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Child Sexual Abuse in Latinx Populations in the United States: An Examination of Cultural Influences

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Introduction

Few studies examine childhood sexual abuse (CSA) in Latinx[1] populations, and even fewer study the intersections of Latinx identity and trauma. In this chapter, we will summarize the current literature on CSA in Latinx populations. Attention will be paid to risk factors and cultural norms surrounding this form of victimization. In the United States (US), the Latinx community is the second largest and includes individuals from numerous countries with their own ethnic identities, languages, and cultural values. While the authors recognize the diversity among Latinx in the US, the goal of the chapter is to present the existing literature in an attempt to give attention to the potentially unique influences and intersections of Latinx cultural identity as related to the trauma of CSA. Intersectionality is important to consider when

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discussing CSA among Latinx as it frames sexual abuse within a larger system of inequity and injustice. Intersectionality refers to the role of overlapping and vulnerable individual level factors (e.g., gender, race, economic status, and immigration status) which relate to an individual's power within larger systems in which they are embedded (Crenshaw 1991). Within this framework, these identities may shape how CSA is discussed, viewed, and influence norms around abuse disclosure within Latinx families and communities. Most of the existing literature on CSA is dated and presents contradictions in the occurrence of, and characteristics related to CSA in Latinx groups. This chapter will examine these inconsistencies in the research and the role of culture on incidence, disclosure, and family, victim and perpetrator characteristics among US-based Latinx populations. A critique of the current weaknesses in the literature, including incongruities and recommendations for future research are also presented.

Prevalence of Childhood Sexual Abuse in the United States

In 2019 in the US, there was a reported 62,961 new victims of CSA (US Department of Health and Human Services 2021). It is estimated that one in seven girls and one in 25 boys will be victims of CSA prior to turning 18 (Townsend and Rheingold 2013). CSA affects youth of all ages across all ethnic, racial, and cultural groups (US Department of Health and Human Services 2021). The majority of the perpetrators of these crimes are known to children in the form of family members or acquaintances (Finkelhor and Shattuck 2012). Effects of CSA include psychological issues (e.g., depression, anxiety), sexual risk-taking (e.g., multiple sexual partners), and increased substance use (see a 30-year longitudinal study by Fergusson, et al. 2013). The economic costs of CSA—specifically, the projected average lifetime cost for female victims of nonfatal CSA—is a staggering $282,734 per victim and $74,691 for male victims (Letourneau et al. 2018). The cost for males is projected lower as there was insufficient information on productivity losses to be included in the analysis. These expenses include childhood health care

costs, adulthood medical costs, productivity losses, child welfare costs, violence/crime costs (including costs associated with assault, robbery, burglary, and theft), special education costs, and suicide death costs (Letourneau et al. 2018). All of these facts combined, make CSA a major public health issue in the US.

Latinx Population in US

Latinx includes individuals from various birth countries in North, Central, and South America. Latinx, similar to Latino/a, "is a pan-ethnic label typically used to describe individuals in the US who are descendants of, or direct immigrants coming from, Latin America" (Santos 2017: 8). The term Latinx is applied to those who come from Spanish-speaking countries; however, beyond sharing a common language, these individuals represent diverse religions, racial groups, and traditions (Kenny and Wurtele 2013). Although it is important to recognize the substantial diversity among Latinx, it has been argued that many different Latinx cultures (e.g., Mexican, Cuban, Honduran, Chilean) have underlying similarities, often related to the effects of imperialism and imposed colonization: for example, the introduction of Catholicism (Lefkowitz et al. 2000).

There is a tremendous Latinx population in the US that has experienced exponential growth in the last decade. The 2020 US Census included 62 million Latinx of which 33% were foreign-born (Krogstad and Noe-Bustamante 2021). Despite a slight decrease in the growth rate over the last few years (Noe-Bustamante et al. 2020), the Latinx population is the second largest population in the US. Latinx children currently comprise 26% of all children in the US and are projected to remain the largest ethnic minority group among children in the US (Child Trends 2018). Nationwide, the 2020 US Census identified 19% of the US population to be represented by Latinx, yet many of the mental and physical health needs of Latinos are largely unexplored (Arreola et al. 2005). All cultures have norms that increase the risk of CSA while also having values that protect children (Fontes 1995) and those from Latinx communities are no exception. Given the prevalence of Latinx cultures

in the US, there is a need to examine CSA in these populations, how the experience of living as Latinx in the US may contribute to family climates where CSA occurs, may hinder disclosure and the ability of individuals from these communities to access help after CSA.

One difficulty with research that has been conducted with Latinx groups is that many studies simply refer to participants as Latino/a or Hispanic, without specifically describing their origins. Fontes (1995) identified the hazards of "ethnic lumping" referring to when researchers collapse many diverse individuals into broad, overly general categories. As Leenarts et al. (2013) conclude after their review of child maltreatment and ethnic minority groups, there are insufficient numbers of participants from different ethnic minority groups in recent studies of trauma symptoms among victims of CSA. This may contribute to the "ethnic lumping" that occurs in research. In this chapter, where possible, we will use descriptions provided in studies about their Latinx participants to more specifically describe their national roots.

Prevalence of CSA in Latinx Populations

Despite their population growth, there is little investigation of CSA among Latinx populations in the US. Much of the early research into CSA neglected to examine race and ethnicity, often failing to mention or parse out these demographic characteristics. The available research on CSA that examined race and ethnicity was conducted in the 1980s and 1990s, and the authors have chosen not to include these studies currently due to their age (see Kenny and McEachern 2000). This chapter will only include studies that have been conducted in the last 20 years in order to represent the current state of research on this topic.

