

# Challenging Stigmas and Recognizing the Strengths of Hispanic and Latino Families Headed by Single Mothers

## Overview

Hispanic and Latino families headed by single mothers represent a substantial portion of family structures in the U.S. According to the 2022 U.S. Census, 42% of Hispanic/Latino youth live in single-parent households, highlighting the importance of understanding and supporting diverse family structures. Hispanic/Latino single mother headed households face disproportionate economic adversity, with about 30% falling below the poverty line. These financial pressures heighten the need for policies and interventions that address economic support and access to social and culturally informed behavioral health services.

When joining Hispanic/ Latino families as they respond to social stressors, navigate change, and cultivate healing practices, validating their strengths, and understanding their social cultural realities is an elemental step in the process. This factsheet dispels myths surrounding these families and highlights the protective social factors they embody. By recognizing the strengths and supportive bonds within these households, mental health and social service providers can offer culturally sensitive, empowering support that respects and builds on these families' relational structures.

## References



**We acknowledge for their contribution to this product:**

**Erick Senior-Rogés, Ph.D.**  
Clinical Psychologist

**Darice Orobítg, Ph.D.**  
HLBH CoE  
Training and Technical Assistance  
Consultant



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The Hispanic/Latino Behavioral Health Center of Excellence is led by the Institute of Research, Education, and Services in Addiction at the Universidad Central del Caribe School of Medicine and is funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration under grant number H79FG001136.



## Culturally Related Stressors

- **Social Stigmas:** Despite the growing number and prevalence of single-mother headed households, they often face unwarranted stereotypes and societal stigmas. Pew Research (2022) reports that nearly half (47%) of U.S. adults express negative views about single women raising children alone, considering it a generally bad thing for society (Pew Research Center, 2022). These sentiments also more common among non-Hispanic White adults, with 49% considering it detrimental to society.
- **Greater Cultural Acceptance:** Within Hispanic/Latino communities, diverse family structures that are not composed by a two parent married couple, are generally more accepted. For instance, only 32% of Hispanics view unmarried cohabiting parents negatively compared to 53% of non-Hispanic Whites (Pew Research Center, 2022). Cohabitation as a non-married couple is also considered more normative, particularly among Caribbean Hispanic families, compared to non-Hispanic families in the United States (Fomby & Estacion, 2011). This cultural acceptance provides a foundation for resilience and support within these family structures.

## Dispelling Myths and Stereotypes

- **Increased Behavioral Risk:** Contrary to prevalent stereotypes, Hispanic/Latino youth from single-mother households are not necessarily at higher risk for maladaptive behaviors compared to their peers from two-parent households. Studies reveal that both single- and two-parent Hispanic/Latino families provide comparable relational resources, including attention, affection, and emotional support which help deter youth from risk behaviors (Savell et al., 2023; Senior-Roges, 2023; Zeiders et al., 2011).

- **Youth Outcomes Influenced by Support and Affection, Not Family Structure:** Relational resources like verbal and non-verbal expressions of support and affection within Hispanic/Latino single-mother households help foster resilience among youth (Savell et al., 2023; Senior-Roges, 2023). These findings highlight the importance of relationship quality over family structure in determining youth outcomes.

## Sociocultural Protective Factors

- **Positive Youth Development through *Familismo*:** *Familismo* among Latino families, regardless of their family structure, promotes positive youth development by reinforcing family obligations, which may deter youth from engaging in risky behaviors like substance use or early sexual activity, particularly in socioeconomically disadvantaged environments (Garcia-Reid et al., 2018). *Familismo* strengthens family bonds, providing emotional and psychological support that helps mitigate the adverse effects of socioeconomic challenges.
- **Resilience through Cohesion:** Mental health providers can leverage this strong family orientation when working with Hispanic/Latino families. Understanding *familismo* allows providers to address challenges while recognizing the inherent resilience within these family systems, fostering healthier relational and individual outcomes.



## Addressing Social Stigmas in Mental Health Support

### Promoting Strength-Based Approaches:

- Effective mental health support for Hispanic/Latino families involves challenging negative stereotypes and focusing on strengths, such as *familismo* and community cohesion.

### Culturally Responsive Services:

- Culturally informed practices consider the unique challenges and values of Hispanic/Latino families, supporting families in ways that respect and build on their cultural strengths.

### Social and Policy Advocacy:

- By advocating for policies and social services that alleviate economic burdens on single-parent Hispanic/Latino families, policymakers can foster environments that support well-being and long-term positive outcomes for these families.

