

Searching for Dignity: Barriers Encountered by Latina Immigrants in Search of Health Care

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Objective

This paper explores the structural barriers encountered among Latina immigrant women in a rural area of the mid-Atlantic eastern United States as they seek appropriate primary health care.

Design

For this qualitative study participants were recruited through a purposeful convenience sampling strategy and concomitant snowball recruiting. Semi-structured in-depth individual interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, translated when needed and reviewed for accuracy. NVIVO 11 provided a platform for coding and sorting into themes.

Population

The participants were 8 Latina immigrants in a rural area of the Eastern United States who have sought primary care in the country at least once. Participants were 18-65 year-old women of first or second-generation Latina families who speak fluent Spanish.

Method

This study used a Heideggerian interpretive phenomenological approach to data analysis.

Findings

The overarching theme that emerged was searching for dignity. Common barriers encountered included racism and assumptions about socio-economic class, lack of health systems literacy on the part of health care workers and the women themselves, communication barriers, , differing cultural expectations.

Emergent themes related to health care barriers included: need for trust, vulnerability, feeling like an outsider, and the desire to be treated the same as everyone else.

Implications

The findings suggest that structural barriers deny these Latina immigrants dignity, which in turn undermines their entire health care experience. Developing a shared agenda of mutual trust and understanding within community care systems would improve the health care experience while at the same time assisting women in learning how to navigate the system appropriately.