

Revealing the importance of culture in Latino dental health

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Maria Orellana, DDS, PhD, assistant professor in the UCSF School of Dentistry, has long observed that Latino parents are often more resistant to having their children get braces or retainers to straighten teeth than

parents of other ethnicities. But beyond simply recognizing this trend, Orellana wants to know why.

“I’m trying to understand what is preventing Latinos from getting the dental and orthodontic care other people are getting. Is it mainly economical or something else?” she says.

In a recent preliminary [study](#), Orellana confirmed what she already suspected — the importance of acculturation, or the process of becoming “Americanized,” on dental care.

A survey of 63 young Latinos between the ages of 8 and 17, and their [parents](#), revealed that the more acculturated children and adults are, the greater importance they put on dental and orthodontic care.



“Here are kids that come into the clinic and they don’t want to smile,” she says. “It affects their self-confidence.” And perhaps not surprisingly, the more acculturated children were often at odds with their less acculturated parents, Orellana notes.

The survey, conducted at the UCSF clinic, asked about dental and orthodontic experiences and views, income, and the use of English, as a barometer of acculturation. Orellana compared responses between parents and their children, and compared levels of acculturation with dental experiences and attitudes. “In seeking treatment, socioeconomic status played a role but acculturation also played a role,” she says.

For help with the study’s statistical analysis, Orellana turned to the [Consultation Services](#) program managed by [UCSF’s Clinical and Translational Science Institute \(CTSI\)](#). Adept at conceptualizing research based on need and on running projects, Orellana says she needed assistance with the mathematical nitty-gritty of data analysis. “It’s great help to vet ideas with UCSF colleagues who are experienced in a field that I’m not an expert in. It’s a unique way of collaborating for practical results.”

In fact, Orellana uses CTSI’s Consultation Services to support much of her research, including work with statistics and study design, or simply to brainstorm. “It helps me expedite studies so I can complete them and get them published,” she says. It’s helping a great deal in the work I’m doing with Latino populations.”

Her study highlights the need for cultural sensitivity in efforts to improve [dental](#) care among Latinos, says Orellana, who plans to expand

the research. “It’s very important to relate not only to the teenagers, but also to the parents.”

The parents, or caregivers, are part of the solution, because they are the decision-makers, Orellana adds. And for new-comers or the less acculturated, “having Spanish-speaking providers who can educate immigrants about the importance of oral health is key.”

More information: Recent preliminary study:
[iadr.confex.com/iadr/2010barce ... mcd/Paper133708.html](http://iadr.confex.com/iadr/2010barce...mcd/Paper133708.html)

Provided by University of California, San Francisco

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