

Not all Hispanics are the same when it comes to drinking

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Hispanics are often grouped into a single category when it comes to alcohol use. Yet a new Michigan State University study indicates that the risk of alcohol abuse and dependence can vary significantly among different subgroups within the population.

Using pre-existing national data which looked at the incident rate of [alcohol use disorders](#), or AUDs, over a period of time, Carlos F. Ríos-Bedoya, an assistant professor in the College of Human Medicine, is the first to determine that the annual incidence rate isn't the same among all Hispanics and prevention efforts shouldn't be the same either. Subgroups include Mexican-American, Puerto Rican and Cuban-American.

The study can be found in the most recent issue of the journal *Alcohol and Alcoholism*.

"The problem is major lifestyle and migration differences among these subgroups aren't taken into account in most of the survey data that's been collected," Ríos-Bedoya said, who specializes in epidemiology of drug use. "The result is an inaccurate picture of this population."

Hispanics are one of the fastest growing populations in the United States and often have been identified as having a higher risk for alcoholism. Yet, Ríos-Bedoya counters that stereotype, showing that one group in particular, Cuban-Americans, has the lowest incidence rate – less than 1 percent – among their counterparts. They also are half as likely to develop a drinking problem than non-Hispanic whites.

"Cuban-Americans typically come into America as political refugees with no threat of immigration laws and have been able to thrive and become part of mainstream society," Ríos-Bedoya said. "They don't face as much adversity as, say, Mexican-Americans, who often cross the border illegally and find themselves with little to no options to become part of the mainstream."

His study indicates the annual incidence rate of [alcohol abuse](#) among Mexican-Americans is more than twice that of Caucasians, with Puerto Ricans showing almost three times the risk.

"Even though Puerto Ricans are born U.S. citizens and have easy access back and forth between countries, they have a much higher risk factor in part because drinking starts at an earlier age and is a larger part of their culture growing up," Ríos-Bedoya said.

The [legal drinking age](#) in Puerto Rico is 18 years old.

Ríos-Bedoya indicated that [alcohol](#) use is one of the most prevalent disorders in the United States and also one of the most costly, with more than \$6 billion spent on treatment and prevention each year. He also added that since birth rates are among the highest across the nation within the Hispanic population, it's important to introduce [preventive measures](#) early and develop programs that are specific to each group's differences.

"The onset of this problem starts in young adolescence so it's important that we start early," he said. "Although treatment is important, developing preventive measures that fit each group's culture is what could be the most effective all around."

Provided by Michigan State University

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