Exploring Experiences & Expectations of Prenatal Healthcare and Genetic Counseling/Testing in Immigrant

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In recent years, the Latino population of the United States has continued to increase, but the specific needs of Latinos in the genetic counseling setting have yet to be explored. Genetic counselors tailor sessions to the needs of the patient, and more information regarding general attitudes of a population can assist in building rapport. We aimed to investigate the relationship between acculturation, prenatal care, genetic testing experiences, and expectations for their prenatal care in an immigrant Latino population. A total of 20 Spanish-speaking, pregnant Latinas from various Latin American countries were interviewed after completing a prenatal genetic counseling session. The semi-structured phone interview included questions about the participants’ experiences with genetic counseling/testing, prenatal health care in their home country, their current prenatal care in the United States, and information they feel is important to know during their pregnancy. The study showed no associations between acculturation and prenatal care and genetic counseling/testing experiences. However, six major domains were identified throughout the topics explored with the participants. Overall, we found that immigrant Latinas desire to know prenatal risk information as it can help them prepare, relieve guilt, and help make screening/testing/family planning decisions. Additionally, information discussed in prenatal genetic counseling sessions, such as complex genetic information, can be internalized by these women and utilized to make decisions about their care. Women reported the genetic counselor helped provide a sense of autonomy and empowerment to make their own decisions regarding prenatal screening/testing. The participants also spoke about stressors unique to the immigrant population, most notably being away from their older children and other family members. Identifying themes about the lived experience of this population can help genetic counselors better address patient needs, focus contracting in a session around their possible guilt and/or isolation, and identify women who could benefit from group prenatal care, such as delivered via Centering, support groups, or referrals to social work.

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