

Family thought to play part in reducing stress for young Mexicans, study shows

January 9 2013, by Sharita Forrest

(Medical Xpress)—Family members may play a unique and influential role in buffering Mexican youth against the negative effects of stress as they transition into adulthood, suggests a new study by an interdisciplinary group of researchers at universities in Mexico and the U.S.

More than 6,700 [Mexicans](#) ranging in age from 16 through 21 participated in the study, which assessed perceived [levels of stress](#) and [depressive symptoms](#) as well as social support that the young people received from family members, peers and significant others. The [study participants](#), who were applicants to a public university in Mexico, were at a particularly stressful time in their lives, since they were engaged in selecting career paths and applying to college.

High levels of stress were associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms among youth who reported having the least social support but not among youth who indicated they had the most support. While support from friends, family members and significant others reduced the association between stress and depression, only familial support had a significant impact.

These findings were consistent with prior studies. However, unlike youth in the previous studies, which were conducted primarily in the U.S. and Europe, Mexican youth indicated that family members were their most important sources of support.

"The findings suggest that families may play a unique and powerful role in meeting the mental health needs of Mexican youth, especially during stressful periods in their lives," said Marcela Raffaelli, who is a professor in the department of human and community development at the University of Illinois and one of the study's co-authors.

The authors speculate that the strong cohesiveness of Mexican families may explain why the young people who participated in their study reported that relatives were their greatest source of [emotional support](#). They note that [young adults](#) in Mexico often continue living in the parental home while completing their education and embarking upon careers, not moving out on their own until they marry.

However, the researchers cautioned that the findings should be interpreted carefully since the participants – 47 percent of whom had at least one parent with a college degree – were not representative of Mexico's general population.

The study is part of an ongoing collaborative research project called [UP-AMIGOS](#) (University of San Luis Potosi: A Multidisciplinary Investigation on Genetics, Obesity and Social-environment), which is examining factors among Mexican college students that are linked to health outcomes and amenable to intervention.

The study appeared in a recent issue of the *Journal of Research on Adolescence*.

Provided by University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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