The lack of available consistent research findings on CSA in Latinx makes estimates of prevalence in this population difficult, however, the available data indicate that Latinx youth experience higher rates of CSA than White youth. The US Department of Health and Human Services, *Child Maltreatment* report does not provide ethnicity of victims within the categories of abuse; it simply provides race across all types

of maltreatment (i.e., White (43.5%), Hispanic (23.5%), African American (20.9%)) (US Department of Health and Human Services 2021). The National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV) (Gewirtz-Meydan and Finkelhor 2020) on children and adolescents found the highest rates of CSA in Black youth (5.7%), and then Hispanic (4.1%), followed by White non-Hispanic (3.1%). Analysing the 2018 National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System, Luken et al. (2021) found that based on population ratios, Latinx-identified children were over-represented for CSA in nine US states as compared to CSA over-representation for Black children as found in 30 states (Lukenet al. 2021). However, the authors' findings point to underreporting among Latinx as underrepresentation for all types of child abuse in about half of the US states. The National Incidence Study 4 reported CSA incidence rates of Latinx children (1.8 per 1000) were a bit higher than those of White non-Latinx children (1.4 per 1000), but the differences were not statistically significant (Sedlak et al. 2010).

Adult Retrospective Studies

Many studies on CSA in Latinx communities have employed a retrospective research design, asking women to recall experiences of CSA. In fact, this is often the most common type of research methodology for CSA studies, regardless if culture is being examined (Murray et al. 2014). Bowman, and colleagues (2009) found that 46.8% of a sample of community dwelling Latinx reported a history of CSA. Two recent studies (one using the Latinx data from the National Latino and Asian American Study (NLAAS)) found rates of 15–18% of Latinx women in their studies reported CSA (McCabe et al. 2018; Ai and Lee 2018). Similarly, 12.2% of participants from the Sexual Abuse Among Latinas Study (Cuevas and Sabina 2010), a national study of lifetime sexual violence among a sample of mostly Mexican American women, reported experiencing at least one incident of CSA. In a sample of predominantly Mexican and Mexican American women, Ulibarri, et al. (2009) found that 35% of the women reported some form of sexual abuse experience

in childhood or adolescence. In sum, the ranges from these retrospective studies are 12.2 to 46.8%, representing a wide variability, although consistent with lifetime prevalence rates found in studies where ethnicity is not considered (Finkelhor et al. 2014).

College Students

Given the presence of researchers in academia and the availability of undergraduates as research participants, there are some studies with this population which show quite high, but consistent, rates of CSA. In a study with primarily Mexican American female college students, Ernst and colleagues (2009) found that 1 in 3 reported being a victim of sexual abuse prior to age 18. This is very similar to the results by Cordero (2020) with a sample of 95 male Latinx undergraduate students of Mexican descent who found over one-third had experienced CSA in their lifetime. In a college sample, Ullman and Filipas (2005) found some ethnic differences in prevalence of any CSA, with more Black survivors (40.3%) reporting a CSA experience than Hispanic survivors (33.3%). Finally, in another sample of Mexican American college students, Clemmons et al. (2003) found 38% reported CSA.

Youth/Young Adults

The Reteniendo y Entendiendo Diversidad para Salud (Project RED, Grest et al. 2021) data found that 15.8% of Latinx youth reported sexual abuse. This data set is a longitudinal study of youth in the US in selected schools where 70% or more of student enrolment was Latinx. Another study using the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Brown et al. 2021) found that 5% of the sample (aged 10–19 years old) reported CSA and there were no significant differences between Latinx and non-Latinx.

Men

Much of the research on CSA and Latinx men has predominantly focused on men who have sex with men (MSM) and HIV risk. Thus, the majority of the literature is limited to prevalence rates and sexual risk-taking behaviours among this population. Only a handful of studies within the past decade have sought to explore the long-term related health outcomes among Latino MSM who have experienced CSA in general (Arreola et al. 2009; Levine et al. 2018; Mattera et al. 2018; Sauceda et al. 2016). Previous research has suggested that Latinx MSM are more likely to have experienced CSA (Mimiaga et al. 2009; Welles et al. 2009). Arreola et al. (2005) found that almost twice as many Latinx MSM have experienced CSA (prior to age 13) as non-Latinx MSM. When examining Latinx MSM specifically, other studies have reported higher rates. For example, in a study conducted with HIV positive MSM, Welles et al. (2009) found that 58% of Latinx MSM had experienced CSA. Further, in a sample of Latinx men (predominantly Mexican (35%) and Puerto Rican (17%)), Arreola et al. (2005) found that 22% of Latinx MSM reported experiencing at least one instance of CSA before the age of 13 as compared to their non-Latino counterparts (12%). Variations in prevalence rates of CSA among this population may be due in part to the ways in which participants conceptualize CSA. For example, some studies have shown that Latinx MSM may not view age-discordant sexual experiences as abuse (Camacho et al. 2021; Carballo-Diéguez et al. 2012; Bruce et al. 2012). Negative perceptions of LGBTQ+, cultural bias, and discrimination towards members of this community within the Latinx context has been noted in previous research. From a religious standpoint, the Catholic Church has actively supported the inequitable and unjust treatment of the LGBTQ+ community by refusing to recognize LGBTQ+ people and partnerships. These homophobic environments and attitudes can contribute to Latinx MSM emotional or psychological distress. Latinx men and boys in particular may not be able to disclose CSA due to fear of the repercussions of being viewed as gay (Camacho et al. 2021). While CSA disclosure is critical for intervention, homophobic environments may also contribute to feelings of shame or other emotionally distressing experiences in addition to the CSA. Arreola et al.

(2009) found that after the CSA had ended, Latinx MSM still experienced homophobia in childhood and adulthood, leading them to engage in maladaptive coping behaviours.

