

# Mental Health Disorders and Treatment of Dominican Women in the USA

## Introduction

Dominican women are part of two cultures that are understudied regarding mental health despite their status as a majority in society: Latino/Hispanic and female. The Dominican population is a growing and large community within the Hispanic and/or Latino culture in the USA. The female sex/gender consists of a great majority as well. Therein, Dominican women are part of a rising culture and demographic that affects US society. Their mental well-being and function pertains to US's interest as part of major contributors and individuals in this society. As part of primal human well-being, mental health should not be ignored. Yet, this is still an area that lags behind.

In the USA Dominican women, as a subtype of the Hispanic/Latino culture, are affected by lack mental health research and lack of culture-specific competency in mental health services. Their mental health tends to be explained by generalization of the Hispanic/Latino and female culture without considering intra-cultural diversity and variance. The holistic and epidemiological study of Dominican women's mental disorders and treatment utilization will help track needs and changes of this particular dominant culture. In order to understand the mental health landscape for Dominican women in this country, the epidemiology of major disorders and mental health services/treatment for this specific culture (nationality and gender) must be studied. Progress in this area will yield to understanding of pertinent idioms of distress, prevalence of mental disorders, and mental health utilization of Dominican women that could result in better human services and health in the US health care system and culture. Therefore, by reviewing and surveying the existent research regarding the predominant mental disorders diagnosed in Dominican women and their treatment, a more in-depth insight into the culture's unique effect can be observed.

## Discussion

Dominican women experience mental disorders that are pervasive in other cultures, such as depression, anxiety, traumatic stress, and somatization. Yet, they also have their own cultural variance. Unfortunately, results did not derive from epidemiological or nationality-oriented mental health studies that would yield a more clear and concise picture of the prevalence of disorders in Dominican women. Consequently, no concrete assumptions can be drawn from Dominican women's actual prevalence of disorders in the USA. The prevalence of mental disorders and mental health was mainly found due to the Dominican nationality's inclusion as subtype of Hispanic culture. Therein, the Hispanic/Latino culture is generalized to countries and nationalities, and intra/inter-cultural variance and diversity is ignored.

No real census or measure of the epidemiology of mental health disorders in Dominican Women on the USA was found. Dominicans as a whole have been relatively understudied. As a subgroup of Hispanic/Latino culture and other social factors affected or correlated to it, disparities in mental health access, utilization, research inclusion/participation, and measures exist for Dominican women. Latinos from various regions in the US, and different countries may have different needs and concerns; neglect and ignorance to this dilemma leads to more disparities in this country and cultural incompetency. Indeed, this could be explained by the lack of studies or information that encompasses the prevalence of mental disorders by nationality of minorities in the USA.

## Literature Review

Trends in research themes and studies done in mental health usually reflect the priorities regarding disorders prevalent in a specific culture, and their effect and importance in society. Due to the lack of epidemiological research in the prevalence of mental disorders and treatment for specific groups, such as Dominicans in the USA, an explanation of the methods and process of the literature review is necessary. The aim of the literature review consisted of obtaining trends of popular mental health topics, disorders, and treatment in order to formulate a general assumption for this population.

Some databases consulted consisted of EBSCOhost, PsychINFO, psychnet, and sagepub. Key terms such as Mental (health or illness\* or disorder\*), psych\* (disorder\* or illness\* or patholog\*), and Dominican (women\* or female\* or girl) were used to search for articles. Popular and creditable websites, such as NIH.gov, medlineplus.gov, and SAMHSA.gov, were also referenced. Academic journals and articles that studied women in the USA of Dominican origin or descent were exclusively included.

The trend in peer review journals guided the results section of this review as no holistic study of the Dominican culture in the USA regarding predominant mental disorders were found.

