

Stress caused by discrimination linked to mental health issues among Latino teens

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Latino adolescents who experience discrimination-related stress are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and issues with sleep, according to research led by NYU's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. These mental health outcomes were more pronounced among Latino teens born in the U.S. to immigrant parents, as opposed to foreign-born teens.

The longitudinal study, which appears online in the journal *Child Development*, suggests that first-generation [immigrants](#) and second-generation immigrants are affected differently by discrimination-related stress.

Latinos are the largest and fastest growing ethnic minority in the U.S., making up 15 percent of the population. Research has shown that many young Latinos face discrimination in their daily lives.

"Discrimination has been linked to a variety of [mental health](#) symptoms," said Selcuk Sirin, associate professor of applied psychology at NYU Steinhardt and the study's lead author. "Adolescence may be a particularly vulnerable time for discrimination, as forming one's cultural, ethnic, and racial identities is central during this developmental period."

Sirin and his colleagues surveyed 173 Latino teens in New York City high schools during the teens' 10th, 11th, and 12th grade years. Both foreign-born (first-generation) immigrants and U.S.-born (second-generation) immigrants were included.

Each year, the survey measured the level of stress the teens experienced related to discrimination, as well as three aspects of their mental health: anxiety, depression, and issues with sleep.

Overall, the teens' mental health significantly improved over time. Anxiety decreased from 10th to 12th grade, while depression and sleep issues decreased from 10th to 11th grade, and then increased slightly from 11th to [12th grade](#).

Discrimination-related stress was significantly related to an increase in symptoms of anxiety and depression. While there was no difference in the amount of discrimination-related stress between U.S.- and foreign-born immigrants, the researchers observed a more detrimental effect among Latino [teens](#) born in the U.S.

"The finding may shed light on the 'immigrant paradox,' where second-generation immigrants fare worse than first-generation immigrants in a number of contexts, including mental health," said Sirin. "This may be because foreign-born immigrants are more in touch with aspects of Latino culture that serve a protective role, or because discrimination becomes more noticeable for later generations."

The researchers concluded that the pattern of improving mental health over time demonstrates the psychological strength and resilience among Latino immigrants. However, those working with Latino immigrants should consider the damaging effects of discrimination on mental health, especially for U.S.-born youth.

Provided by New York University

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