TuSalud

Latino Youth With Food Insecurity Vulnerable to Health Risks

The cardiometabolic concerns were strongest among those with foreign-born parents/caregivers.

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Food insecurity among Latino youths was linked with worse cardiometabolic profiles than their food-secure counterparts, a new study published in Pediatrics found. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food insecurity as a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life.

Previous studies have shown that food insecurity in adults was connected to cardiometabolic diseases, such as type 2 diabetes, hypertension, hyperlipidemia and obesity, but little was known about the impact on young people's physical health, notably those with foreign-born parents.

Food insecurity affects about 14% of households with youths, and a disproportionate number of these are Latino.

Researchers from Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, the University of Southern California, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Harvard University, San Diego State University and Einstein College of Medicine aimed to uncover whether food insecurity among Latino youth is associated with metabolic syndrome and cardiometabolic markers such as waist circumference, fasting plasma glucose, HDL (bad) cholesterol and triglycerides.

A total of 1,325 Latino youths ages 8 to 16 from the Bronx, Chicago, Miami and San Diego participated in the Hispanic Community Children's Health Study/Study of Latino Youth. The study started with a baseline clinic visit between 2012 and 2014.

Using the U.S. Department of Agriculture 18-Item Household Food Security Survey Module, researchers assessed household and child food insecurity.

The study found that youths in the lowest household and child food security categories had significantly worse HDL levels than those with high food security, according to a study press release. Furthermore, low/very low child food security was also associated with greater fasting glucose and triglycerides and a higher incidence of metabolic syndrome than high child food security.

The link was most pronounced among youth with foreign-born parents/caregivers and those whose families did not receive food assistance in the previous year, the researchers noted.

“Nutrition policies are needed to improve Hispanic/Latino families’ access to food assistance programs, and we call on health care providers to consider early screening for food insecurity to identify youths who may benefit from additional resources,” observed the authors.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it especially difficult for Latino immigrant families to maintain food security.

“As food prices continue to rise as a consequence of the pandemic and other world events, it will be important to develop interventions to more effectively address food insecurity,” senior author Sandra Albrecht, PhD, assistant professor of Epidemiology at Columbia Mailman School of Public Health said in the press release. “Our findings suggest that this will be especially important for households that may not qualify for federal aid.”

Read “Helping Latino Children Manage Obesity” to learn more.

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