CSA in general has been linked to distress intolerance, or the inability to withstand periods of emotional discomfort leading to impulsive and avoidant coping strategies. MSM from 17 countries in Latin America (mostly Mexico (34%), Brazil (15%), Columbia (13%), and Venezuela (10%)) who participated in Wang et al. (2017) study, reported higher levels of distress intolerance as compared to those who had not experienced CSA. This increased level of distress intolerance was associated with increased odds of participating in negative health behaviours such as substance and alcohol abuse. The links between CSA and substance abuse have been well-documented in the literature, and the same is true for Latinx MSM with a history of CSA as well (Lee et al. 2020; Levine et al. 2018). In particular, men who have experienced CSA are more likely to engage in heavy drinking in general, but Latinx MSM are more likely to report binge drinking and heavy drinking (Levine et al. 2018) which have been shown to place MSM at greater risk of sexual risk-taking (e.g., anal intercourse without condoms) (Lee et al. 2020; Levine et al. 2018).

Latinx MSM with a history of CSA are known to face heightened risk of negative mental health outcomes (Sauceda et al. 2016). Findings from Levine et al. (2018) suggest that among a sample of Latinx MSM (28% Central American, 28% South American, 17% Puerto Rican), those that experienced CSA were 3.5 times more likely to be clinically depressed, particularly if they only spoke Spanish. This is in line with findings from Mattera et al. (2018) who reported higher odds of clinical depression among bisexual Latinx men who had experienced CSA, and Sauceda et al. (2016) who reported the same among a sample of Latinx MSM. Relatedly, in a study comparing Latinx MSM and Black non-Hispanic MSM, Downing et al. (2020) found significantly greater PTSD symptoms in Latinx MSM. In a study conducted on Latinx MSM in three large metropolitan areas in the US (Los Angeles, Miami, and New York), Arreola et al. (2009) reported higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidality among their sample.

Characteristics of Abuse

Severity

While there is some general consensus on the definition of CSA, given the range of actions and behaviours involved, severity of the abuse varies. CSA can include both contact and non-contact forms of abuse. The later may involve forcing the child to witness sexual acts or taking photos of the child for pornographic purposes. When considering severity, factors such as the frequency, duration, nature of the acts, relationship of the perpetrator, force, and number of perpetrators are considered (Fortier et al. 2009). Some studies will use indicators of severity such as forced intercourse as well as the length of time the abuse occurred (Clemmons et al. 2003). The results on severity of CSA experienced by Latinx victims is inconsistent. Niu, et al. (2021) found that 14.5% of their Black Hispanic sample and 41.8% of their non-Black Hispanic sample of young women (ages between 13 and 23 years) reported severe sexual abuse. In a sample of Latinx (self-identified as Mexican American, Hispanic, or Latina), Bowman et al. (2009) found a greater proportion of participants (22.6%) reported extreme severity for sexual abuse compared to the other forms of maltreatment. Contrary to these findings, in a sample of low-income African-American and Latinx adults, Myers, et al. (2015) found that both men and women reported severe histories of CSA involving penetration, with Latinx women reporting the lowest levels of CSA severity. Ullman and Filipas (2005) found that severity of CSA also differed by ethnicity with higher percentages of Black and Latinx college student survivors reporting minor abuse (e.g., 29.2% and 23.5% reported exposure or fondling, respectively) compared to Asian or White survivors. Further, 19% of Black survivors more often reported attempted or completed penetration compared to 9.9% of Latinx survivors. Examining Latinx and African-American girls who had experienced CSA, Shaw et al. (2001) found that the African-American girls in this sample were more likely to experience CSA involving penetration compared to the Latinx girls.

Perpetrators

CSA in Latinx communities seems to fit broader patterns of CSA with regard to perpetrators. Specifically, as is true of most cases of CSA, family members and individuals known to the child (in the form of family friends, boyfriends, or acquaintances) pose the biggest risk for offending (Finkelhor and Shattuck 2012). Ullman and Filipas (2005) found that most perpetrators reported by their college student sample were family members or relatives of Latinx victims (63%). In their Mexican–American sample, Ulibarri et al. (2009) found that most of the perpetrators were family members (31%), a boyfriend (27%), a friend or acquaintance (25%), and the lowest percent were strangers (14%). Moreover, of the women who experienced rape before age 13, the perpetrators were friends and boyfriends. Among their predominantly Mexican–American sample in Cuevas and Sabina's (2010) study, perpetrators were most commonly relatives (42.6%) and non-familial individuals (38.1%) known to the family. Similarly, Clemmons et al. (2003) found that extended family members and acquaintances were most often identified as perpetrators among Mexican–American college students recollecting CSA. In a qualitative study conducted with Mexican–American women, Marrs Futchsel (2013) found that perpetrators comprised of family members (brothers, aunts, cousins), boys, and a Catholic priest. Shaw et al. (2001) found Latinx girls were more likely to report abuse perpetrated by their fathers or stepfathers (45%) than other non-related adult males (34%). Graham et al. (2016) analysed secondary data from the 2012 National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System Child File to determine if Latinx victims of CSA differed from Black or White with regard to characteristics related to the child, the perpetrator, or the caretaker. For CSA cases involving Latinx children, primary perpetrators were 75.71% male and 21.46% female, which differed significantly from that of perpetrators in cases involving White and Black children. Perpetrators were also primarily Latinx and were more likely to be a parent (45.50%), other relative who was not a foster parent (27.20%), or an unmarried partner of a parent (11.63%). Perpetrators in substantiated CSA cases involving Latinx children were more likely to be caretakers (71.84%) than in cases involving White (67.86%) and Black (70.06%) children.

In the Plummer et al. (2009) study of Latinx youth being seen at a clinic for CSA victims, the majority of reported perpetrators was a known non-relative (47.8%) and 33% were acquaintances. In 15.6% of the cases, children were sexually abused by their biological fathers.

