

Male acts of bravery, risk display honor, increase accidental death

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Men sometimes prove themselves by taking risks that demonstrate their toughness and bravery. Putting yourself in peril might establish manliness, but it can also lead to high rates of accidental death, particularly among men who live in states with a "culture of honor," according to a study in the current *Social Psychological and Personality Science* (published by SAGE).

A culture of honor puts a high value on the defense of [reputation](#)—sometimes with violence. It can develop in environments with historically few natural resources, danger of rustling, and low police presence. States with strong cultures of honor in the U.S. are in the South and West, such as South Carolina, Texas and Wyoming. People from honor states tend to respond to reputation threats with higher levels of hostility and violence compared to people from non-honor states, mostly in the Northeast and upper Midwest, such as New York, Wisconsin and Ohio.

People who most believe in a culture of honor—who agree that "A real man doesn't let other people push him around" or that aggression is a reasonable response to being insulted—told the researchers they were quite willing to engage in risky behaviors, such as bungee jumping or gambling away a week's wages.

This willingness to take risks might well translate into an early death, according to Collin Barnes, Ryan Brown and Michael Tamborski of the University of Oklahoma. They compared the rates of accidental

death—by drowning, car wrecks, over-exertion and so on—and found that people in honor states had significantly higher accidental death rates than did people in non-honor states, especially among White men.

Honor cultures are more powerful in rural areas, where the influence of personal reputation is higher than it is in cities. Although honor states had a 14% higher accidental death rate in the cities, they had a 19% higher rate of accidental death in more rural areas, compared to non-honor states. More than 7,000 deaths a year can be attributed to risk-taking associated with the culture of honor in the USA.

"Exposing yourself to potentially deadly situations is proof of strength and courage, and because this proof is such a concern for people living in cultures of honor, they suffer from a higher rate of accidental fatalities," said the authors.

More information: The article "Living Dangerously: Culture of Honor, Risk-Taking, and the Non-Randomness of 'Accidental' Deaths" in *Social Psychological and Personality Science* is available free for a limited time at: spp.sagepub.com/content/early/.../410440.full.pdf+html

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