

US Hispanics prefer beer

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Despite the considerable and growing numbers of Hispanics living in the United States, little is known about their alcohol-beverage preferences. A new study of U.S. Hispanics belonging to four national groups – Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban American, and South/Central American – has found that beer is their beverage of choice.

Results will be published in the January issue of *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research* and are currently available at Early View.

"Currently, there is not much information about beverage preference among Hispanics and how that differs across national groups," said Raul Caetano, professor of epidemiology and regional dean (Dallas) at The University of Texas School of Public Health, as well as the study's corresponding author. "This is important to know because once we can identify a type of beverage that is more associated with risky drinking – such as binge drinking – then prevention policies can be developed to target that beverage and that type of drinking."

"'A drink' is not just 'a drink,'" added Sarah Zemore, associate scientist at the Alcohol Research Group. "Individuals who prefer wine, beer, and liquor have different drinking patterns and, hence, drinking problems. Moreover, physiological and psychological reactions can differ across beverage type. Some fascinating research ... has shown that the body reacts differently to beer and liquor: at equivalent levels of pure alcohol, liquor results in a higher blood alcohol content (BAC) on an empty stomach, whereas beer produces a higher BAC on a full stomach. Finally, people who prefer wine, beer, or liquor may actually be drinking

different amounts of pure ethanol in a typical single 'drink.'"

"While previous federal surveys interviewed a larger number of Hispanics than we did," said Caetano, "our survey was unique in that it was designed to examine differences across national groups. Thus the sample is evenly divided across these groups with about 1,300 respondents in each of the four groups."

Caetano and his colleagues surveyed 5,224 adults, evenly divided between genders, from households in five cities: Miami, New York, Philadelphia, Houston and Los Angeles. During face-to-face interviews in respondents' homes that lasted one hour on average and were conducted in either English or Spanish, study participants were asked about their drinking habits, including their choices of wine, beer and/or liquor.

"In the end there were more similarities than differences in beverage preference across the four Hispanic national groups," said Caetano. "Beer was the preferred beverage of all Hispanics." More specifically, among Hispanic men who drank beer, it constituted 52 to 72 percent of their total alcohol consumption. Among Hispanic women who drank beer, it constituted 32 to 64 percent of their total consumption.

"One difference we found was that wine was closely associated with binge drinking among Cuban American and South/Central American women, more so than beer," said Caetano. "Furthermore, Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans seemed to drink more than the other two groups, and thus would be more at risk for alcohol-related problems."

"The findings were different for men and women," added Zemore. "Ethnic subgroup seems to have little impact on beverage preference among men. Hispanic women's beverage preferences do depend on their ethnicity. Puerto Rican and Mexican American women seem to drink

more beer than wine or liquor, whereas wine is the preferred beverage among Cuban American and South/Central American women. I was interested to see that the rate of binge drinking among Puerto Rican beer drinkers was higher among women than men (40% versus 35%); I'm curious about this extreme beer drinking among Puerto Rican women."

Neither Caetano nor Zemore were overly surprised that beer was the beverage of choice, given that beer is generally preferred by the U.S. population, and American men in particular.

"I think it is important for people to realize that beer is not a safer or less harmful beverage than wine and hard liquor," cautioned Caetano. "The popular sentiment is that hard liquor is bad for you but that beer is 'weaker' and therefore less dangerous. It is true that the alcohol content in beer is lower than that of liquor, but what the study showed is that beer is the beverage most associated with binge drinking, which is a dangerous way to drink alcohol because of the impairment associated with such high number of drinks: five for men and four for women. Even the federal government sees beer in a different way from wine and liquor; the federal excise tax rate per gallon is \$13.50 for spirits, \$1.07 for wine but only \$.58 for beer."

Both Caetano and Zemore believe that not only do U.S. Hispanics closely resemble the general U.S. population in terms of their drinking choices, but that more prevention efforts should be focused on beer drinking.

Source: Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research

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