

Latino teens who care for others reap academic benefits

October 12 2016, by Sheena Rice

According to the Pew Research Center, Latino teens remain at high risk for poor academic outcomes. They drop out of high school at higher rates of compared to blacks, whites and Asians and they lag other groups in obtaining four-year degrees. Now, a new study from the University of Missouri, found that Mexican-American youth who exhibit more prosocial behaviors, such as empathy and caring toward others, are more likely to demonstrate better academic performance later in adolescence. These findings provide guidance to parents as well as clues for developing early intervention and policy programs designed to improve academic performance.

"Given the large representation and continued rapid growth of the Latino population in the U.S., the current disparities in academic performance among the Latino population is a significant concern," said Gustavo Carlo, Millsap Professor of Diversity in MU's College of Human Environmental Sciences. "The goal of this study was to examine how parenting styles and prosocial behaviors can impact academic performance over time to develop effective intervention programs that could foster positive academic performance."

Carlo and his colleagues analyzed a sample of 462 Mexican-American families living in the Southwest. Children, teachers and parents were interviewed to assess the child's prosocial behaviors, such as willingness to help people in need, being empathetic and quickly responding to requests. The researchers followed these families and their teachers during the child's 5th, 10th and 12th grades in order to assess how

prosocial behaviors influenced academic performance over time.

"We found that Mexican-American teens who reported more caring behaviors were more likely to demonstrate better academic performance later in adolescence," Carlo said. "We also found that parents who expressed high levels of support and moderate levels of discipline, were more likely to see their children exhibit high levels of caring behaviors. Not surprisingly, uninvolved parenting style was found to be negatively associated with prosocial behaviors."

Carlo suggests Latino parents should understand the importance of [prosocial behaviors](#), and encourage their children to be empathetic, share and wait their turn. Parents also should remain engaged in their children's lives while maintaining boundaries to help them learn discipline. Moreover, policy programs should focus on efforts aimed at fostering more caring behavior in teens, which can promote better academic outcomes.

"This study presents the strongest evidence to date that fostering caring behaviors early in Mexican-American youth will create lasting benefits later in life," Carlo said. "These findings shed light on how parents can intervene early in a child's life to help improve their [academic performance](#)."

"The mediating role of prosocial tendencies in the relations between [parenting styles](#) and [academic outcomes](#) among U.S. Mexican adolescents," will be published in *Child Development*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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