



**ALBERTA MEN'S NETWORK**

# **Well-being and Healthy Relationships**

**Insights and Experiences of Latino Men in Alberta**

*Community Research Brief*



Human Rights  
Education and  
Multiculturalism  
Fund





ALBERTA MEN'S NETWORK

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**Acknowledgements:** Michael Hoyt, Michael Embaie

**Contact:** Fanny Oliphant at [fannyoliphant@gmail.com](mailto:fannyoliphant@gmail.com)  
Dr. Liza Lorenzetti at [laklorene@ucalgary.ca](mailto:laklorene@ucalgary.ca)



# Introduction

## Overview

The Alberta Men's Survey (AMS) gathered responses on men's well-being and relationships from over 2,214 men in 42 unique localities. This research brief focuses on the insights and experiences of 132 Latino men living in Alberta, representing 6% of the total AMS respondents. A structured questionnaire containing 23 quantitative and qualitative questions was prepared to collect relevant information through targeted, convenience, and snowball sampling methods. Data was collected online and in person by 51 trained research assistants from diverse backgrounds. Research assistants entered paper questionnaire data into SurveyMonkey by web-link or manual entry.

## Context and Literature

Canada is an immigrant-receiving country with a high level of ethno-cultural diversity (Statistics Canada, 2016; 2011; 2007) and Canadians of Latin American origin are one of the largest non-European ethnic groups in the country (Statistics Canada, 2016).

Latinos, like other migrants, may experience numerous resettlement challenges wherein values, talents, education, professional credentials or prior experiences are minimized or negated. Additional stressors related to shifts in gender relationships, roles and existing hierarchies (e.g. "role reversal") from country of origin may exacerbate language and cultural differences (Lorenzetti & Este, 2010; Smith, 2004;). Some research associates these uncertainties with increasing levels of stress and frustration, social isolation, anxiety and depression, and in some cases mental health concerns and domestic violence (Guruge et al., 2010; Lorenzetti & Este, 2010; Runner et al., 2009). Domestic violence affects people from all social, cultural and economic backgrounds, it is not a cultural problem, but an issue primarily related to power and oppression (Fong, 2010). Multiple systemic stressors, however, can complicate or exacerbate domestic violence, and limit access to services and supports.

As men are more frequently involved in violence perpetration (Statistics Canada, 2015), their participation in prevention efforts is critical (Berkowitz, Fabiano, Linkenbach, Perkins & Stark, 2003; Kaufman, 2001). There is still little understanding of the services and supports that men need in order to experience more nurturing relationships and lead healthier lives. This lack of knowledge contributes to the barriers that men face in accessing existing healthy relationship supports.

In response to this social issue, the AMS emerged as a collaborative project of community members, agencies and academics. The survey was designed by 71 men and women committed to enhancing men's roles in violence prevention. A tremendous strength of the project was a culturally-diverse team of community-based research assistants, supported by a leadership group of 18 organizations and numerous volunteers.



## Background: Latino Peoples in Alberta

While migrants from Asia (including the Middle East), were Canada's largest source of immigrants during the past five years, there has been a recent increase of newcomers from Africa, Caribbean, and Latin America. Canadians with Latin American origin or "Latinos" includes those from countries that were colonized by Spain, France, and Portugal. These include Mexico, Central America and South America (or "Latin America") and parts of the Caribbean. The Latino culture originated with the combination of pre-Hispanic or Indigenous cultures, the cultural influences of of occupancy (Spain and Portugal in Central and South America, including Mexico) and strong-rooted African cultures which arrived in America with the slave trade. The term Latino refers to culture and language, not a race. Over time, global migration and settlers from other parts of the world have shaped Latino cultures and ways of life.

People born in the Caribbean, Central and South America represented 12.3 % of all newcomers between 2006 and 2011, up from 10.5% for those who came five years early. Colombia, Mexico and Haiti were the three source countries of newcomers from The Caribbean and Latino America. The majority of Latino Canadians are recent immigrants who arrived in the late 20th century from El Salvador, Colombia, Mexico, Chile, and Guatemala, with smaller communities from Dominican Republic, Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Ecuador, and elsewhere. Similar patterns of migration exist in the United States, although Latinos are the largest and fastest growing minority group, at 15% of the total population (US Census Bureau, 2008; 2007).

