

Developing an Early Childhood Mental Health  
System of Care in Maryland

November 2004

**Voices of Families II**

Summary of Focus Groups with Latino Families,  
Fathers, Teen Mothers and Grandmothers



**1. Latino Families -11 family members with 18 children came from 5 countries:**

**Mexico, Peru, El Salvador, Ecuador and Guatemala**

- a. Families recognized that their child's behavior was a problem
- b. Delayed speech and language were identified as issues and children were referred to speech therapists
- c. Barriers to care:
  - Language - Afraid to call because of language barrier
  - Cost - Lack of insurance
  - Immigration status - No access to entitlements regardless of income
  - Work - Cannot take off work when services are open during the day - often work a second job in the evening
  - Fears - If your child attends a special program, it stays in the child's record and it looks bad.
- d. Where did you get help?
  - Pediatrician - Language is the primary criteria when choosing medical care, not experience or qualifications of provider - Often have to rely on secretary for information because they speak Spanish - not doctor or other professionals
  - Family Support Center, Infants & Toddlers, Home Visiting
  - Contigo - Washington Assessment and Therapy Services
- e. Culture:
  - Parents spend more time with their children in Latino culture
  - Mothers educate their children in Latino culture rather than formal programs
  - Need to educate mothers, so they can educate their children
- e. Needs:
  - Information in Spanish
  - More ESOL classes
  - Support from other mothers
  - Involve more fathers

( Note: Two translators assisted with the focus group.)

**"I was so desperate that I opened the phone book to find help - most did not speak Spanish."**

- 2. Fathers - 19 men ranging from 17 to 30+ years in age with 41 children  
12 fathers have their children living with them part of the time**
- a. Knowledge of normal child development was limited
  - b. Understanding of behavioral or mental health issues was limited
  - c. Father's role in child's life:
    - Father's feel marginalized in child's life
    - Mother/grandmother determines care
    - Child's mother "cuts down" father in front of the child
  - d. Where do you go for help?
    - Pediatrician, family, other men, phone book, church
    - Court order
    - Few knew about Head Start, Infants & Toddlers
  - e. Violence/trauma:
    - Fear for children due to increased violence
    - Some kids seem to thrive on violence
  - f. Needs:
    - Parenting classes - learn techniques for discipline so don't use physical punishment
    - Better communication with mother
    - More time with our kids

**"He can't stay still. He's 'evil.' I see the worst side of me in him."**

**"I was misguided. They're going to be misguided too. I haven't made consistent decisions or stability - I'm passing it on to them."**

**"Our children have 'ghetto tendencies.' If you live in a certain place, you become it."**

**"Daddy's f--- up. I feel badly about the example I'm setting."**

**"Violence is the only resort now, no coping strategies now."**



### **3. Teen Mothers**

**Group 1. 11 mothers and 1 father - Youth Center**

**Group 2. 5 mothers and 1 father - Head Start Program**

- a. Described child's behavior as "bad" but not as mental health or behavioral problem
- b. Barriers to care:
  - Private insurance
  - Care that understands culture, family and neighborhood
- c. Where did you go for help?
  - Head Start, pediatrician, mental health clinics, teacher, family member
  -
- d. Needs:
  - Information on resources, child development
  - Culturally competent care
- e. Consistent themes:
  - Cultural issues - traditional therapy not helpful -therapists did not understand the African American culture - children are raised to be more independent
  - Confrontation with 3 generations living together with different parenting styles
  - Physical punishment as primary means of discipline
  - Domestic violence and impact on the children

**"I want information. Don't tell me what to do."**

**"I stopped going because all she told me was everything I was doing was wrong."**

**"Our children are more active, hyper and independent. The teachers don't know how to deal with African American children."**

**"She (Grandmother) tries to act like his mother. I had to tell her that I'm the mother now."**

**"The kids go to the grandmother to get their way."**

**"I was in an abusive relationship for 4 years. As a result, my children get very nervous when they are near fighting or arguing. They get really aggressive with others when they are not given their space."**

**I was physically abusive to my partners and my children are very aggressive with me."**

**4. Grandmothers - 5 grandmothers and 2 great-grandmothers with 17 children, 40 grand children, 5 great-grandchildren**

- a. Recognized that parenting is different now than when they were raising children - better understanding of normal child development and importance of self-esteem
- b. Barriers to care:
  - Conflict of roles and who is the "child's parent" - the mother or grandmother - creates confusion for child
  - Accessing care for grandchildren requires parent's signature and sometimes mothers can't be found or may be in prison
  - Grandchildren left with so many different people with different parenting styles - difficult for children to know what to expect
  - Daughters may come and go from child's life, grandmother is expected to step-in to care for children - daughters go out to the store and don't come back for weeks
  - Grandmothers viewed as interfering and daughter's may take the children and not bring them back
- c. Needs:
  - Support
  - Respite - time for themselves

**"Grandmothers have no rights."**

**"Kids realize you can bathe me, feed me and can't get help for me."**

**"Don't beat these kids in front of me! I will call protective services or the police. I have to protect the kids."**

**I can't sleep when they are with me. I'm always worried."**

**"Girls use the kids to get back at the guys."**



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is conducting family focus groups

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