

Parent-teen involvement deters Hispanic youth from substance use, risky sexual behaviors

January 17 2014, by Jared Wadley



Without parental guidance, Hispanic youths are at increased risk of contracting HIV because they are more likely to engage in substance abuse and risky sex behaviors, a new University of Michigan study found.

But parent-child communication and parental involvement—which are

examples of family functioning—may reduce these HIV risk behaviors.

"Effective parenting plays a key role in the development of Hispanic youth and may help to prevent problem behaviors, including substance use and [sexual risk behaviors](#)," said David Cordova, assistant professor of [social work](#).

The study is among the first to examine the impact of parent-adolescent family functioning discrepancies on Hispanic teens' HIV risk behaviors.

"Other researchers have relied solely on one perspective of family functioning, not analyzing the data from two different perspectives, inclusive of both the parent and adolescent," said Cordova, who will discuss the findings with colleagues this week at the Society for Social Work and Research annual convention in San Antonio.

The study included 746 Hispanic 8th-graders and their primary caregivers who reported the past 90-day and lifetime alcohol and illicit drug use, as well early sex initiation and [unprotected sex](#).

Parents and children answered questions about family functioning based on six factors: positive parenting, [parental involvement](#), family cohesion, family communication, parental monitoring of peers and parent-adolescent communication.

When the parents and teens reported a greater difference in how they perceive the family context, the youth were more likely to report lawful and [illicit drug](#) use both in their lifetime and the past 90 days, and having sex early in life and unprotected sex.

Therefore, family functioning may help curb the tide of HIV health disparities among Hispanic youth, Cordova said.

Study participants also assessed their comfort and enjoyment with American and Hispanic cultural practices, such as use of language, food and traditions. The greater the difference in parent and adolescent reports of Hispanic cultural norms, the greater are the negative effects on [family functioning](#), the research showed.

Family-based interventions designed to improve communication between the parent and child, and reduce differences in how they perceive the family environment, may be effective in reducing and preventing HIV risk behaviors in Hispanic adolescents, Cordova said.

"To effectively engage Hispanic families in prevention programs, intervention developers need to consider the social, political and institutional barriers that have historically prevented this population from having quality and equal access to programs and services," he said. "By not doing so, we run the risk of blaming them."

Provided by University of Michigan

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