Effects of CSA on Victims

Adults

There is a body of literature that examines the resultant effects of CSA on adults. Symptoms that have commonly been observed in other samples of victims of CSA, have also been found in Latinx victims. Severe CSA has been found to be strongly related to depression among Latinx, especially among Latinx who disclosed their abuse (Sciolla 2011). In their interviews with male survivors of CSA, Payne et al. (2014) found differences in reactions based on ethnicity, with more Latinx men reporting being angry about the abuse and reporting flashbacks and PTSD type symptoms. By contrast, Latinx men did not engage in as many self-hatred statements as the other men (Blacks and non-Latino Whites). Similarly, several studies have found that Latinx women who reported a history of CSA had symptoms of PTSD and depression and substance use (McCabe et al. 2018; Ulibarri et al. 2015). Cuevas et al. (2010) found that CSA was more strongly predictive of psychological distress including anger, depression, dissociation, and anxiety in adulthood among Latinx women. Compared to their African-American, non-Hispanic White, and "Other" counterparts, Latinx women reported less severe psychological distress symptoms due to CSA (Andrés-Hyman et al. 2004). The authors of this study hypothesize that it may be due to the inclusion of a range of Latinx nationalities. These discrepant findings may make drawing conclusions about any differences in the ways in which Latinx experience symptomatology post CSA difficult.

Contrary to these reported findings, Newcomb et al. (2009) found that Latinx adolescents who were victims of CSA did not score any differently than their European peers on measures of trauma symptoms and

psychological distress. Similar results were found among college students who were victims of CSA with Latinx students showing no differences in either depressive or PTSD symptoms (Ullman and Filipas 2005).

Factors in Latinx Families That May Affect CSA

Immigration

Heightened stress due to immigration and adjustment to new cultural contexts and roles are experienced by immigrants making their way in a new country. Latinx immigrants currently make up the largest immigrant population in the US. The highest numbers originate from Mexico which accounts for 25% of all US immigrants in 2018, with Central America and South America comprising of 8 and 7%, respectively (Budiman et al. 2020). As immigration from Mexico, and Central and South American countries, are driven by increased economic opportunities in the US, as well as refugee and asylum seeking (Tienda and Sanchez 2013), Latinx immigrants may rely upon support from family who are already in-country as they establish themselves. Poverty and housing instability can exacerbate CSA risk. Dettlaf et al. (2009) found that Latinx children of immigrants in the welfare system were four times as likely to be the subject of a CSA report as compared to non-immigrant counterparts. Latinx children of immigrants were also five times more likely to be a confirmed victim of CSA as compared to Latinx children of native-born parents. Relatedly, Latinx participants in Fontes and colleagues (2001) focus groups spoke about children being exposed to sexual acts by family members inadvertently. Fontes et al. (2001) further explains that due to immigration transition, families may need to share homes and possibly beds. Katerndahl et al. (2005) reported similar findings in their study of CSA experiences between Latinx and White women in that Latinx women reported sharing their living space with extended family members during their childhoods. Sharing such close sleeping quarters may leave children prey to predators or witness to sexual acts. While not all actions should be considered CSA, observing sexual acts

may be disturbing to the child. Grest et al. (2021) found that first-generation Latinx adolescents were more likely to report experiencing sexual abuse compared to second and third generation (i.e., twice the odds of reporting CSA compared with second generation). The authors contend that this is likely due to cultural and environmental risk factors including lack of family communication, need to keep a male in the household for financial reasons and authoritarian parenting. They further suggest that in first-generation families, there may be extended family members and unrelated acquaintances having unsupervised access to children at home and a lack of overall awareness of the issue of CSA.

Acculturation

Related to immigration status, other studies have discussed the role of acculturation in CSA reporting rates. It has been found that as families acculturate, they are more likely to discuss CSA. One study reported that Mexican-born US Latinx, reported they were more likely to be aware of CSA than their parents were, causing them to be more vigilant of the risk of CSA to their children (Lira et al. 1999). In other reports, researchers have found that Hispanic women who are more highly acculturated reported higher rates of sexual violence (Cuevas and Sabina 2010). Katerndahl et al. (2005) found that in a study of CSA experience between Hispanic and White adult women, acculturation among Hispanic women was associated with longer periods of CSA. However, higher levels of acculturation were also related to a higher likelihood of reporting CSA to an adult. The authors hypothesize that these women who reported CSA were not believed by the adults they sought help from. Further, they report it may be that although acculturated Hispanics report the abuse they are experiencing, they are not believed perhaps because the perpetrator is a family member. Thus, no action is taken, and the abuse continues adding to an increased duration. This existing literature demonstrates the impact of immigration and acculturation on the incidence of CSA.

Latinx Attitudes Regarding Sexuality/CSA

While there is a lack of consistent literature, it appears that CSA in Latinx may vary from White non-Latinx in part due to differences in attitudes towards sex and sexual behaviours, gender and social norms among Latinx communities and their White counterparts. Culturally based perspectives and beliefs regarding sexuality, and CSA are likely to affect Latinx behaviours related to CSA disclosure, reporting and support for child victims and children at risk for CSA (Graham et al. 2016).

Familismo is a specific aspect of Latinx culture that has been suggested to serve as a protective factor against child abuse (Coohey 2001). Familismo has been described as the high value placed on respect for and loyalty to the family system in Latinx families (Sue and Sue 2012). In Latinx culture, extended family, including cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, are considered to be part of the immediate family. These caring family members typically serve as a protective factor, unless one is a perpetrator of CSA (Fontes and Plummer 2012). Given the presence of a large, extended family in the life of the child, there is the opportunity for these individuals to sexually offend. Typically, in Latinx families, there is an emphasis on the family, rather than the individual, with a deep sense of family obligation. Fontes (1995) describes the impact of this value on maintaining family homeostasis in the face of CSA, which may include denial or reluctance to report abuse. Fontes and Plummer (2012) state that the concept of *respecto* (respect) in Latinx culture, emphasizes that children should be respectful of elders, particularly older male relatives. This cultural concept may encourage children to be duped by elderly male family members' sexual requests as well as add to their fear of not being believed if they disclose. Young children may be compliant with sexual requests from older relatives due to the *respecto* they have been taught.