The majority of Canadians of Latin origin follow the Catholic faith. For the Latin community, the family unit is considered of utmost importance and forms the basis of values for many. In a recent study, male Latino respondents identified family, both nuclear and extended, as central to their lives and self-concept (Ribner, 2010). This is the cultural context that framed the responses to the AMS.

A man in a dark jacket is sitting on a grassy field, looking towards a lake and snow-capped mountains in the background. The scene is peaceful and scenic.

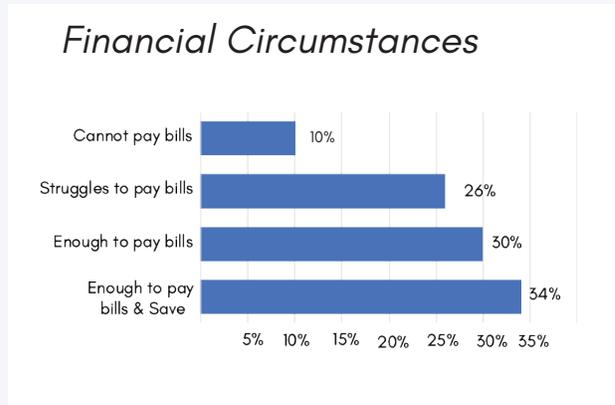
***“Un lugar donde  
me sienta seguro”  
(A place where  
I can feel safe)***

-A survey respondent on the types  
of supports that men require



# Survey Results

## Financial Status



## Mental Health

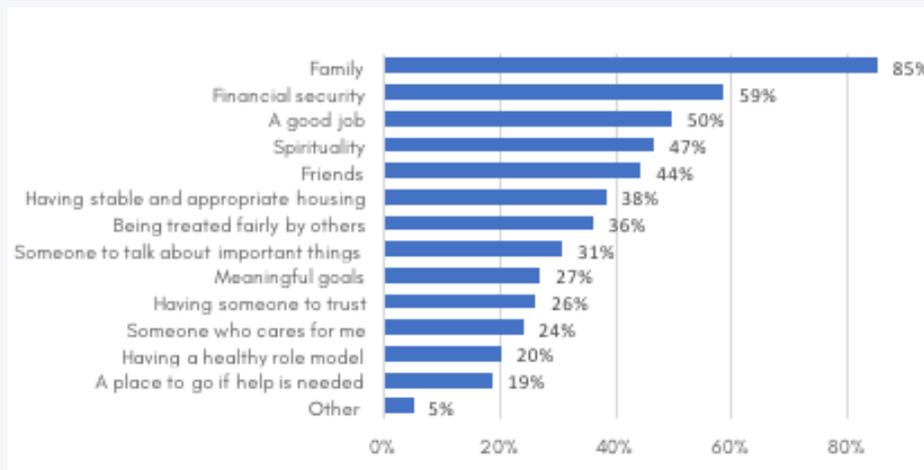
**15%** of latino respondents reported mental health concerns

- TOP 3** conditions
- Depression
  - Anxiety
  - Stress

Intersectionality (race, class, gender etc.) (Crenshaw, 1989) is an important lens through which to view mental health. Information collected shows that 15 percent reported mental health concerns. A review of the literature suggests that factors impacting mental health can include freedom from discrimination, economic hardship like unemployment or underemployment, and social inclusion (Robert & Gilkinson, 2012). Studies have shown that immigrants with lower income were more likely to report a high level of stress (Robert & Gilkinson, 2012).

## Well-Being

### Enablers to Well-being



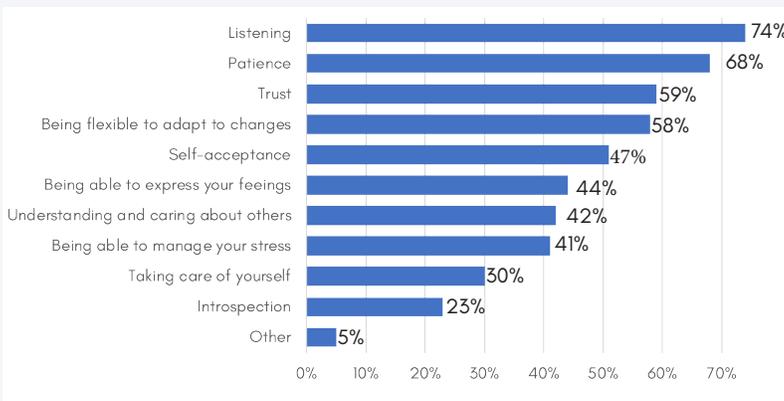
When asked their perception of well-being and healthy relationships, a majority of respondents consider family (85%) the main factor. Other contributing factors reported were financial stability (59%), followed by a stable job (50%). Most respondents also perceived spirituality (47%), friends (44%), stable housing (38%), and fair treatment by others (36%).

