therefore keeping the Latino population at a disadvantage for medical needs.

Under Exposure to STEM Field

One of the biggest factors contributing to the underrepresentation of Latinxs in medical professions is the lack of funding into getting Latinxs into the path of success. Many school districts try to expose students that come from minorities into the STEM field. Apart from schools trying to surround Latinx youth with STEM and other opportunities, not many programs can be afforded by districts because usually there is not enough funding. Many Latinx attend urban schools; these schools are not funded the same as inner city schools. (Trevino, Sumaya, Miranda, Martinez, Saldana, 1993) More than 90% of Hispanic-Latinx students attend an urban school. (Trevino, Sumaya, Miranda, Martinez, Saldana, 1993) Unfortunately, those schools are typically infested with crime, violence, drugs, poverty, and are not funded like other districts. (Trevino, Sumaya, Miranda, Martinez, Saldana, 1993) The children are not at fault when they go down the wrong path in life. In most cases it is the lack of resources presented to them that limit their options for the future. Knowing that Latinxs attending urban schools are already at a disadvantage, there should be a greater effort put into these schools and towards these students.

Financial Need

A plan needs to be implemented to help Latinxs from this background graduate from high school, go onto a university, and pursue a degree in the medical field. Latinxs have many barriers they have to overcome to achieve a higher education. Findings included that Latinos are
underrepresented in the medical field because their financial status impedes them. In many cases, many Latinx parents did not get a full education (many receiving only an elementary level education) therefore now have jobs with a lower income. As you can see from the graph on the left, in 2013 the Latino pop has the highest percent of working families in poverty. This results in Latinx students depending on financial aid to pay for college and having to resort to attending a community college rather than a university.

As you can see by the Pew Research Center graph on the bottom left, 48% of Hispanics in 2014 enrolled in a 2-year public college and 52% enrolled in a 4-year university. The percentages are very close, this is why there needs to be a higher percentage of Latinos enrolled in a university. It is not necessarily possible to earn a degree in the medical field through a community college; a degree of a 4-year-institution or more should be attained.
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Educational Attainment of Latinx

The highest population of Latinos reside in California, USA. There are 14 million Latinx living there. California also high both one of the highest and one of the lowest attainment rates of Latinos with a BA degree. Miami, Florida has the highest percent of its Latino population attaining a bachelor’s degree at 26% and Boston, Massachusetts behind Miami with 20% of its Latinx population have a BA degree (Ryan & Bauman, 2016).

![Chart showing educational attainment of Hispanics and Non-Hispanics.](chart-image)

As you can see by the chart on the left, only 2.8% of Hispanics go into a professional occupation compared to 22.1% of Non-Hispanics. The majority of Latinx according to this chart from elcosh.org occupy a position in the construction/extraction. (elcoch.org, 2009) Therefore, we go back to the idea of the lack of role models that Latinx youth have that have been through the process of university onto a professional career which may or may not be in the medical field.

Cultural Barriers

If Latinxs do graduate from high school and want to pursue a higher education, there are cultural barriers they have to overcome. Commonly, in Latinx cultures women are meant to stay at home, so going away for college is out of the question in some situations. On the other hand, Latino males who do want to pursue a higher education might be persuaded into going down a wrong path in life, getting a job, or taking a gap year. Although these are rarer situations, there are more common situations for Latinx that are stopping them from attending a university like
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having to stay at home and help. Whether it is because of medical reasons or they have family to support. Since Latinxs are family oriented, going away to university puts a strain on the student and the family back home.

Discrimination towards Latinx

When Latinxs are able to achieve a higher education and want to pursue a degree in the medical field they often feel discouraged and they feel they do not belong. Most of the educational institutions in America are predominately white. Therefore, causing not only the Latinx population but all minorities to feel as if they cannot do better and succeed in their major. Sometimes flat out causing a feeling of separation from the crowd; many if not all minorities experience this. Gonzales goes onto say “…a number of studies have found that African American students attending predominantly White colleges and universities are more likely than their White peers to view these campuses as alienating, isolating, hostile, and less supportive to their needs (Allen, 1981, 1985, 1988; Fleming, 1984; Loo & Rolison, 1986; Murguía, Padilla, & Pavel, 1991; Sedlacek, 1987; Thompson & Fretz, 1991). (Gonzales, 2002) Not only is there a feeling of isolation but many Latinxs have experienced discrimination on college campuses nationwide in America. The issue of discrimination of college campus’ is not addressed as often as it should. As studies show, Latino and African Americans significantly report more discrimination on campus than any one else. (Nettles, 1990; McGabe, 2009)

Hispanic Serving Institutions

So maybe there should be something done about this? There are institutions nationwide that are geared towards one specific group. But Hispanic Serving Institutions are not talked about
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enough. Hispanic Serving Institutions are currently in nineteen different states across the nation and its territories (Puerto Rico). The official definition of a Hispanic Serving Institution is an institution that is eligible and has the undergraduate full-time enrollment of 25% or more Hispanic students. (ed.gov, 2016) Although these institutions are helping diversity the education system and the future work force, only 3.87% of all STEM PhD’s were put out by Hispanic Serving Institutions. (edexcelencia.org, 2012) This number is still very low and as a country we have a long way to go. It is expected for HIS’s to emerge and be 35 states in total that have these institutions nationwide. (edexcelencia.org, 2012) These Hispanic Serving Institutions growing throughout the nation means the more Latinos there will hopefully be in the medical field. A field that is critical for our society.

Social Identity Theory

The social identity theory addresses that ones’ confidence comes from the knowledge that there are other people from the same social group. Self confidence is grown when you are surrounded by the same ethnicity. (Lorenzo-Hernandez & Ouellette, 1998) Adriana J. Umana-Taylor goes on to say, “In line with these ideas, researchers have consistently found a positive relationship between ethnic identity and self esteem among ethnic minority adolescents.” (Umana-Taylor, 2003) With the perspective of the social identity theory, it would be effective to not only recruit but maintain a high number of Latinx students in higher education, so everyone could empower one another and succeed together.

Possible Resolutions
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Overall, there are five possible resolutions that would help the Latinx population find a profession in the medical field. First one being bringing awareness to the lack of Latinos in the medical field. Knowing that there is a problem that impacts our entire nation is a big part of the resolution. Secondly, exposing the Latinx youth to the STEM field, encouraging a college mentality at a young age, informing them about their opportunities, and starting programs such as AVID or GearUP in urban schools is a critical factor and one of the simplest solutions. Thirdly, funding urban schools that are in need, so schools are able to implement the programs they need. And lastly, incorporating programs/techniques/resources that have worked for schools/universities before, so schools have a higher rate of Latinx graduation and a higher rate of Latinos achieving a higher education degree, hopefully in the Medical Field. Hispanic Serving institutions are doing their part and all other universities should take them as an example and implement their tactics. The health care industry is a vital role for our society and economy; with the world changing so rapidly, the more diversity there can be in health care professions, the better our society and the health industry will be.
Works Cited/References


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