

Examining the influence of acculturative stress on substance use and related maladaptive behavior among Latino youth

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Some experts believe that stress associated with acculturation, rather than acculturation itself, may be responsible for maladaptive behaviors such as alcohol use. This implies that the process of adapting to another culture may result in stress, which in turn may lead to the maladaptive behaviors. Acculturative stressors are interactive and as such are related to other stressors found in the domains of family, school, and peer functioning. Ninety-three Northern California Latino youth were interviewed; 76% were female; mean age of 16; and 61% were US born. Males experienced less acculturative stress than females, $F(1,90) = 4.374$, $p=.039$; $r=.22$, $p<.05$. Youth who had problems with English experienced more acculturative stress than youth who didn't have problems with the English language, $F(1,89) = 3.763$, $p <.05$; $r=.24$, $p<.05$. Diverse perceived advantages and disadvantages of being bi-cultural were informative as they related to Latino youth feeling empowered or discouraged to pursue different venues. When controlling for gender, age, and socioeconomic status, ANCOVA results show that youth who experienced more acculturative stress drank more than youth that experienced less acculturative stress.

Acculturative stress uniquely contributed to the prediction of alcohol use among Latino youth in this study, $\beta = .22$, $t=2.14$, $p= .035$ beyond gender, age, social class, and acculturation status. Similar analysis computed on cigarette/cigar and marijuana smoking yielded non-significant results. Such findings heighten the need for continued research on the acculturation experiences of Latinos and other different ethnic groups—assessing similar and contrasting stressors and related outcomes.