Stigma Reduces Compliance With Depression Treatment in Some Latinos

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Depressed Latinos who believe most strongly that mental illness is stigmatizing are less likely than other Latinos to take medication, keep appointments and control their depression. These findings were published in the March issue of *General Hospital Psychiatry* and reported by Health Behavior News Service.

To determine the impact of stigma on compliance with treatment for depression, William Vega, PhD—a professor of social work at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles—worked with researchers at the University of California in Los Angeles. Vega's team surveyed 200 economically disadvantaged Latinos who had been screened for depression. A second screening revealed that 146 were suffering from the condition, while 54 were not. Among those with depression, 51 percent stigmatized mental illness.

Stigma had a significant impact on compliance to depression treatment. Those who stigmatized depression were 22 percent less likely to be taking depression medication, 21 percent less likely to be able to control their depression and roughly 44 percent more likely to have missed scheduled mental-health appointments.

According to Vega, the study "shows evidence that stigma does exist, and it's related to things that are important to provide as part of proper treatment."

James Walkup, PhD, an associate professor of psychology at Rutgers University in New Jersey, says the study suggests that providers should perhaps find other ways to treat Latinos who stigmatize mental illness. He wonders "whether it may sometimes make more sense to switch gears with a patient who, for whatever reason, finds it intolerable to think of themselves as having depression."

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