



# Mental Health Perspectives in Colombia

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## Bogotá, Colombia

Bogotá is the capital of Colombia. Just under 10 million people call Bogota home.

Bogotá is also home to the world's largest bus rapid transit system, TransMilenio. 12 bus lines and 131 stations cover over 70 miles and carry millions of people a day. A metropolitan city, Bogotá has 114 universities, 58 museums, 62 art galleries, 33 library networks, 45 stage theatres, 75 sports and attraction parks, and over 150 national monuments.

## Why Bogotá?

I lived in Colombia for a year and the minute I left, was eager to return. There are many lessons to be learned from Colombians on resilience, community and innovation. As they come to a conclusion in a historic peace deal, I jumped at the opportunity to ask Rolos (people who live in Bogotá) what they thought about mental health and how it relates to the conflict.

## Lesson Learned

After talking to many students, my main takeaway is there is no one Colombian perspective on mental health. Like here in the United States, there are people who know a lot about depression, who experience anxiety, who have family members living with a severe mental health concern and all of that and more informs their approach to and perspectives on mental health.



## Project

I tagged along with my friend, who is a professor at a local University, (Universidad Central) to her English classes. I asked students their opinions on depression, anxiety, stigma in Colombia and how they would access help if they needed it.

For students with lower level of English, I had one on one conversations in Spanish. I conducted conversation groups with students who were fluent in English. I also participated in an extensive interview during a private English lesson with a government psychologist who provides mental health assessment and treatment to victims of the conflict. Every person I spoke to provided unique feedback on their perspectives about how mental health works and how it looks in Colombia.

## Reparations Law of 1448

This law established the 5 categories that needed to be addressed during the peace process. One of the categories is "Rehabilitation" which is broken down to the physical, mental and psychosocial. As a result, teams of psychologists and social workers travel around the country meeting with people and communities to provide treatment.

## Acknowledgments

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## What I Heard

The students I spoke with expressed a wide variety of opinions on mental health:

"Colombian culture is so happy and expressive, so there is a taboo here to admit that you don't always feel so happy."

"Anxiety didn't exist as a word or concept until the pharmaceutical companies created a financial incentive to diagnosis it."

"Soccer here in Colombia is a way for us to cope. Alcohol helps us forget."

"The lifestyle here in Bogotá is go, go, go. We don't have time for depression."