## Results

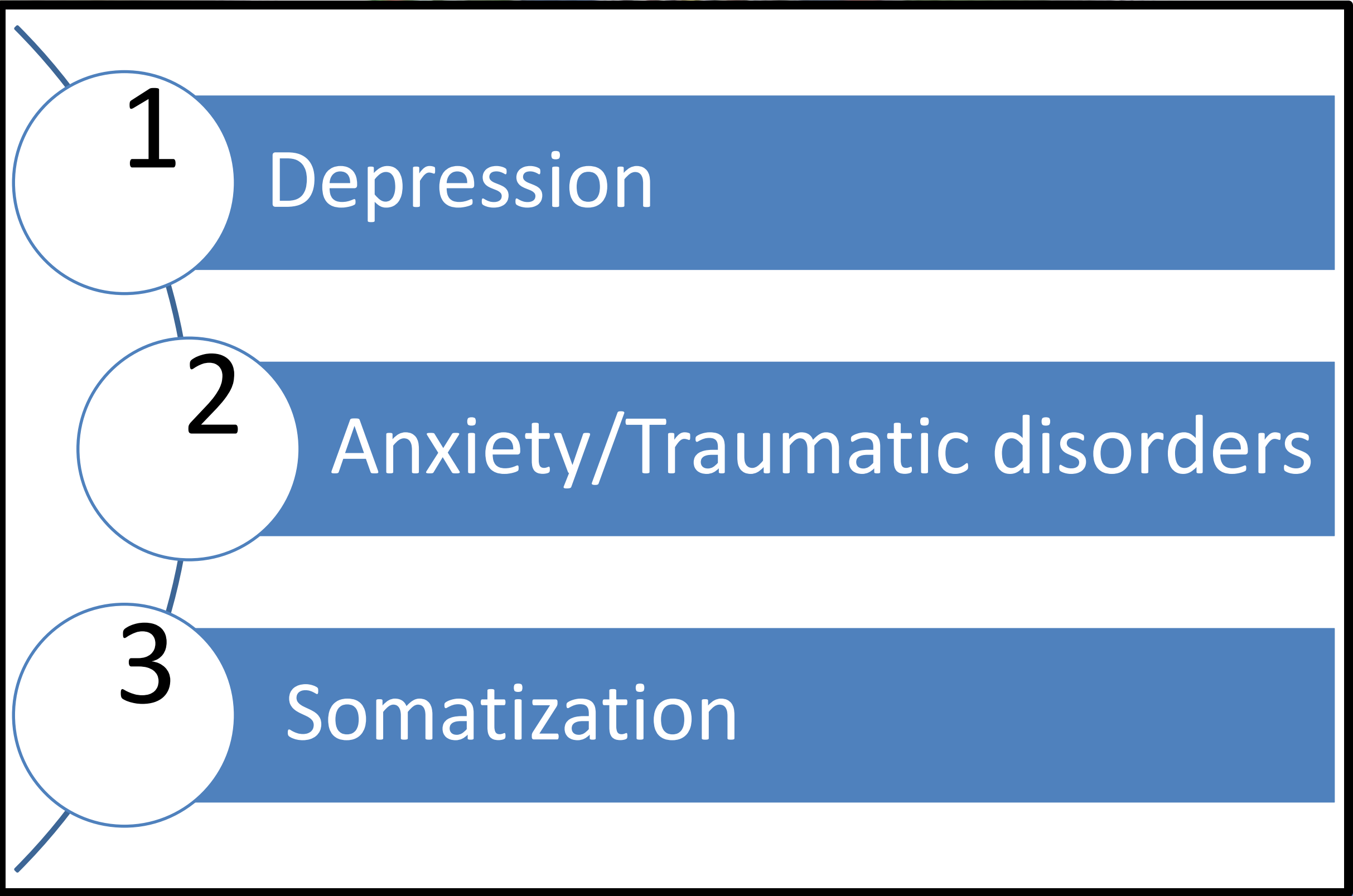
As suggested by the consistent themes in research regarding Dominican women in the USA, most common disorders experienced are:

- 1.Depression**
- 2.Anxiety related disorders** (*ataque de nervios, nervios*, and traumatic stress)
- 3.Somatization of HIV/sexual-health and medical disorders**

Regarding treatment, bodies of articles present the use of substances (pharmaceuticals and plants), outpatient services, and professionals such as medical folk leaders/healers and mental/psychological counselors to treat mental disorders.

The intercultural prevalence of depressive symptoms within the USA is corroborated by the study of depression in the Dominican female population. Dominican women, as women in general, are and have been diagnosed and studied for depression. This trend is also applicable to anxiety disorders, and even culture-bound manifestations of anxiety and depression. HIV prevention and psychological distress related to somatization in Dominican women had a popular trend in peer reviewed and academic journals.

As stated, these results were obtained from observed trends of research and reports of general populations. These studies corroborate the general cultural occurrence of depression, anxiety and somatization, or they neglect culture/nationality-specific differences. Depression and anxiety prevalence in Dominican women in the USA was obtained from Hispanic/Latino mental health studies mainly. Dominican women's mental disorders prevalence and treatment were mainly found as a derivative or subpart to Hispanic/Latino mental health literature. Results are culture-specific as well, where HIV (as a predominant Dominican, if not Caribbean, health concern) is studied in women due to the sexual tourism and prevalence of the disease in the country of origin.



