The Need for Interpreters and Translators in Holyoke Health Clinics

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This presentation will discuss the need for interpretation and translation services in healthcare facilities in Holyoke, MA. According to the Refugee Health Technical Assistance Center (2011), interpretation entails the conversion of oral messages from one language to another, while translation deals with the conversion of written text from one language into another\(^1\). The goal of this project is twofold: 1) to assess the level of need for interpretation resources among Spanish-speaking residents, and 2) to examine the job market outlook for interpreters in Holyoke healthcare facilities.

The Latinx community is one of the fastest-growing immigrant groups in the U.S. In Holyoke, MA, the Latinx community comprises about 50 percent of the population\(^2\). Effective communication between patients and healthcare providers is vital to the health outcomes of the populations the healthcare facilities are serving. Although Spanish is one of the most spoken languages in the U.S., this does not guarantee that there are adequate Spanish interpretation services in healthcare settings. Inadequate interpretation services can have detrimental effects on patient health and can lead to clinical errors\(^3\). Many of the healthcare facilities contacted for this study expressed that they did not have official interpreters onsite, but instead utilized Spanish-speaking staff as interpreters. Studies have found that children who live in non-English speaking, Latinx households have poorer health outcomes than those who reside in English-speaking homes\(^3\). Thus, this highlights the importance of appropriate interpretation resources in healthcare facilities in communities like Holyoke, where there is a high Spanish-speaking population.

The data for this study was gathered by distributing bilingual surveys to parents at an elementary school in Holyoke, MA. I also collected data from local clinics and health centers inquiring about the kinds of interpretation resources they offer and how they resolve situations where an interpreter is needed. The findings of this study have broader implications, such as improving and expanding interpretation resources in social service agencies that support non-English speaking communities. Moreover, this project underscores the importance of advocating for training programs that will utilize the language strengths of community members to serve as interpreters in their communities. Hiring well-trained medical interpreters in Holyoke healthcare facilities would improve the quality of healthcare and health outcomes of Holyoke residents.

\(^1\)“Interpreters vs. Translators.” Refugee Health Technical Assistance Center. Accessed April 3, 2017,
