Life Expectancy on the Rise for Latinos

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While life expectancy for women in the United States continues its backward slide, the life expectancy of U.S. Latinos is on the rise, according to a study done by the University of Washington and reported by the *Los Angeles Times*.

For more than 20 years, the life expectancy for American men and women has risen, with communities across the country boasting life expectancies as long as those found in any other country. But in the last decade, researchers have seen a sharp decline in that trend for women and a widening gap between the most and least healthy places to live.

Looking at trends, researchers from the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington found that a woman's life expectancy at birth in the United States was 81.3 years in 2007, which ranked 35th in the world. Men's life expectancy grew to 76.7 years, ranking 24th on the list.

However, Latinos were excluded from the group. Researchers found that Latinos in Los Angeles County had the highest life expectancies in the country, despite a poverty rate above the average. This may be evidence of what public health officials call "the Hispanic paradox," a phenomenon in which Latino immigrants are healthier than non-Latinos.

A reason for this could be that only the healthiest immigrants make it to the United States and that a combination of diet, social networks and physical labor keeps them that way.

In order for other communities to catch up to Latinos, researchers said intensive anti-smoking and obesity campaigns must be instituted. Otherwise, the downward spiral will continue and U.S. life expectancies will plunge below those of other nations, including Syria, Panama and Vietnam.

"There are just lots of places where things are getting worse," said lead researcher Christopher Murray, MD. "We're not keeping up."

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