## Barriers to Well-being



Over sixty percent perceived financial challenges as one of the main barriers to well-being and healthy relationships. Other barriers reported were family or relationship conflict (50%), discrimination (50%), non-recognition of education or experience (47%), and an unsatisfactory job (38%).

## Personal Skills Needed for Healthy Relationships



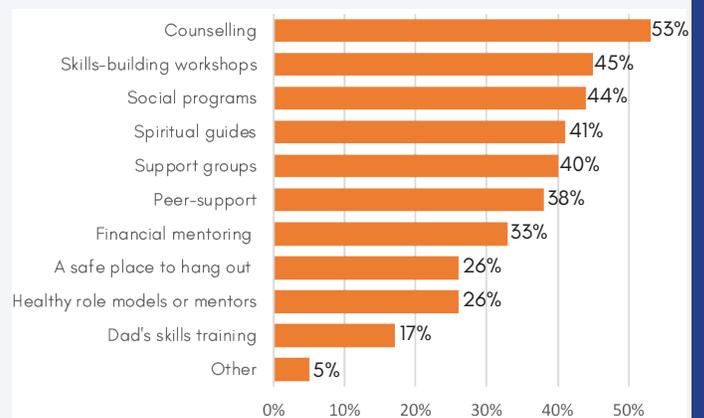
In order to maintain healthy relationships, a majority reported listening (74%), patience (68%) and trust (59%) as important skills. In addition, being flexible and adaptable to change (58%), practicing self-acceptance (47%), and managing stress (41%) were highlights.

## Awareness and Utilization of Supports and Services

A very striking majority (92%) of Latino men recognized that men need supports and services for well-being and healthy relationships. However, 80% among them did not know where to go and whom to approach for support and services.

When respondents were asked about the types of support and services they would use, more than half (53%) stated professional support such as counselling. Other types of support noted were skill-building workshops (45%) followed by social programs (44%) and spiritual guides (41%).

## Type of Supports or Services Required



## What Does it Mean to be a Man?

Men were asked to respond to a question about masculinity - specifically what it means to be a man. For this group of Latino Albertans, the most frequent terms used to describe a man were (1) Honest; (2) Hard Working; (3) Responsible; (4) Respect/Respectful; and (5) Strong. Some common responses focused on men's roles as supporters and providers of family, as noted by one respondent: "Hard worker, responsible, able to care for the family". Others referred to traditional masculinity concepts such as "head of the family".

***“Consejería donde  
hablemos las cosas  
personales,  
confidencialidad”  
(Counselling where we can  
talk in confidence about our  
personal issues)***

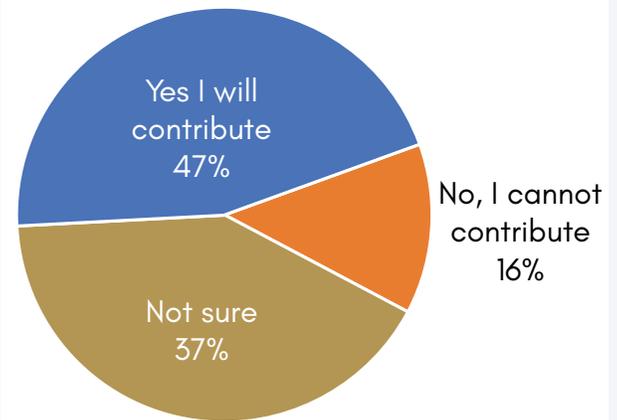
-A survey respondent on the types  
of supports that men require



## Men's Role in Violence Prevention

Approximately half (47%) of the Latino men agreed that they can contribute to violence prevention. Another thirty-seven percent reported that they were not sure about their participation. For those who said that they could contribute to preventing violence, some respondents indicated various roles that they could take. Roles varied, from role modeling, peer-support and sharing of experiences, to also helping with practical skills related to employability.

