

Latinos with disabilities rely on cultural ties to avoid substance abuse

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People with physical disabilities often turn to alcohol and drugs to cope with their condition, but many disabled Latinos rely heavily on cultural ties with family and friends to help them steer clear of substance abuse, say University of Michigan researchers.

Unlike previous research that only looked at negative factors, a new U-M study indicates that identifying as Latino and being associated with

Latino [cultural values](#) might shape intrapersonal risk and protection factors, said David Córdova, an assistant professor of social work.

"Understanding intrapersonal processes is essential to improving the health and mental health of this population," said Córdova, the study's lead author.

Researchers used data from five Los Angeles community organizations serving Latinos and persons with disabilities who reported alcohol and drug use within the past year. Respondents were between the ages of 18 and 35.

To identify intrapersonal risk factors, respondents described and photographed their experiences as a Latino with a disability as it related to [substance use](#). Four themes emerged in the participants' reflections: experiencing pain and sadness; trying to escape and forget about the disability; feeling inferior to others; and wishing they could be saved.

Córdova and colleagues found that, in general, if disabled Latinos feel discriminated against or excluded socially, their experiences as a disabled person becomes more pronounced.

Some participants shared photographs representing experiences aimed at overcoming [negative perceptions](#) and [life experiences](#) of disability, thereby reducing risk of alcohol and drug use. These incidents involved people learning to adapt and performing tasks independently. Some participants wanted to improve [family communication](#) and cohesion, but were reluctant to do so because openly sharing concerns about difficult topics might place a burden on others.

Córdova said there isn't an effective family-based intervention for alcohol and drug use among Latinos with disabilities. As a result, some respondents expressed feeling misunderstood by mental health service

providers.

The findings appear in the *Journal of Social Work Practice in Addictions*.

More information: www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10732917.2013.812007#.Ujw9Ya9ZBk

Provided by University of Michigan

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