

Cultural stressors increase risk of smoking, binge drinking and poor mental health among Hispanic teens

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Credit: Flickr user Jordan Cameron

Researchers at FIU's Robert Stempel College of Public Health and Social Work have found that social interactions such as ethnic discrimination and other cultural stressors can have a negative effect on a range of outcomes such as smoking tobacco, binge drinking and mental health among Hispanic teens.

Compared to non-Hispanic Whites, Hispanic teens have higher levels of

depressive symptoms and a higher prevalence of cigarette smoking and [binge drinking](#).

Miguel Angel Cano, an assistant professor in the Department of Epidemiology, led a study that examined how [ethnic discrimination](#) and other culturally-based stressors adversely affected recently immigrated Hispanic teens.

The study was one of the first multisite longitudinal studies to examine the effects on multiple cultural stressors in relation to substance use and [mental health](#).

Working with adolescents in Miami and Los Angeles, researchers recruited teens from 23 randomly selected schools and evaluated them across a six month period. Teens were questioned on their personal experiences with cultural stressors such as being treated unfairly or hostile because of their ethnic background, among others. Later they were evaluated on their use of alcohol, tobacco, depressive symptoms and rule-breaking behavior.

"The study demonstrated how geographic location can impact the effects of cultural stressors on health outcomes," Cano said. "While study site wasn't a factor that influenced the effects of cultural stress on substance use, higher cultural stress increased [depressive symptoms](#) among adolescents in Miami, but not in Los Angeles.

The adolescent population in the United States is continually becoming more diverse. Currently one in five adolescents in the U.S. are of Hispanic descent. This number is expected to increase to one in three by 2020.

"Identifying clinically and culturally relevant factors associated with health among Hispanic adolescents is an increasingly important public

health priority. This study helps recognize a need to develop interventions that address the effects of cultural stressors," he added.

Provided by Florida International University

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