Title of Paper/Presentation: English language proficiency and mental health service use among Latino Americans with mental disorders

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(a) Background: The impact of language proficiency as a potential contributor to ethnic disparities in mental health care has received less attention than other factors. Prior studies addressing language proficiency have been limited by focusing on select patients or geographic area, specialty mental health service use or current service use only, or have not assessed self-reported English language proficiency or the presence of a mental disorder.

(b) Method: Data from the National Latino and Asian American Study were examined to assess the impact of limited English proficiency (LEP) on access to and quality of mental health care for community-dwelling Latino Americans with mental disorders. Latinos with mental disorders and LEP were compared to English-proficient (EP) Latinos on lifetime use of healthcare services for a mental disorder, duration of untreated disorders, receipt of minimally adequate care, and barriers to treatment (e.g., lack of identification of need for treatment, language barriers, and stigma).

(c) Results: Compared to EP Latinos, fewer LEP Latinos identified a need for mental health services (33.0% vs. 41.4%, p=0.059), or used healthcare services (42.8% vs. 54.2%, p=0.005), particularly specialty mental health care (9.3% vs. 16.3%, p=0.009). Survival analyses revealed that LEP Latinos had significantly longer duration of untreated disorders than their EP counterparts (p<0.001). Receipt of minimally adequate care did not differ significantly by language proficiency. Stigma was not more common among LEP Latinos. Identification of a need for treatment predicted lifetime healthcare use, whereas stigma did not.

(d) Conclusions: Among Latinos with mental disorders, LEP is associated with disparities in access to care and longer duration of untreated disorders. To address disparities in the receipt of mental health care such as these, future research should examine how sociocultural, clinical, and contextual factors influence recognition of mental health problems and help-seeking for mental disorders among Latinos with limited English proficiency.