

Research looks to combat US Latina immigrant obesity

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According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Latinos are the largest minority group in the United States, comprising 16.7% of the population. Approximately one-third of Latinos are obese and are 1.2 times as likely to be obese compared to non-Hispanic Whites.

NYU College of Nursing student researcher Lauren Gerchow, BSN, RN, MSN candidate, has sought to identify the factors that contribute to this problem by compiling a systematic review of qualitative studies that focused on food patterns in Latina women recently published in *Nursing Research*.

"The review focuses on women in particular, because they are usually the primary caretakers, with responsibility for food-related decisions," said Gerchow. "We performed this analysis in the hopes of identifying common food patterns across Latino culture and within Latino subcultures, and to inform future research by determining gaps in the existing literature."

Gerchow encountered several disparities in her review of thirteen studies, through which she was able to outline the complexity surrounding this issue and provide recommendations for future research on this topic.

"A particularly troubling discrepancy found was that the definition of Latino varied considerably between studies, with four even considering Latinos a single ethnic group with no cultural differentiation for

analytical purposes," noted Gerchow. "We found that these purportedly qualitative studies, of which findings are not supposed to be generalizable, were consistently reporting ways their findings could be generalized across Latino populations."

Gerchow and her team found that despite researchers and providers acknowledging the importance of cultural differences based on country of origin in this population, there was no change in practice or methods of the studies. Contributing to the need for specification is the fact that food words vary between countries, therefore Latinos may be unable to rely on each other for proper translation when it comes to making informed, healthy decisions.

The immigrant experience pervades every aspect of an immigrant Latina's life," said Gerchow, and ultimately influences the dynamics that become barriers and facilitators to healthy food choices. Such barriers include changes in routines and circumstances such as snacking, the availability of fast food, and the cost of healthy foods. Furthermore, socioeconomic status, lack of transportation, and a lack of nutritional knowledge and education, were all found to be barriers to [healthy food](#) patterns."

Gerchow's study is the first of its kind to address the qualitative literature regarding the food patterns of Latinas living in the United States. The results of her analysis indicate that healthcare providers need to recognize the complex influences behind eating behaviors among immigrant Latinas in order to design effective behavior change and goal-setting programs to support healthy lifestyles." In order for such a level of recognition to be achieved it is imperative that future studies limit overgeneralization in this population.

"Our study identifies some of the unique similarities in Latina behavior patterns among the diverse ethnic group while encouraging future studies

to limit overgeneralization in this population and identifying gaps in the literature, which future research can begin to investigate," Gerchow concludes.

Provided by New York University

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