

Seeking Maternal and Infant Health: Latina's use of herbs and foods in Athens, Georgia



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INTRODUCTION

- ❖ The state of Georgia has become an important destination for Latino migrants in the United States.
- ❖ Immigrant women carry with them knowledge about plants for maternal and child health which have been little considered.

Research Questions

- ❖ How do Latino women rely on biodiversity and traditional birthing practices for maternal and infant health and wellbeing?
- ❖ What are the existing articulations between migrants' own health care systems and the midwifery system?

Methods

- ❖ Literature review – urban ethnobotany, Latino identity, Latino concepts of illness and wellbeing.
- ❖ Informal qualitative interviews conducted in 2008 with 1 traditional healer, 1 mother, 2 Latino food store owners; and one Georgia state certified midwife.

Background

- ❖ Immigration to Western metropolitan areas has a significant impact on migrant's experience and meaning of illness and on health care-seeking strategies (Pieroni and Vanderbroek 2007, Ceuterick et al 2007, Papadoupouls et al 2004, Owusu-Daaku and Smith 2004; Gilgen et al 2005 Belliard and Ramirez-Johnson 2005)





Preliminary Findings

- ❖ Prescriptions and Proscriptions
- ❖ Sobada
- ❖ Plant Use
- ❖ Identity
- ❖ Articulation

Prescriptions and Proscriptions

- ❖ “I had to take care what I ate after birth not eating raw things. Everything you eat has to be *cálido* [hot]. I could eat tortillas and bread if they were toasted, clear soup....Just things that are light and nothing spicy...” (Mexican migrant mother)

Sobada

- ❖ “When the baby gets stuck in a certain spot on one side one has to loosen it from its spot. When a woman sleeps always on the same side which tends to happen... they need to be moved and balanced because sometimes the women can't walk anymore.” (Mexican traditional healer)

Plant use

- ❖ “There are several plants that are good for after giving birth... like *ipozote* which I grow in my garden and *arnica* which are yellow flowers, and star anis...The *ipozote* cleans the belly out so that all that is left after birth comes out, *arnica* is an anti-inflammatory and star anis is good to clean the blood.” (Mexican traditional healer)
- ❖ “Many of the plants we sell are used for remedies and also many are used as condiments for food preparation.” (Latino food store owner)

Identity

- ❖ “I learned from my mother because I couldn’t afford to take my children to the doctor so we would go to her when my children were sick. She said one day “I’m going to teach you so that you can heal your children” so she began to teach me the remedies that she used.” (Mexican traditional healer)
- ❖ “I lived in Mexico City and so we went to the clinics and not to a *curandera* [traditional healer] when we were sick. We didn’t have the chance to learn about the *sobada* or natural medicines.” (Migrant mother)

Articulation

- ❖ A midwife interviewed advocates for scientific research to evaluate the effects of traditional maternal and child health practices in order to further understand the birthing process and be able to provide support to the birthing mother.

CONCLUSIONS

- ❖ Biocultural diversity can be found thriving and adapting within migrant communities.
- ❖ Latina migrants negotiate identities choosing cultural adaptation or strengthening their cultural identities.
- ❖ Traditional birthing practices lend insight into the Latino (panAmerican) concept of preventive health and wellbeing.
- ❖ Further studies should look at knowledge, beliefs and practices that have been retained or abandoned by migrants, or alternatively, by focusing on those that are newly acquired and the underlying reasons for change.

Thank You

