Alcohol and Drug Rates Lower Among Latinos

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A new federal government study has found that Latinos have lower rates of drug use and alcohol abuse than the national averages, *USA Today* reports.

After studying data from almost 230,000 people (including 31,848 Latinos), researchers found that only 46.1 percent of Latino adults drink alcohol and 6.6 percent use illicit drugs, compared to a national average of 55.2 percent and 7.9 percent.

But while overall alcohol and drug levels are lower, Latinos take the lead on binge drinking and a need for alcohol treatment. Binge drinking rates for Latinos stand at 26.3 percent (versus 24.5 percent nationally) and alcohol treatment rates are at almost 9 percent (versus 8.1 percent nationally), according to a statement from the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

“This study and others indicate that as ethnic and immigrant populations become more acculturated into our national culture, they tend to develop many of the same behavioral health challenges faced by the general population,” said Pamela S. Hyde, SAMSHA administrator.

Researchers also found huge differences in rates within the Latino community itself. For example, the rate of illicit drug use among Spanish Americans is almost three times higher than the level among Dominican Americans. And the level of past month alcohol use among Spanish Americans stands at 60 percent while for Dominican Americans its around 40 percent.

“Hispanic Americans are one of the fastest growing communities in our country and include a vast array of diverse populations, each with a unique set of behavioral health strengths, challenges and needs,” Hyde said.

Substance abuse rates also differed depending on the ethnic group being studied. According to the report, rates were much higher for Latinos born in the United States than those born outside of the country. For past month drug use, rates for U.S.-born Latinos stood at 11.3 percent and only 3 percent for those born outside of the United States.

Scientists are hoping these findings will lead to more comprehensive and specific health programs for Latinos in the United States.

“Through a more detailed understand of this diverse community we can better tailor our prevention and treatment strategies to reach all of its members,” Hyde said.

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