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Social and Cultural Determinants of Healthcare Utilization Among Latinas

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The United States population is growing more racially and ethnically diverse with the Latino population in the U.S. increasing and becoming more dynamic. Research data consistently shows that Latinos have more health problems compared to the white population. Because low income is common among Latinos the numerous health problems associated with poverty are also more prevalent in the Latino community. Low income Latinos also experience substantial barriers to obtaining appropriate health care, most prominently lack of health insurance, lack of providers in low-income neighborhoods, and language barriers for non-English speakers.

Health research among Latinos has become widespread, but there is less up-to-date research on their health beliefs. People from different cultural backgrounds have different beliefs about health and illness compared to people from the dominant U.S. culture. Researchers have recognized the need for studies to be culturally anchored in the norms, beliefs, and experiences of specific populations.

The goal of this research project is to find out what Latinas living in Amsterdam and Albany believe about health and illness. Because many Latinas are at risk for chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes, we hope to understand Latina experiences and challenges using health care.

There are three main purposes of the survey:

- 1) Document Latinas health care experiences
- 2) Describe Latinas cultural beliefs related to spirituality and health
- 3) Document health practices, diseases and conditions of Latinas and barriers to health care among Latinas

Future implications of this study include a possible increased interest in Latino research. Further examination of Latinas health beliefs, behaviors, experiences and related factors can lead to culturally appropriate health programs that can educate Latinas and health professionals. Thus, knowledge gained can provide insights to guide state health policies and appropriate intervention at the community level.