



## Are Latinx Youth Getting the Mental Health Services They Need?



As rates of anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges [continue to increase](#) among young people, a [new study](#) suggests that the nation's fastest-growing youth population is not receiving the care it needs. Roughly one in four youth in the U.S. are estimated to be Latinx.

The study was based on a survey, conducted during the 2018-19 school year, of 306 first- and second-generation immigrant Latinx high school students living in Texas and Rhode Island. Even during that pre-pandemic school year, more than half of respondents (57 percent) reported symptoms that met the clinical definition of anxiety. Forty-six percent had symptoms meeting the criteria for PTSD. And 32 percent met the clinical cutoff for depression.

Despite these relatively high levels of need, just 57 percent of the students had received mental health services during their lifetimes.

Ideally, these students who received services would be the students with symptoms of mental illness. However, the researchers found no association between services and symptoms. Instead, the best predictors of service use were:

- **Gender:** Females were nearly twice as likely as males to receive services.
- **Parents' country of origin:** Children with parents from South America were nearly five times more likely to receive help compared to children with parents from Central America, Mexico, or the Caribbean. The researchers wrote:

These findings add to the growing literature showing that youth with parents from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean are at a disadvantage compared with other Latinx youth—this group is more likely to be undocumented or live in mixed-status families where there is uncertainty about immigration status, a factor that may compromise access to needed care.

- **Economic status:** Children from lower-income families were less likely to access services.
- **Age:** Older students were more likely to have received services—a finding that makes sense given that the study examined lifetime service use. Only 23 percent of survey respondents had access to services the year prior to the study.

The article’s authors are [Natalia Giraldo-Santiago](#) of the Center for Health Outcomes and Interdisciplinary Research in the Department of Psychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital, [Arlene Bjugstad](#) of the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, [Jodi Berger Cardoso](#) and [Tzuan A. Chen](#) of the University of Houston, [Kalina Brabeck](#), of Rhode Island College, and NEPC Fellow [Ruth M. López](#) of the University of Arizona.

Because the study was based on a convenience sample that was not representative of the general population, the results should be interpreted with caution. However, the study authors suggest that, at the very least, their findings indicate a need for schools to increase efforts “to prevent, identify, and intervene with Latinx youths’ growing mental health needs and limited access to mental health services.”

They conclude:

Mental health programs and services within schools and culturally tailored interventions for youth who are immigrants themselves and the children of immigrant parents are greatly needed. Services should be mindful of the economic hardships and challenges in the access to care among Latino youth and those with a parent from Central America, Mexico, or the Caribbean as the migrations from South America often occur for varied social, cultural, and political reasons.

### NEPC Resources on Diversity - Race, Ethnicity, Class, Culture, and/or Gender

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