Ligiéro et al. (2009) report on several cultural characteristics in Latinx families that may impact sexual abuse. Specifically, the clear delineation of gender roles, which include *machismo* and *marianismo*. Machismo and marianismo prescribe to cultural norms dictating women be sexually pure, passive, and abstain from any sexual activity except for procreation. *Marianismo* defines the ideal woman as emotional, kind, docile,

compliant, vulnerable, and unassertive (Castaneda 2021; Ligiéro et al. 2009). The concept of marianismo for women, promotes the image of women as sexually pure, submissive, and obedient, with a likeness to the Virgin Mary (Terrazas-Carrillo and Sabina 2019). Norms surrounding gender and gender roles for Latinas influence CSA disclosure decisions (Castaneda 2021; Ligiéro et al. 2009; Fontes and Plummer 2010; Dettlaff et al. 2009). The choice to remain silent to protect oneself from the shame of not meeting cultural ideals for women, namely, purity and virginity, have been discussed in the context of CSA (Castaneda 2021). In order to avoid the stigma of "being used goods", and potentially mistreated by family members and others in their community, women chose not to speak out about the abuse that was occurring. Shaw et al. (2001) found that the length of time between CSA onset and report of CSA was shorter among African-American girls as compared to Latinx girls. There are some aspects of marianismo (e.g., subordination to men, self-silencing, chastity) that may contribute to women being vulnerable to CSA because traditional gender roles require they maintain family unity by remaining silent and avoiding conflict (Kelly 2009). The authors hypothesize the role of stigma and shame as a significant barrier to reporting among Latinx girls.

Machismo is a Latinx cultural value emphasizing the man's traditional role of protector and caretaker of the family (Sastre et al. 2015). It is a set of values, attitudes, and beliefs about masculinity, or what it is to be a man. Machismo can be broken down into two forms: traditional machismo and *caballerismo.* Traditional machismo includes hypermasculine characteristics that are valued culturally like physical strength, power over women, and sexual prowess, while caballerismo is nurturing, family-centred, and chivalrous (Arciniega et al. 2008). Fontes (2007) states that in Latinx culture, a boy's masculinity may depend on the number of his sexual conquests, while a girl will be valued for her chastity. Machismo also includes control and aggressiveness. Terrazas-Carrillo and Sabina (2019) discuss the culture of honour for Latinx, which values status and reputation which is enforced by women's subordination to men and men's power over women. This lack of honour by men is associated with shame and there is an expectation that men will use force in order to defend their honour. Fontes (2007) claims fathers of Latinx girls who

are sexually abused may be prone to violence against the offender, as the actions have been a direct threat to his role as a man/provider/father.

Ligiéro et al.'s (2009) findings with Latinx women who had been sexually abused confirmed the presence of machismo in all facets of their lives. They emphasized the importance of virginity and that women who have sex before marriage are viewed as "dirty". There was also a general silence around abuse for fear that knowledge by elderly family members may make them ill. Castaneda (2021) found that machismo influenced women's decision not to report CSA. Due to beliefs that their fathers' role is to protect their family, especially the daughters, these women believed disclosing would emasculate their fathers and cause them shame and heartbreak.

Religion

While there is some variability in religion for Latinx groups, the majority identify as Catholic. The Pew Research Center's 2013 National Survey of Latinos and Religion found that 55% of the US Latinx adults identify as Catholic. The largely practised Catholic religion has effects for Latinx who have experienced CSA. The shared Catholicism and patriarchal foundation impacts certain beliefs across these groups including putting extreme value on a woman who makes it to the altar as a virgin (Castaneda 2021; Raffaelli and Ontai 2001). Due to the amount of reverence their families give to the Catholic church and patriarchal norms in Latinx culture, high value is placed on women's virginity, which may affect disclosure rates for CSA. A study using data from the National Survey of Family Growth found that Latinx female adolescents who frequently attended religious services were less likely to have had sex, had fewer sexual partners, and were older at sexual debut (Edwards et al. 2011). It has been suggested that some religious beliefs may heighten victim-blaming responses, which may lower reporting rates and help-seeking by Latina victims, thereby contributing to deleterious psychological effects (Ramos Lira et al. 1999).

Disclosure

Cultural and religious values may also influence the way in which the process of disclosure is experienced and can either facilitate disclosure or act as barriers to reporting CSA (Fontes and Plummer 2010). The desire to not disclose CSA appears strong in Latinx culture due to cultural values regarding virginity, gender ideals, and a general lack of communication regarding sexuality. When studying CSA disclosure among Latinx, Castaneda (2021) warns it is important to note "societal and cultural values related to race, citizenship, and gender heavily influence decisions about privacy issues and create expectations of how people think privacy should be managed" (p. 5). She further reports that a potential risk–benefit calculation could take place by victims as disclosures of CSA can lead to potentially both increased emotional support and necessary interventions, as well as familial estrangement and sociocultural isolation.

In a study of Latinx women and help-seeking behaviour, Sabina et al. (2012) found that 35.5% of women did not seek help after being sexually victimized as children. In her study with adult Latinx women about their CSA, Castaneda (2021) found that the women overwhelmingly reported generational abuse (e.g., mothers and grandmothers with a history of CSA), thus normalizing the abuse they experienced. Several participants reported remaining silent about their abuse due to subtle or overt messages from their mothers to do so. Given the taboo on the discussion of sexual acts, the reporting of sexual abuse may be particularly discouraged by culturally informed gender role beliefs, such as the prohibition against girls losing their virginity before marriage (Castaneda 2021; Kenny and McEachern 2000; Ligiéro et al. 2009) and beliefs about sexual assaults that blame the victim (Ahrens et al. 2010).

