TuSalud

Assimilation Is a Risk Factor for Alcohol Use by Immigrant Youth

First-or second-generation Latino immigrant youth are more likely to drink than their Asian-American counterparts.

November 12, 2021 By Jeanette L. Pinnace

Immigrant youth in the United States frequently face pressure to become Americanized. This push for assimilation may lead to increased alcohol use, particularly among Latino immigrant youth, according to study findings published in the Journal of Adolescent Health, reports a press release from New York University.

Researchers referred to this phenomenon as the "immigrant paradox": a contradictory dynamic examined in prior investigations that shows a connection between successful cultural adaptation and negative health outcomes.

For the inquiry, researchers reviewed 43 studies of immigrant youth conducted between 1997 and 2018. Scientists generated a sample size of 61,851 people ages zero to 25 to evaluate the connection between their acculturation and alcohol use. In addition, investigators noted the effects of demographic variables and their impact on alcohol use.

After excluding studies with insufficient data on race and ethnicity, researchers zeroed in on U.S. studies involving Latino and Asian-American youth. Investigators ascertained whether the youth were first- or second-generation and fluent in English and the number of years they had lived in the United States. Additionally, researchers determined their psychological acculturation status. Scientists used metrics such as quantity or frequency, intent or risk, binge drinking and drunkenness to assess alcohol use.

Results showed no significant link between Asian youth's acculturation and their use of alcohol. However, researchers noted the exact opposite among Latino youth.

"Cultural norms of drinking for Latinx and Asian immigrant youths in the U.S. show that while these two groups are similar, to a degree, in their ethnic drinking patterns, variation in socioeconomic status and education may put Latinx immigrants at a high risk for alcohol use over time than Asian immigrant youths," observed Selcuk Sirin, a professor of applied psychology at NYU's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development and lead author of the study. "At the same time, it is important to understand how Latino and Asian immigrants are

perceived in the U.S. Anti-immigrant sentiment is more apparent for Latinos over the past few decades."

Findings also showed that the length of time youth lived in the country was most strongly linked to drinking, trailed by proficiency in English and generation status.

The immigrant paradox appeared to affect older Latino youth more. This may be attributable to these individuals' stronger connection to the United States, suggested researchers.

Scientists stressed that although current studies may not highlight the effects of acculturation on immigrant youth's alcohol use, there are insufficient data to rule out this possibility.

To learn about the health effects of alcohol use by young Latino people, read "Latinos May Develop Alcoholic Liver Disease Earlier."

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