

Ethnic pride may help protect Latino college students from problem drinking

July 5 2022



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Negative consequences from excessive drinking are well-documented, but little is known about how to tailor interventions to prevent problem drinking by Latino college students, the fastest-growing ethnic minority

group on U.S. college campuses.

A new study led by Katja Waldron, doctoral candidate in [biobehavioral health](#) at Penn State, suggests that developing culturally-sensitive interventions for Latino students in their first and second years of college could be effective in preventing alcohol-related problems during college and later in life.

The study examined whether [ethnic identity](#) and familismo influenced Latino students' frequency of drinking and likelihood of developing [alcohol-related problems](#) in their fourth year of college.

Ethnic identity refers to one's sense of belonging to that ethnic group and familismo is a Latino cultural value of family as the primary source of social support and identity, Waldron explained.

"Previous research has shown that Latino ethnic identity and familismo can be protective against physical health risks and risky drinking, but questions remain about how the two interact to impact college alcohol use," Waldron said.

The research team surveyed 245 Latino students about their cultural values, drinking behaviors and alcohol-related consequences from two predominantly white institutions in the northeastern and northwestern U.S. and one Hispanic-serving institution in the southwestern U.S. They surveyed the students in their first, second and fourth years of college. Possible consequences covered five categories—blackouts, sexual consequences, social problems, impaired control and academic impairment.

The study found that ethnic pride—extent to which one feels proud or confident about their ethnic identity—was associated with significantly less drinking and alcohol-related consequences. Conversely, ethnic

shame—the extent to which one feels embarrassed or ashamed of their ethnic identity—was linked to a higher likelihood of problem drinking.

Familismo during the first year of college was not directly predictive of drinking and consequences during the fourth year. However, familismo was indirectly associated with drinking and consequences through ethnic identity. Familismo predicted more ethnic pride, while less familismo predicted more ethnic shame. The results are published in the *Journal of Ethnicity in Substance Abuse*.

When examining the drinking patterns of the Latino [student](#) group, Waldron found a "crossover effect" showing that the Latino students drank less and had less alcohol-related consequences in the first two years of college—followed by an increase in both the amount of alcohol consumed and negative consequences beginning in the third year and increasing through the fourth year.

According to the researchers, studies have consistently shown that parents can play a positive role in their children's attitudes towards [drinking](#)—through modeling, monitoring, communication, and rule-setting, said Robert Turrisi, Penn State professor of biobehavioral health and a principal investigator on the study.

The research team recommended conducting focus group interviews with Latino parents and college students.

"In order to effectively incorporate elements of ethnic identity and familismo into an intervention program, researchers must first speak with the Latino parents and students directly to understand how the study's findings resonate with them," Waldron said. "My hopes are to support development of intervention programs that help Latino [college](#) students by using a personalized approach."

Waldron and Turrisi collaborated on this study with Eduardo Romano, senior research scientist and expert on the links between Latino culture and alcohol use at the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation; and Erin Wolfe and Alexa Plisiewicz, who were undergraduate researchers at Penn State at the time of this study.

More information: Katja A. Waldron et al, Long-term impact of familismo and ethnic identity on latinx college student drinking and high-risk consequences, *Journal of Ethnicity in Substance Abuse* (2022). [DOI: 10.1080/15332640.2022.2082618](https://doi.org/10.1080/15332640.2022.2082618)

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

Citation: Ethnic pride may help protect Latino college students from problem drinking (2022, July 5) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-07-ethnic-pride-latino-college-students.html>

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