Disclosure by male victims may be equally difficult. Williams et al. (2008) posit that Latinx men may not disclose their sexual abuse as the meaning of CSA in their cultures may preclude positive images of strength and prowess. Some of the Latinx men in the Payne et al. (2014) study made statements about how difficult it was to disclose the abuse to others. Boys who are abused by females may be mocked for disclosing with taunts about how disclosing means they did not want sex with a

woman (Fontes and Plummer 2010). Alternately, boys may be considered gay if they report victimization by a male, which in Latinx culture is often highly stigmatized (Fontes 2007).

There is limited research on the positive responses Latinx received when disclosing CSA. Ulibarri et al. (2009) found that 56% of the Mexican women who reported some form of CSA told someone about the abuse (e.g., family member, friend, boyfriend), and of those, almost 75% stated they felt supported when they disclosed. In the Plummer et al. (2009) study, 44% of mothers of victims stated there was a time when they suspected something "wasn't quite right", and in the majority of these cases, the mothers would speak to their child or watch them more closely. Almost one-third of these mothers confronted the offender prior to knowing about the abuse (disclosure). When disclosure was made, 53% of the mothers reported completely believing what happened was true, whereas 20% were not at all certain or had very little certainty. The majority of mothers felt guilty about what happened and felt they failed to protect their children. A similar majority reported being more protective and lacking trust in others.

Concerns related to deportation could prevent CSA reporting among undocumented Latinx residing in the US. Gulbas and Zayas (2017) found that secrecy norms and fear of law enforcement within undocumented Mexican families resulted in limited access to necessary services (e.g., medical services). These findings are in line with previous research conducted by Bacigalupe (2009) who described challenges among US Latinx in accessing community or social services due to previous negative experiences with social services providers, experiences of institutionalized racism, and language barriers when seeking services.

Beyond concerns related to citizenship status, navigating the US judicial system due to CSA can be especially difficult for Latinx and other racial/ethnic minority members and a further deterrent to CSA disclosure. In a retrospective study of CSA cases involving Latinx and Black children in the Midwestern US, Powell et al. (2017) highlight the ongoing patriarchal, heteronormative, and racial biases faced by child survivors of CSA. In particular, stereotypes related to Latinx and Black cultures are often emphasized in the court room in order to portray these youths as hypersexual, or deviant (Powell et al. 2017; Stephens

and Phillips 2003). For example, in one case of CSA in which the adult perpetrator was the same sex as the victim, jurors speculated that the abuse may have been consensual, but norms around homosexuality in "Latino culture" disallowed for the child to state so (Powell et al. 2017). These racialized and systemic injustices not only perpetuate further harm to marginalized communities but also result in lower rates of child abuse substantiation for racial/ethnic minority children. Specifically, according to Fix and Nair (2020) Latinx youth are significantly less likely to have their CSA case substantiated as comparison to non-Latinx youth despite findings that Black and Latinx children are more likely to be referred for child abuse or neglect (Fix and Nair 2020; Lanier et al. 2014).

Victim Blaming

The notion that the victim is somehow to blame for the CSA, appears to transcend culture. Burt (1980) theorizes that sexual violence is an extension of traditional patriarchal gender roles in general, and previous research has demonstrated strong ties between adherence to traditional gender roles, and victim blaming (Angelone et al. 2012). In a qualitative study exploring the relationship between CSA and domestic violence and familism among Mexican–American women conducted by Marrs Fuchsel (2013), participants experienced adverse outcomes when attempting to report CSA. In particular, a participant was told that she was lying when she reported the abuse to her parents. Many victims reported feeling shame and fear about disclosing abuse. In her work with primarily Mexican–American school children, Clonan-Roy (2019) found that both mothers and school administration had conversations with girls that positioned boys and men as predatory, and girls as (simultaneously) victims of predatory interactions and hypersexual. This included advice from mothers on how girls might protect themselves from boys, as the narrative included boys using girls for sex. This narrative appears to place responsibility on girls for boy's behaviour, as if they can deter offences.

In this same line, Collin-Vézina et al. (2015) found that many of their victims of CSA reported feeling responsible for the abuse, and experienced embarrassment and shame, which were often related to self-blame.

In another study of CSA survivors, Okur et al. (2019) found that a minority of victims blamed themselves. Specifically, victims were more likely to blame themselves for the CSA when they had more conservative attitudes towards gender roles than victims with more liberal attitudes. This may be applicable to Latinx victims, as this culture endorses stereotypical gender roles. Castaneda (2021) also found that Latinx women reported feeling immense shame for their CSA largely because it was contrary to the notion of the ideal Latinx woman who is pure and virginal.

Lack of Sexual Discussions

Given the apparent gender role dichotomies among Latinx men and women, it is important for research to examine the sexual messages that women in this community receive (Aragón and Cooke-Jackson 2021). Strong religious or political beliefs serve as barriers to engaging in constructive familial sex talk in Latinx families. Castaneda (2021) found that the female victims in her sample spoke about not knowing how to speak about anything sexually related with their parents as children because they believed if they did so, they would be viewed as sexual beings and that would be shameful.

Many Latinx women have been subject to negative narratives regarding sex, reproductive health and menstruation which leaves them with little understanding and education about their bodies and reproductive systems (Aragón and Cooke-Jackson 2021). The young women (aged 19–29) in the Aragón and Cooke-Jackson (2021) study reported that communication about sex was not straightforward and that if conversations occurred, they were filled with misinformation, rebukes, or expectations of imminent sexual promiscuity. They represented a range of groups including Mexican, Salvadorian, Mexican and Guatemalan, Puerto Rican, Peruvian/Honduran, Cuban, Mexican–American, and Dominican Republic.

