



policy brief

Effectiveness of Promotoras in Engaging Latino Parents

Underage drinking is a serious issue and research shows that Hispanic youth are more likely to drink and get drunk at an earlier age than non-Hispanic white or black youth¹.

In this study, promotoras were engaged as experts who were simultaneously teachers and learners. They engaged in creating interventions or changing their environment through a process of dialogue, critical reflection, and integration of lived experiences and cultural stories.

According to one study of youth in five Southwestern states, Mexican-American 7th- to 12th-graders are significantly more likely to binge drink than their white peers. The differences were greatest for 7th- and 8th-grade girls, and for 7th-, 9th- and 12th-grade boys². In Arizona, Latino youth have the highest rates of alcohol

use among all ethnicities: 23.7% report binge drinking. In efforts to address this risky behavior, researchers at Arizona State University and a group of promotoras, known as lay helpers or community health workers, joined together to evaluate a culturally grounded community-based intervention aimed at preventing and reducing alcohol use among Latino youth.

Promotoras are lay Latino community members with specialized training who share the language, culture, social norms and contexts of the communities they serve. This makes them well equipped to inspire the trust and respect needed to facilitate collaborative relationships with

community members. Community-based health promotion programs have used promotoras to educate about health conditions; to teach preventive skills and behaviors; and to increase access to health information and systems of care. The promotora programs have been identified as a promising approach for reaching underserved communities that often face language, cultural, and practical barriers that deter access to health care information and treatment. Promotoras are influential in encouraging self-determination and empowering community members to adopt lifestyle changes that improve health and well-being.

The intervention consisted of a one-hour education workshop for adult parents of Latino youth. Prior to the intervention, the 36 female promotoras participated in a training session designed and facilitated by a social worker. Their training was based on the Popular Education Model which encourages promotoras to explore their own life experiences, and engage in dialogue and reflection on their own lives and action steps they could take to prevent risky alcohol use among Latino youth in their neighborhoods. They also worked with the researcher to design and implement an evaluation of the education workshop for Latino parents.

The intervention involved 85 parents, all of whom were first generation Latino immigrants whose primary language was Spanish. The majority of the participants were female and of Mexican ancestry. The one-hour intervention consisted of an educational workshop including reenactment of lived experiences, problem solving, listening to poster

¹ L.D. Johnson, P.M. O'Malley, J.G. Bachman, and J.E. Schulenberg, Monitoring the Future National Survey Results on Drug Use, 1975-2010: Volume I, Secondary School Students (Bethesda, MD: National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2011), tables D-73 and D-76.

² Swaim, R.C., Wayan, J.C., and Chen, J. (2004). Alcohol Use among Mexican American and Non-Hispanic White 7th-12th-Grade Students in the Southwestern United States. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Substance Abuse*, 14 (2), 1-18.

presentations and sharing statistics, education about the contents of alcoholic drinks, dangers of alcohol use and laws related to giving youths alcohol. They also sought to increase parents' understanding of the possible causes of alcohol use and ways they could intervene to prevent risky alcohol use with their children.

Findings showed parents increased their awareness of the risks, rates and consequences of risky alcohol use. The workshop also prompted parents to think about their own role in preventing alcohol use in youth. Participants agreed it was important to have open communication with their children, set a good example, express their love by listening to their children and engage them in healthy safe activities such as sports or educational workshops. Parents also thought it was important to show their children support and to monitor them by knowing their children's friends, setting limits with their children, monitoring children's changes in behavior and protecting them from others who may use alcohol or other drugs. Workshop participants agreed they appreciated the quality of information presented, workshop interactivity and ability to identify with the promotoras.

Parental substance use, low parental monitoring, and low levels of family communication and cohesion have been associated with increased risk of substance use for Latino youths. In contrast, having strong parental sanctions against drug use served to protect youths from engaging in drug use and from having drug-using peers as friends.

While there are few studies that document including promotoras in substance use prevention programs with Latinos, this study shows they can play an important role in working with community members to improve their access to prevention resources and build bridges between the community and health/social service providers.

Public Policy Recommendations

Methods to increase the use of Promotoras in serving hard to reach community members include:

1. **Build awareness of funding mechanisms** by supporting financing options through Medicaid (known as Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System, AHCCCS), and the Arizona Legislature so that Promotoras can be integrated into health care organizations.
2. **Support Training and Certification** to increase the capacity of Promotoras to address health disparities in underserved communities through accredited educational institutions.
3. **Join the Arizona Community Health Workforce Coalition (AzCHOW)**, coordinated by the Arizona Department of Health Services Community Health Worker Program, the professional association for Community Health Workers, and the University of Arizona College of Public Health. The Coalition consists of stakeholders interested in legitimizing the work of Promotoras with reimbursement models for service provision.



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To learn more about the Arizona Community Health Workforce Coalition, please visit the website: <http://azchow.org>.

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