*Men's Role in Violence Prevention*



# Recommendations

## Focus on Family and Relationships

AMS results indicated that family is a key factor for Latino respondents that ultimately contribute to maintaining and developing healthy relationships. Clutter and Zubieta (2009) point out that Latino family members are very close as a unit. Additionally, AMS respondents highlighted the importance of trust, patience, listening and understanding, and caring for others as important well-being and relationships skills. Survey respondents also considered flexibility to change as another important factor. Respondents in the survey further placed emphasis on spirituality and friendship as other key factors that enable them to be happier.

## Financial Hardship, Discrimination and Family Conflict

Financial stability, such as a stable job, was critically important to the well-being of Latino Albertans. Respondents stated that financial hardship, among other structural and systemic barriers, affected their well-being and maintenance of healthy relationships. A high number stated that they could not meet their basic financial needs, underscoring the connection between immigration/racialization and poverty. Discrimination and non-recognition of out-of-country education or experience were some of the key barriers noted.

Almost half of the respondents also reported that family or relationship conflict was a notable barrier. In the traditional Latino family the father is the 'head of the family', although rigid gender role interpretations are increasingly changing. For instance, a study in Central America (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua) showed traditional men expressed their support for gender-role segregation and the use of authoritarian approaches, and including "force" in their perceived role as head of the family; enlightened men displayed a more equitable view of shared responsibilities and decision-making with their female partners; men in transition were viewed as holding various conflicting perspectives on their identities, vacillating between traditional and modern man (Hegg et al., 2005).

## Service and Support Use

Strikingly, almost all Latino respondents expressed that men need support and services for well-being and healthy relationships; however, most did not know where to go and whom to approach. When asked about the type of supports they would use, most commented that professional help, counselling (53%), skill building workshops (45%), social programs (44%), and spiritual guidance (41%) may be useful. These findings are consistent with what Turner and Lloyd (1999) highlighted as the dual need for “social and personal resources [that] act as moderating forces which impact stress exposure, and they may affect mental and physical health status” (p.160). Support and services for Latino Albertan communities should concentrate on both personal and systemic factors. A focus on skill-building is an important step, as many respondents stated that listening, patience, and trust are important skills as well as being flexible and adaptable to change, practicing self-acceptance, and managing stress. Systemic changes to structural inequality should occur in tandem.

## Recommendations

1. Create awareness about existing resources, connect with and provide capacity-building for spiritual leaders, cultural associations, clubs, and social/ethno-specific media
2. Build supportive structures to enhance well-being and mental health in the Latino community
3. Develop innovative and culturally significant programs to better reach men who are currently isolated from supports
4. Address systemic discrimination and financial inequality through policies and legislation

The promotion of healthy families and violence prevention work among Latin communities cannot be separated from services that will provide the necessary training for people to obtain good and stable employment. At a policy level, this includes the recognition of credentials or work experience to enable men to continue to be active providers in supporting their families. While many men expressed that they had a role to play in violence prevention, more than half stated that they did not have a role or were unsure. Outreach is needed to connect with this group of men and engage them as stakeholders in this work.

At the core, well-being, healthy families, and violence prevention cannot be uncoupled from the desires of migrant communities to have harmony and stability in their homes. This includes addressing structural barriers and promoting gender justice and anti-racism. A focus on providing family supports for immigrant communities to reduce the level of stress they experience will also help them cope with many of the changes they are facing. Skill and capacity development as well as support related to work stress, past traumatic experiences, addiction, depression and anxiety were other issues identified in this survey that call for concrete actions. Moreover, social change has to occur with the leadership of all levels of government, for people to be able to use their expertise and job experiences in order to feel productive, accomplished, and an asset to their families and communities.

# Special Thanks

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**The Alberta Men's Survey Leadership Team includes:** Alberta Father Involvement Initiative, Alberta Human Rights Commission, City of Edmonton, Strathcona County Family & Community Services (Community & Social Development Sector), Edmonton/Evergreen Family Violence Committee, Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary (ECCC), Family & Community Support Services (FCSS) Beaumont, Men's Action Network Calgary (MAN-C), Men Edmonton (ME.), REACH Edmonton, Norwood Family Centre, The Calgary Foundation, United Way of Calgary and Area, University of Calgary, Faculty of Social Work, Calgary Immigration Women's Association, Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services, and Calgary Sexual Health Centre.