Fontes (2007) reports that questions about the body parts or the acts involved in sexual abuse will be shameful for many victims, who may have been raised to believe that merely discussing these matters

is disgraceful. Fontes (2007) states that many Latinx families subscribe to the concept: "*de eso no se habla*", translated to mean "one does not discuss this". Ligério et al. (2009) found that all of the victims of CSA also reported that sex was not something that was openly talked about or taught, especially by women. Castaneda (2021) found that the CSA victims in her study spoke about not knowing how to speak about anything sexually related with their parents as children. This was rooted in their belief that if they did so, they would be seen as sexual beings which is shameful. Many Latinx mothers believe giving their daughters knowledge about sex and sexual health would lead them to promiscuity and sexual deviancy (Aragón and Cooke-Jackson 2021). When children are known victims of CSA, mothers may still have difficulty talking about the abuse due to the cultural emphasis on virginity before marriage and the taboos related to speaking about sexuality (Plummer et al. 2009).

Sanchez et al. (2019) describe healing circles used with Black/Latinx women who were survivors of CSA. For many women, they reported this was the first time they spoke about the abuse. Several were survivors of incest and shared that their families were unaware of the abuse. Luz Marquez Benbow (second author) of the Sanchez paper, shares how her mother never talked to her about her body or sex and encouraged her to stay with her brothers to make sure she was safe. (Ironically, her brother was her abuser.) Fontes and colleagues (2001) found that Latinx women in their focus groups tended to use euphemisms when talking about CSA and they were more reluctant to name specific sexual acts compared to Latino men. One participant mentioned that "good girls don't talk dirty" (p. 109).

In focus groups with primarily Mexican women who had immigrated to the US, Quelopana and Alcalde (2014) found that overall the women reported the quality of sex education in their countries of origin was poor. In general, they reported that sex was viewed as sinful and they mostly learned about it outside of the home. Similarly in a group for middle-school aged Latinx girls at school, Clonan-Roy (2019) was asked questions by them that reflected a lack of knowledge about a range of topics and a curiosity to learn about their bodies, sex, and sexuality. She concludes that they were in need of safe spaces where they could talk and

learn about sexuality as they were feeling frustrated with the powerful silence surrounding sexuality in their families, school, and community.

Kenny and Wurtele (2013) found that compared with a sample of Caucasian parents, Latinx parents intended to discuss sexual abuse/molestation at an earlier age, but planned to discuss human reproduction, intercourse, and AIDS at significantly later ages. They also found parents intended to delay discussions of normal sexual development (i.e., genital differences, birth, reproduction). A qualitative study with college students found that Latinx women who experienced CSA reported repressed sexual attitudes in their homes, with no discussions of sexuality (Kenny and McEachern 2007). Research in a previous study comparing Spanish- and English-speaking children's knowledge of genital terminology (Kenny and Wurtele 2008), found that none of the Spanish-speaking children knew the correct terms for breasts, penis, or vulva, suggesting a void in sexuality education in Spanish-speaking homes. Mexican mothers experience shame and embarrassment communicating about sexuality, using the term *cuídate* that translates as "take care of yourself". Children often don't understand that mothers are trying to communicate about sexuality because the terms mothers use are too general and vague (Moncloa et al. 2010). Prikhidko and Kenny (2021) found that Latinx mothers had lower scores than White parents on knowledge of sexual abuse prevention. White non-Latinx parents talked to their children about sexual abuse prevention more than Latinx parents. This is consistent with Jerman and Constantine (2010) who showed that parents expressed views on sexual conversations being a taboo due to family norms and religion.

There may be changes occurring in Latinx families. Recent research found that the majority of Columbian adults believed that sexuality education was necessary and that it should address all aspects of sexuality with both male and female adolescents (Pineda Marin et al. 2019). Among a sample of young Latinx women, Alvarez and Villarruel (2015) found those who believed in more traditional gender norms were less likely to engage in sexual health communication. Thus, as Latinx populations potentially move away from traditional gender beliefs and norms and become more acculturated, they may be more able to engage in discussions regarding sexuality.

Discussion

Ethnic diversity is an important topic to examine in CSA literature, particularly among Latinx, which have been found to a large growing population in the US. Much of the research reviewed in this chapter looked at factors associated with ethnicity and their mediating role in CSA. CSA has some similarities across culture, including secrecy, shame, and effects of trauma (Fontes and Plummer 2012). Ethnically based variables such as religiosity, gender roles, communication about sexuality and family support can all impact CSA. This chapter demonstrates that Latinx youth are experiencing CSA at rates similar to or higher than their peers, but the research indicates several key areas in which the experience of Latinx CSA victims are unique. This chapter sought to examine the intersection of Latinx in the US and CSA.

Latinx cultures tend to hold more traditional values than the US dominant culture, including an emphasis on the role of the family (*familismo*). An environment of familial support may encourage reporting and, in turn, help prevent long-term negative effects for victims of child maltreatment. Past research has shown the importance of maternal support in the recovery of the victim following disclosure. In contrast, the traditional family values noted in many Latino populations may decrease reporting rates and victim support, as failure to protect an abusing relative could be considered a dishonour to the family (Ramos Lira et al. 1999). In addition, the notion of CSA occurring and resulting in a loss of virginity for the female victim as well as possibly bringing dishonour to the family, may impact disclosure and subsequent support. The importance placed on respecting older family members may make young victims easy prey for offenders. Also, the role of extended family, in terms of living together and family cohesion, may allow greater access to young children by potential offenders within the family. In turn, children's lack of understanding and language to discuss the abuse may make disclosure difficult.

