

Loneliness, poor ethnic identity among Latinos contribute to suicide risks

December 5 2017, by Jared Wadley



Credit: University of Michigan

Suicide is a serious mental health issue among college students, especially Latinos who may struggle with belonging to their ethnic group.

A new University of Michigan study found that when Latinos did not have a strong [ethnic identity](#)—how a person looks at himself in a racial group—and felt lonely, they were more likely to consider ending their lives.

"For Latinos, feeling pride about their ethnicity might keep some from feeling lonely or depressed, which are associated with greater risk of [suicide attempts](#)," said Edward Chang, U-M professor of psychology and social work.

In a study published in *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, Chang and colleagues examined how ethnic identity and hopeless/loneliness predicted suicide risk. About 160 Latino college students—including 115 women—responded to survey questions.

To assess ethnic identity, the students rated how they felt about statements such as "I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group," "I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group," and "I have a clear sense of my [ethnic background](#) and what it means for me."

Respondents also rated their feelings of loneliness and thoughts/behaviors about suicide. The risk of suicidal behavior was high for Latinos who believed their future was hopeless as a member of their ethnic group, the study showed.

The research also indicated that Latinos who interacted with other [ethnic groups](#) reported fewer suicidal behaviors, which supports previous studies about dialoguing with diverse groups fosters better social adjustment and academic performance.

Loneliness also contributed to [suicidal behavior](#).

"These findings suggest that for Latino students, feeling socially isolated from others is reliably associated with greater risk of suicide," said Chang, the study's lead author.

To help distressed Latino students, it's important to learn if they feel insecure about their ethnic identity or lack positive interactions with non-Hispanics, he said.

More information: Edward C. Chang et al. Ethnic Identity and Loneliness in Predicting Suicide Risk in Latino College Students, *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* (2017). [DOI: 10.1177/0739986317738028](https://doi.org/10.1177/0739986317738028)

Provided by University of Michigan

Citation: Loneliness, poor ethnic identity among Latinos contribute to suicide risks (2017, December 5) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-12-loneliness-poor-ethnic-identity-latinos.html>

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