

# Innovating practice for Latino families affected by cancer through *familismo*: Recommendations for culturally tailored occupational therapy

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# Background

- Globally, migration of Latin American and Caribbean people has grown to >42 million people
- The US remains the top (but by no means only) destination for Latinos emigrants
- 195,300 Latinos in the United States were diagnosed with cancer in 2024
- Latinos in the United States have **lower** mortality rates and **similar** 5-year survival rates compared to non-Hispanic Whites
- Latinos report **lower** health-related quality of life



# Background

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- Culturally tailored interventions show great promise to improve health & participation of Latino communities affected by cancer
- *Familismo* is a prominent cultural value in Latino culture that prioritizes close immediate & extended family relationships with loyalty, respect, obligation, & support
  - Interdependence
  - Reciprocity
  - Family needs over individual needs
- *Familismo* can serve as a protective factor but may come with drawbacks
- No OT-informed studies on *familismo* with Latino families experiencing cancer



# Describe the role of *familismo* among Latino families affected by cancer to develop recommendations for culturally tailored care



Latino cancer survivors  
(n = 8)



Family caregivers  
(n = 5)



Cancer care providers  
(n = 5)

# Methods

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**Audit Trail**



**Semi-structured  
interviews**



**Cross-sectional  
qualitative  
design**



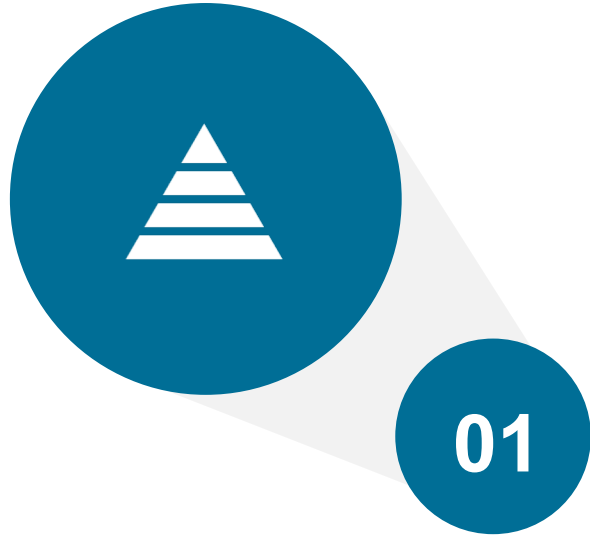
**Thematic  
analysis**



**Peer  
debriefing**

# Results

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**Multilevel  
Support**



**Present Yet  
Distant**



**Unmet  
Expectations**

# Results: Multilevel Support

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All participants emphasized the culture of interdependence that was crafted by not only immediate family members but also extended family & community members

*My shirts are too tight and he [husband] helps me lift my arm and helps me put on my shirt. My daughter helped me put lotion on my back. . . . I thank God that I have a daughter that has helped me out significantly.*  
(Rosa, 52-year-old Mexican breast cancer survivor)

*I rarely see one of our Latinx patients come alone. They're often with a loved one, a family member, with a friend or with multiple people. . . . The celebration of family is so beautiful to me. It's very different from my own culture.*

(Social Worker)

# Results: Present Yet Distant

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Family dynamics had unspoken complexities; when cultural expectations of *familismo* were not met, families experienced distress & relationship strain

*My parents did not understand what happens after chemo...there have been times where I have told them that I'm really tired and they are like, 'I just did a 10-hour shift, I'm tired!' They belittle me!*  
(Jessica, 29-year-old lymphoma survivor)

*My husband calls me from work: 'How are you doing?'  
'I'm okay...'  
He says, 'What's wrong?'  
. . . I don't want them to worry about other stuff that they don't need to be worried about.*  
(Beatriz, 43-year-old breast cancer survivor)

# Results: Unmet Expectations

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Some families expressed disappointment when expectations of connectedness and interdependence of *familismo* were not met

*[I feel] sad that it's just me that is here. My parents are in Mexico. . . . Everyone is busy. My mother too; I would call but she would end the conversation and she would tell me she was very busy.*

(Silvia, 39-year-old breast cancer survivor)

*No one [supported us during my wife's cancer treatment] . . . like support from [extended] family, no. Better us [immediate family] . . . we were there for her.*

(Juan, caregiver to his wife with breast cancer)

# Conclusions

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- *Familismo* is both a source of strength and tension for Latino cancer survivors
- Latino cancer survivors can experience *familismo* as both a source of **comfort** and a source of **stress**.
- These experiences are deeply contextualized during the cancer survivorship journey and should never be assumed, taken for granted, or reduced to a stereotype.



# Implications for Practice

## Occupational Therapy's Role in Oncology



## References



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