## Conclusion

No specific conclusions can be made about Dominican women's mental disorders and treatment in the USA due to lack of consistent epidemiological evidence that is nationality-specific. In order to understand the phenomena of mental health extensive culture or nationality-specific research is necessary. Work in this area is in progress, yet more specific studies that target these populations in the USA are still needed. Once nationality-inclusive epidemiological studies of mental health are conducted this area can benefit from progress.

The need for general mental health assessments and studies is pivotal to understand psychological sources of distress that contribute to mental health disorders. Once this is achieved, local communities can acquire a more nuanced understanding of the needs that are relevant to their particular population.

Lack of general record-keeping and research in mental health and even less pertaining only to specific nationalities (such as Dominicans) and women should be addressed. A much improved cultural sensitive approach to cultures, such as this one, will yield rich culture-specific information that can shed light on societal, individual, and psychological factors of mental illness.



# Bibliography

[Untittled graphic design picture of Dominican flag]. Retrieved December 7, 2011, from: <http://s1.lzoom.net/big3/360/339186-alexfas01.jpg>

Alegría, M., Canino, G., Shrout, P. E., Woo, M., Duan, N., Vila, D.,Torres, M., Chen, C. N., & Meng, X. L. (2008). Prevalence of mental illness in immigrant and non-immigrant U.S. latino groups. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, *165*(3), 359-69. doi: 10.1176/appi.ajp.2007.07040704

Bromberger, J. T., Harlow, S., Avis, N., Kravitz, H. M., & Cordal, A. (2004). Racial/Ethnic differences in the prevalence of depressive symptoms among middle-aged women: the study of women’s health across the nation (SWAN).*American Journal of Public Health*, *94*(8), 1378–1385. Retrieved from: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1448459/>

Cardemil, E. V., Adams, S. T., Calista, J. L., Connell, J., Encarnación, J., Esparza, N. K., ... Wang, E. (2007). The latino mental health project: A local mental health needs assessment. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health*, *34*(4), 331–341. doi:10.1007/s10488-007-0113-3

Fortner, R. t., Pekow, P., Dole, N, Markenson, G.,& Chasan-Taber, L. (2011). Risk factors for prenatal depressive symptoms among hispanic women. *Maternal Child Health Journal*, *15*(8), 1287-1295. doi: 10.1007/s10995-010-0673-9

La Roche, M. J., & Turner, C. (1997). Self-orientation and depression level among dominicans in the united states. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, *19*(4),479-488. doi: 10.1177/07399863970194006

Liebowitz, M. R., Salmán, E., & Jusino, C. M. (1994). Ataque de nervios and panic disorder. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, *151*, 871-875. Retrieved from : <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,uid&db=ssf&AN=512466238&site=ehost-live>

Moreno, C. L., & El-Bassel, N. (2007). Dominican and puerto rican women in partnerships and their sexual risk behaviors. *Hispanic Journal of*

*Behavioral Sciences*, *29*(3), 336-347. Retrieved from:<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,uid&db=psyh&AN=2007-11840-004&site=ehost-live>

Olfson, M., Shea, S., Feder, A., Fuentes, M., Nomura, Y., Gameroff, M., & Weissman, M. M. (2000). Prevalence of anxiety, depression, and substance use disorders in an urban general medicine practice. *Archives of Family Medicine*, *9*, 876-883. Retrieved from: <http://triggered.clockss.org/ServeContent?url=http://archfami.ama-assn.org%2Fcgi%2Fcontent%2Ffull%2F9%2F9%2F876>

Rutenberg, N., & Baek, C. (2005). Field experiences integrating family planning into programs to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV. *Studies in Family Planning*, *36*(3), 235-245. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4148949>

Sacramento Area Women's Chamber of Commerce. (2013). [Untitled photograph of diverse women]. Retrieved December 7, 2014, from: <http://www.sacwomenschamber.org/about-us.html>

Weiss, C. I. (1992). Controlling domestic life and mental illness: Spiritual and aftercare resources used by dominican new yorkers. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, *16*(2), 237-271. Retrieved from: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/1395697>

World Health Organization. (2011). Dominican Republic. *In Mental health atlas-2011-country profiles*. Retrieved from World Health Organization: [http://www.who.int/mental\\_health/evidence/atlas/profiles/dom\\_mh\\_profile.pdf?ua=1](http://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/atlas/profiles/dom_mh_profile.pdf?ua=1)

Zayas, L., Jankowski, K., & Mckee, M. (2003). Prenatal and postpartum depression among low-Income dominican and puerto rican women. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*,*25*(3), 370-385. doi: 10.1177/0739986303256914