Overwhelmingly in the studies cited in this chapter, Latinx women believed culture and religious values play a major role in their sex education, or lack of education. They desired simple, clear body affirming

messages that were free from shame or blame (Aragón and Cooke-Jackson 2021). The lack of sexuality discussions and unease parents experience using appropriate sexual language adds to a culture of silence around CSA. Youth are not equipped with the language they need for disclosure. The disclosure process appears difficult for all victims, but particularly those who are Latinx. Given the standards of virginity and the struggle in talking about such matters, it is likely that children will remain silent. Couple this with a potential fear of hurting some family members and causing disgrace to their fathers, victims may suffer in silence for years. As Castaneda (2021) eloquently reports on the dilemma for Latinx victims—there is a desire to gain support from family for the CSA, but also a strong desire to remain silent due to shame and possible isolation by the community. Male victims too struggle with disclosure for fear of being shamed or labelled as gay. The concepts of marianismo and machismo appear to affect the way in which CSA is understood in Latinx communities, and often results in victim blaming.

Latinx communities struggle with a host of issues related to their immigration status. They may experience poverty, language barriers, and limited access to community resources in some areas. This impedes their ability to access services post abuse or receive culturally appropriate interventions. While level of acculturation appears to impact discussions and awareness of CSA, there remains taboos against open, honest discussions of sexuality. Families with intergenerational abuse may be particularly at risk for continued abuse, as they often support a culture of silent acceptance of the fate of CSA.

Alaggia and colleagues (2019) summarizes a body of literature on disclosure of CSA and identified environmental and cultural factors that affect this process. Specifically, they identify lack of discussion about sexuality; passive acceptance that unwanted sexual experiences are inevitable; not wanting to bring shame to the family by admitting sexual abuse; lack of involvement from neighbours, school personnel; and stigma perpetuated by societal perceptions, all of which are present in Latinx families. There are also ways in which culture can impact who is at risk, protection from abuse, and support for victims after CSA.

For practitioners working with these families, there are a number of cultural factors to consider when working with these victims. Cultural

mores may affect disclosure and perceived support. As Payne et al. (2014) state, "Practitioners should additionally be aware that men with CSA histories who come for treatment might initially voice specific issues as their presenting problems, based on their cultural background" (p. 241). It may be difficult for Latinx victims to discuss the CSA due to lack of language, feelings of shame and self-blame, and lack of culturally sensitive treatment options. Ideally, practitioners should be matched on ethnicity or at a minimum share culture and language with the victims, as they may feel more comfortable discussing the CSA in their native tongue.

Conclusion: Future Directions

As the US moves to a "minority-majority" country, there is a need for increased attention on the public health issue of CSA in Latinx communities. As Castaneda (2021) states, "the constant fluctuation in evidence highlights the importance of studying CSA among Latinas to gain a better understanding of the scope and impact of this problem" (p. 4). Empirical studies often ignore or fail to report the impact of race/ethnicity or cultural context on victims of CSA. More studies with "larger samples of minority survivors to assess possible ethnic differences and underlying factors explaining these differences" must be conducted (Ullman and Filipas 2005: 82). Analysing separate subgroups of Latinx victims according to nationalities to determine if victims from different groups show varied patterns of CSA in terms of severity, perpetrators and attitude towards discussions of sexuality is warranted to avoid ethnic lumping. Examining levels of acculturation must also occur as inconsistent findings may be related to this construct (Meston and Ahrold 2010). Future research should also examine generational status, making distinctions between first generation, recent immigrants, and other categories. Multigenerational CSA that occurs contributes to a "normalization" of such trauma and prohibits disclosure and supportive responses, as well as limits legal interventions for the perpetrators.

There are also several methodological issues to contend with including definitions of CSA used, severity of CSA, and data collection methods

that need to be standardized across studies for comparison. Research remains scant and may suffer from inconsistent definitions of CSA. While retrospective studies provide important information, participants may experience issues with recall bias (Jacobs-Kayam and Lev-Wiesel 2019). The studies examined in this chapter utilized various methodologies, definitions of CSA and groups labelled Latinx. While some conclusions can be drawn, more research is needed in this area. Future studies need to report the definition of CSA used, severity of abuse, perpetrator, family reaction to disclosure (or disclosure process), the sampling methodology, demographic characteristics including level of acculturation and immigration status, language proficiency, location (rural, urban, etc.) of participants. This will allow for greater comparison across studies. As the US continues to become diverse and increase its Latinx populations, there is a need for professionals to recognize culture when planning prevention and education programmes about CSA. Assisting parents in overcoming barriers to sexual discussion and raising awareness about the prevalence of CSA, is paramount in helping our youth. Culturally informed programming that is accessible to Latinx communities is needed.

Summary of Research on CSA in US Latinx Communities

- Latinx youth are at risk for CSA often at higher rates than their White, non-Latinx peers.
- Like other victims, Latinx victims are often sexually abused by family members, friends, and those known to them.
- Gender norms in Latinx culture that polarise males and females with regard to sexuality appear harmful to all victims.
- Disclosure by victims may be impacted by cultural values of virginity for females and cultural norms that identify male victims as gay as a result of victimization.
- Latinx families have difficulty communicating openly about sexuality and awareness of child sexual abuse may be lacking.

- Immigration status and levels of acculturation among families can impact the prevalence and handling of CSA.
- There is a need for culturally sensitive CSA prevention education, with an understanding of the influence of religion, for Latinx families.
- Helping parents create a family environment where sexuality discussion can occur, free from judgement or shame, may assist in potential disclosure of CSA by victims.
- Future research should be conducted with subgroups of Latinx groups to fully inform prevention efforts and treatment planning that is culturally informed.

Note

1. Latinx is defined as "a person of Latin American origin or descent and is used as a gender-neutral alternative to Latino or Latina" (Oxford English online dictionary, n.d.).

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