

A paradox: Male Latino youth have better health profiles but higher death rates

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A new study led by Yale School of Medicine reveals a persistent anomaly in the mortality rates of male Latino youth: Although the U.S. Latino population has an overall favorable health profile despite its socioeconomic challenges, young Latino males continue to have disproportionately higher death rates from homicides and car crashes, a disturbing trend that appears to be growing in spite of prevention efforts. The study appears in the advance online edition of the journal *Injury Prevention*.

The Yale-led team studied over 1.8 million deaths (1999 – 2006) among residents of California, where Latinos make up nearly 37 percent of the population, compared to 15 percent of the nation's population.

Researchers found that [mortality rates](#) due to homicide or motor vehicle crashes were far higher for Latino males between the ages of 15 and 24 than for non-Latino white males in the same age group. Moreover, the study team noted that both homicide and motor vehicle crash mortality continued to rise over the study time period.

And yet, the authors write, it is known that U.S. Latinos have more favorable health profiles than non-Latino whites or non-Latino blacks, based on key indicators such as life expectancy, infant mortality, death from cardiovascular diseases, and measures of functional health. This better health profile exists in some instances despite poverty, low education, and limited access to healthcare.

While a great deal has been written about the physical and emotional

challenges of adolescence, there is considerably less in the scientific literature relating to racial and ethnic adolescent injury disparities. The Yale study's lead author, Federico E. Vaca, M.D., M.P.H., professor of emergency medicine at Yale School of Medicine, believes that until we know more about why the disparity exists between health profiles and homicide and accident rates among male Latino youth, society needs to continue to focus on prevention measures geared toward this vulnerable group.

“Some of this deals with the context in which injuries occur,” Vaca said, “as well as with developmental factors that influence risk-taking behavior in adolescents who end up injured.”

This anomaly has been studied before, but in revisiting it, the Yale-led team found that after a decade of decline that began in the late 1980s, mortality rates among young, male Latinos from homicide and motor vehicle crashes began going up again during the years of this new study, and the disparity between this rate and those of other racial and ethnic groups widened. The problem is now one of the greatest urgency, the authors write, because across the nation, between the years 2000 and 2006, the Latino population's growth rate was three times that of the total population. “The growth of the U.S. Latino population is not only outpacing the growth rate of the overall U.S. population but also outpacing recent gains and ongoing efforts to close health disparity gaps,” Vaca said.

Provided by Yale University

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