

Chapter 8

“Rural-Specific” Types of Childhood Trauma in Rural Communities

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors discuss eight types of trauma that Latino children are likely to encounter by residing in rural or geographically-isolated communities. The authors contend that there exist more “rural-specific” types of childhood trauma that Latino children are at-risk for when compared to “urban-specific” types of trauma. For example, Latino children who reside in rural communities are more likely to be traumatized by parental deportation, migrating from one town to another because parents follow the harvest, language brokering or translating for their parents, experiencing or witnessing farming accidents, relocating from the city to the country, isolation from extended family, pesticide poisoning of the child or a family member, and living in labor camps or substandard housing. It is important to note that Latino children, like children from other cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds, can experience all types of trauma irrespective of whether they reside in urban or rural settings.

INTRODUCTION

The primary aim of this chapter is to discuss eight common types of trauma that Latino children are likely to encounter by residing in rural or geographically-isolated communities. A secondary aim is to briefly discuss some interventions that can be used with traumatized Latino children. A third aim is to present some directions for future research on childhood trauma in Latino children who reside in rural and geographically-isolated communities.

A systematic review of the scientific literature indicates that there is a growing body of research on trauma in Latino children, with the majority of the research conducted in large urban or metropolitan

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communities. As the Latino population grows and continues to spread across the country, including into rural and geographically-isolated communities, there is also an increasing awareness of the mental health needs of Latino families and their children. In urban communities, Latino families and their children are at-risk for “urban-specific” forms of trauma and in rural communities they are likely to encounter different types of trauma.

It is the contention of these authors, that childhood trauma can be viewed from the perspective of urban versus rural types of trauma, especially in Latino children because of the social, economic, and political circumstances of Latino families. While Latino children are not immune from the infinitesimal types of trauma that can occur to them by living in either type of setting, there are some forms of trauma that are more likely to occur when living in rural communities. Below are some examples of the types of trauma that Latino children are at-risk for in these communities.

- ***Luis*** recently witnessed the arrest of his father at gunpoint in rural Oregon. Luis, who is 10 years old, saw his father beaten by the police and believed that his father was going to die. He is now very angry at the authorities and has constant nightmares about this incident.
- ***Mayte***, a 10 year old undocumented female was in school when her parents were arrested at work and immediately placed in deportation proceedings. She was placed under the care of child protective services in Iowa where she has no family. She quickly became traumatized and began to have severe psychotic symptoms. She also faces deportation because of her legal status.
- ***Julio*** is a 17-year-old undocumented Guatemalan who came to the U.S. three years ago. He went to work at a meat packing plant in Nebraska. He was recently apprehended during an ICE raid and is now facing deportation. He fled his country after his parents were murdered by drug dealers and now fears that he will be killed when he is returned home. While in custody, he has become very paranoid and suspicious.
- ***Susana*** and her sister ***Eva*** , both 14 years old, crossed into the United States from Mexico after traveling from their country of El Salvador in the summer of 2014. They came to the U. S.in search of their parents. During their journey to the United States, both had been raped on numerous occasions, and now experience severe trauma including suicidal ideations.
- ***Roberto*** , who is 16 years old, worked alongside of his parents for many years in farms across rural California. When he was 14 years old, he began to have seizures and problems learning at school. He was later diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor. He prognosis is very poor and is very afraid of dying and never being able to help his family.
- ***Elizabeth*** , a 13-year-old Mexican American lived with her family in rural Georgia. She witnessed the suicide of her older brother after her family moved from a large metropolitan city to a small rural town in Georgia. Sandra is now very depressed and anxious, and feels responsible for not preventing the suicide. She stated that her brother had difficulty adjusting to the rural community after living in the city.
- ***Margarita*** is an 11-year-old child of Guatemalan descent whose family moved to a rural community in Arizona. She was bitten by a rattlesnake in her back yard and traumatized by this event. For many months, she refused to leave her house and developed and constantly clung to her parents. She also refused to go to school for one month.
- ***Johnny*** , who is 8 years old, witnessed the amputation of his father’s arm in a hay baler accident during a recent harvest and saw him die as medical assistance arrived too late. He has experienced significant flashbacks, nightmares, dissociation, and guilt.

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