

Acculturative stress found to be root cause of high depression rates in Latino youth

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Researchers at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis say acculturative stress may explain, in part, why Indiana's Latino youth face an alarming disparity in depression and suicide rates when compared to their white counterparts.

While examining epidemiological health disparities data, a team of

researchers led by Silvia Bigatti at the Richard M. Fairbanks School of Public Health noticed that Latino teens in Indiana had a 65 percent higher rate of suicide attempts and a 24 percent higher rate of [depression](#) than white teens.

"When we saw the alarming disparity in [suicide attempts](#) and depression rates, we had to ask what could be going on," said Katrina Conrad, community research and outreach coordinator at the school.

Community partner Virna Diaz, director of the Latino Health Organization, provided insight about conflict between Latino teens and their parents regarding what they do and how they should act at school versus home. Given that insight, as well as reports in scientific journals about acculturative stress, which stems from immigrants straddling two different cultures, the team decided to work together to develop a study focused on that issue. They received pilot funding from the Indiana Minority Health Coalition.

The community-based participatory research study examined the link between acculturative stress and depression among 86 Latino adolescents—41 males and 45 females between ages 12 and 19.

"We looked at acculturative stress and depression and ended up finding nearly 60 percent of our participants had some level of depression, which was higher than expected," Conrad said. "Those who had moderate levels of acculturative stress were 10 times more likely to have depression, which was shocking to us."

Further, results indicated that adolescents with low self-mastery, the ability to overcome obstacles, were six times more likely to experience acculturative stress.

When the study's findings were presented to the Indiana Minority Health

Coalition, the research team was asked to consider designing an intervention, Conrad said.

Working with additional academic and community partners, the team developed a yearlong program for Latino teens focusing on boosting self-mastery and resiliency called "Your Life. Your Story: Latino Youth Summit." The program began in June with a summer camp and continues with monthly meetings.

"Your Life. Your Story." includes a resilience-building curriculum, a mentoring component with IUPUI undergraduates, physical activity and emotional expression activities including art, music, storytelling, technology and dance, said Conrad, who serves as the program director. All activities are designed to provide teenagers with outlets to further develop their identities and sense of self, and to give them the ability to communicate their stories.

Preliminary results since the program started are promising, Conrad said. After a single week of [summer camp](#), the team found that participants had a statistically significant increase in resilience and a statistically significant decrease in depressive symptoms. At the end of the year, the researchers hope to see that those trends have continued, she said.

"The 'Your Life. Your Story.' program has the potential to create a large and lasting impact, not only in Indianapolis, but across Indiana and even nationwide," Conrad said. "We think it is something that could be tailored to other types of underserved or marginalized youth as well, and we hope to expand it."

More information: The study "Acculturative stress and depression among Latino adolescents living in a Midwestern metropolitan area with an emerging Latino population" was presented at the American Public Health Association's Annual Meeting and Exposition in New Orleans,

Louisiana on Nov. 17.

Provided by Indiana University

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