

# Mammogram rates lower for Mexican women in U.S.

December 21 2011, By Randy Dotinga

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Mexican women in the United States are less likely to get mammograms than white women, black women and other Latinas, according to a new study in the journal *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention*.

An analysis of survey data from 1996 to 2007 found that only 59 percent of Mexican [women](#) over the age of 40 had received mammograms within the two years prior to taking the survey. By contrast, 70 percent of [black women](#), 72 percent of [white women](#) and 68 to 73 percent of other Latinas had received mammograms within the prior two years.

It's not clear why the discrepancies exist, but the study suggests that income, education and health insurance play roles.

Mexican women “have a significant number of additional barriers” to mammograms, said study lead author Patricia Y. Miranda, Ph.D., assistant professor of health policy and administration at Pennsylvania State University. “It's important to dig deeper for the full story. The next step is to better understand why the differences exist,” Miranda added.

A national health campaign was implemented to increase the rate of mammograms in women over 40 to 70 percent of the population by 2010. Statistics released by the federal government last year showed that the rate had grown to 68 percent by 2008.

In the new study, researchers examined figures from annual national surveys taken from 1996 to 2007 (excluding 1997 and 1999, which had insufficient data). They reviewed data collected from 64,811 women who were black, Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, other Latinas or white.

Among Latinas, Puerto Ricans had the highest mammogram rate (73 percent), followed by other Latinas (69 percent), Cubans (68 percent) and Mexicans (59 percent).

Mexicans in the U.S. have the lowest incomes and health insurance rates of any major ethnic groups, noted the study, which cites lack of education as a potential contributing factor for the mammogram discrepancies.

Miranda suspects education is also a factor in the low mammogram rates for Mexican women. “If you have a low level of education, you're much more likely to end up in a part-time job where you won't have access to something like health insurance,” she said.

Elena B. Elkin, Ph.D., an assistant attending outcomes research scientist at the Center for Health Policy and Outcomes at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, said factors other than education, insurance

and language could play roles too.

“Even women who have [health insurance](#) and a regular source of care may have trouble getting a mammogram if they live in an area that has long waits for screening appointments due to a limited supply of mammography machines, technologists or radiologists who specialize in interpreting [mammograms](#),” said Elkin.

**More information:** Miranda P., et al. (2011). Breast Cancer Screening Trends in the United States and Ethnicity. *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention*, published OnlineFirst December 6; [doi: 10.1158/1055-9965.EPI-11-0873](#)

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