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## The Survey Team

**Project Supporters:** Alberta Human Rights Commission, City of Edmonton, Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary, The Calgary Foundation, United Way of Calgary and Area, and University of Calgary, Faculty of Social Work.

**Research Leads:** Dave Este and Liza Lorenzetti.

**Research Advisor:** Leslie Tutty.

**Tool Development Leads:** Abbas Mancey, Adrian Wolfleg, Arya Boustani, Binu Sebastian, Dario Ontolan, Dave Este, Derek Sehn, Derrick Osborne, Donna Brock, Ethel Stonechild, Fanny Oliphant, George Ishiekwene, Grant Neufeld, Joe Campbell, Justin Otteson, Kyle Mack, Lado Luala, Lemlem Haile, Liza Lorenzetti, Madan Nath, Marnie Lee, Michael Hoyt, Michael Lander, Patrick Dillon, Percy Murwisi, Rebecca Robertson, Ryan Valley, Teigist Dessalegn, Thomas Poulsen, Tim Fox, and Vic Lantion.

**Research Coordinators:** Amanda Ulrickson (Leduc), Brodie Stenhouse (Beaumont), Marg Clark (Sturgeon County), Michael Hoyt (Edmonton), Tracy Gravelle (Strathcona County), and Vic Lantion (Calgary).

**Data Management and Analysis:** Percy Murwisi.

**Data Analysis:** Abbas Mancey, Adrian Wolfleg, Aneesh Joseph, Bayo Ogunbote, Camilo Gil, Dave Este, Derrick Osborne, Erfan Tabarsi, Fanny Oliphant, Gautum Verma, Hemlata Sadhwani, Justin Otteson, Lemlem Haile, Leslie Tutty, Liza Lorenzetti, Michael Hoyt, Patrick Dillon, Percy Murwisi, Ryan Valley, Tatiana Ochsepkova, Veronika Ilich, Jeremiah Levine and Vic Lantion.

**Developmental Evaluation:** Bayo Ogunbote, Denise Lysda Mitchell, Ethel Stonechild, Fanny Oliphant, and Liza Lorenzetti.

**Videography:** Arya Boustani, Grant Neufeld, and Hans Ocenar.

**Training:** Adrian Wolfleg, Bayo Ogunbote, Ethel Stonechild, Fanny Oliphant, Justin Otteson, Liza Lorenzetti, Michael Hoyt, Michael Lander, Percy Murwisi, Rebecca Robertson, Ryan Valley, and Vic Lantion.

**Translations:** Bela Gupta and Fanny Oliphant.

**Encoding:** Adrian Wolfleg, Fanny Oliphant, Patrick Breaker, and Percy Murwisi.

**Resource Mobilization:** Dave Este, Doug Murphy, Lemlem Haile, Liza Lorenzetti, Marichu Antonio, Martha Fanjoy, Michael Hoyt, Patrick Dillon, and Vic Lantion.

**Media and Promotions:** Abbas Mancey, Adrian Wolfleg, Dave Este, Justin Otteson, Liza Lorenzetti, Natalie Dawes, Ryan Valley and Vic Lantion.

**Review of Related Literature:** Madan Nath and Martha Fanjoy.

**Launch Planning Committee:** Abbas Mancey, Adrian Wolfleg, Aneesh Joseph, Bayo Ogunbote, Bela Gupta, Camilo Gil, Dave Este, Derek Sehn, Diana Wark, Fanny Oliphant, Grant Neufeld, Heather Morrison, Hemlata Sadhwani, Jeremiah Levine, Joe Campbell, Justin Otteson, Lemlem Haile, Liza Lorenzetti, Malik Walker, Martha Fanjoy, Michael Hoyt, Patrick Dillon, Percy Murwisi, Pol Ngeth, Ryan Valley, and Vic Lantion.

**Dialogues:** Abbas Mancey, Bayo Ogunbote, Camilo Gil, Fanny Oliphant, Gautum Verma, Michael Hoyt, Percy Murwisi, Pol Ngeth, Veronika Ilich, Ryan Valley, Tatiana Ochsepkova, and Vic Lantion.

**Reviewers:** Dr. Dave Este, ECCC Research and Policy Committee, Project Partners and Alberta Men's Survey Leadership Team.

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