

# Colorado Probation Research in Brief

## *The Influence of Hispanic Ethnicity on Long-Term Treatment Outcomes*

Arroyo, J. A., Miller, W. R., and Tonigan, J. S. (2002). The Influence of Hispanic Ethnicity on Long-Term Outcome in Three Alcohol-Treatment Modalities. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 64(1), 98-104.

**Key Words:** Alcohol treatment, AA, cultural competency, MI, substance abuse, alcoholism, CBT, intervention

### Summary/Conclusions

The authors used Project MATCH data, with an additional cultural assessment tool, to explore the influence of culture on treatment outcomes. The sample of substance abusing Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites was exposed to three modalities of treatment: attendance at Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, and Motivational Enhancement Therapy. Although the researchers found some limited differences in the two samples' treatment outcomes at the one-year follow-up period, the finding on responsivity is significantly important for probation officers when making treatment referrals.

### Limitations of Information

Although the sample size was adequate for the study of treatment outcomes, the small subset of Hispanics, who completed the additional cultural assessment, was limited in that 20% of possible respondents did not complete the assessment. For the 80% who did complete the instrument, the questions were based on the participant's identification with Mexican-American heritage. This limits the ability to generalize the findings to those Hispanics who identify as Cuban, Puerto Rican, etc.

**Caveat:** The information presented here is intended to summarize and inform readers of research and information relevant to probation work. It can provide a framework for carrying out the business of probation as well as suggestions for practical application of the material. While it may, in some instances, lead to further exploration and result in *future* decisions, it is not intended to prescribe policy and is not necessarily conclusive in its findings. Some of its limitations are described above.

## The Influence of Culture

"Hispanics are the most rapidly growing ethnic minority group in the United States," and are the largest minority group currently under probation supervision in Colorado. The article cites previous longevity studies (mid-80's to mid-90's) that found the number of problems associated with drinking, as well as the intensity of drinking, has increased for Hispanics while remaining about the same for non-Hispanic whites.

Because of the "rising rates of alcohol problems among Hispanic men," the researchers wanted to explore if there were cultural differences that effect the outcome of treatment. The study addressed two hypotheses: 1. "Hispanics would show fewer favorable outcomes, relative to non-Hispanic whites in the sample, if assigned to" AA 12-step facilitation therapy (TSF) but would have comparable outcomes in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and motivational enhancement therapy (MET); and 2. there would be a difference in outcomes for Hispanics based on how closely they identified with Mexican culture versus mainstream American culture.

The sample of outpatient treatment clients (205 non-Hispanic whites, 200 Hispanics) were randomly assigned to one of three treatment modalities: TSF, CBT, MET. Several intake assessments were administered, and the Hispanic sample also completed the Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans (ARSMA).

The follow-up period was one year after treatment completion. The study found non-Hispanic whites had a significantly higher percentage of days abstinent and fewer drinks per episode with TSF, relative to CBT and MET, while Hispanics showed no difference on either measure

for the three modalities. Also, ARSMA results "did not predict differential response to treatments."

In sum, CBT and MET work equally well with both populations; however, the outcomes for Hispanics assigned to TSF were less favorable than for non-Hispanic whites. Researchers concluded the difference in TSF outcomes "may be explained by a relatively low rate of AA attendance among Hispanic clients." However, for those Hispanics who reportedly attended AA, their outcomes were similar to non-Hispanic whites.

### Practical Applications

- √ Ensure quality assessments are completed and used to match the probationer with the appropriate level of treatment.
- √ When considering a treatment agency and/or service, the probation officer should consider a number of responsivity variables, such as learning style, education level, language needs, ethnicity, and gender. There may be several treatment options but one may be more appropriate based on the probationer's characteristics.
- √ Be sensitive to cultural differences by getting to know your probationer and building rapport.
- √ Although Probation cannot mandate attendance at twelve step meetings, officers can provide positive reinforcement and encouragement to clients who attend voluntarily. Open dialogue with the client's sponsor, ask the client about meeting topics, and inquire about the frequency of meeting attendance.

State Court Administrator's Office  
Colorado Division of Probation Services, Evaluation Unit  
303.861.1111; www.courts.state.co.us **June 2010**