

# Researchers develop guidebook for promoting healthy lifestyles among Hispanic populations

November 20 2012

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A collaborative guidebook involving Kansas State University researchers is helping individuals, families and communities improve the health of Hispanic populations.

Recent studies have shown that Hispanic populations living in the U.S. have higher rates of obesity and diabetes, and lower rates of physical activity and fruit and [vegetable consumption](#), compared with Caucasians. The higher rates of obesity and diabetes among Hispanic populations are connected with the adoption of new lifestyles.

University researchers wanted to improve Hispanic health and health-related behaviors by developing a culturally relevant resource guide for physical activity and nutrition. Working with three communities in southwest Kansas—Garden City in Finney County, Dodge City in Ford County and Liberal in Seward County—the researchers addressed Hispanic community and health needs. The research is published in a recent issue of the journal *Ethnicity and Disease*.

The collaborative project involves Debra Bolton, instructor and K-State Research and Extension specialist in family and consumer sciences; Daniel Kahl, the program coordinator of the Kansas PRIDE Program and the K-State Research and Extension liaison for the Center for Engagement and Community Development; as well as Melissa Bopp and Elizabeth Fallon, both former assistant professors of [kinesiology](#).

"Because of where I live and because of my research, the professors called and said they wanted to do research," said Bolton, who is based in Garden City and performs research centered on Hispanic populations. "It was a good place for them to get into communities and understand health and habits."

Hispanics make up 8 percent of the Kansas population, but southwest Kansas has higher populations of Hispanics. Hispanics make up 48 percent of the population in Finney County, 49 percent of the population in Ford County and 51 percent of the population in Seward County.

"We are way beyond the state average," Bolton said. "That's why southwest Kansas was such a prime place to do this research."

With obesity prevention efforts, community-based participatory research is becoming a popular way to reach ethnically diverse populations. But little research has focused on ways to help Hispanic communities. For the guidebook, the researchers combined community-specific cultural and historical information with physical activity and nutrition health education materials.

The work focused on several areas: heart disease, diabetes, overweight, nutrition, physical activity and access to health care. The researchers used surveys and statistics and spoke with community leaders.

They discovered that many Hispanic residents were new immigrants and possibly unaware of community resources that support healthy behaviors. The researchers found that it was beneficial for these residents to have a guidebook tailored to resources available in their city.

The researchers developed a guidebook available in English and Spanish and distributed it to residents in that community. The guidebook focused on ways to promote and increase awareness of physical activity and

healthy eating resources in each community. The researchers included photos of parks, trails and recreational facilities, photos of families and individuals engaging in activities, and photos and nutritional information for ethnically relevant foods.

When conducting surveys to evaluate the guide, the researchers found that the guide was accepted by community residents and had moderate dissemination.

"I think it's a good start to understanding access to [physical activity](#) and health," Bolton said. "In my own research, I understand these residents don't come to the U.S. as unhealthy people."

Bolton noted the paradigm shift—called the Latino Paradox—that Hispanic populations experience when they come to the U.S. Before emigrating, they often walk a lot and eat home-cooked meals, Bolton said, but when they arrive in the U.S. they drive cars everywhere and have access to inexpensive and convenient fast food, which they often view as a form of prosperity.

"Because it's a new, different way of eating than their bodies are used to, they are more prone to diabetes and other diseases," Bolton said. "I hope that this research helps this population understand that how they ate and exercised in their former country was the healthy thing to do."

In their publication, the researchers noted that while the primary outcome of the research was the development of the guidebook, the collaborative partnerships that were formed between researchers and the community were just as important. Because community engagement breaks barriers, Bolton said it was important for researchers to go into the community to understand the culture.

"It is important out of respect to the community," Bolton said. "Garden

City has a long history of integrating the population. This brought a national issue to a local level. That helps us understand the population."

**More information:** The research is published in a recent issue of the journal *Ethnicity and Disease*.

Provided by Kansas State University

Citation: Researchers develop guidebook for promoting healthy lifestyles among Hispanic populations (2012, November 20) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-11-guidebook-healthy-lifestyles-hispanic-populations.html>

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