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Parents' Discrimination Experiences Linked to Lower Well-Being Among Mexican-American Teens

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Parent Discrimination Predicts Mexican-American Adolescent Psychological Adjustment One Year Later

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Mexican-Americans are one of the largest ethnic minority groups in the United States, and Mexican-American adolescents who experience ethnic discrimination are more likely to report lower self-esteem and more emotional problems. A new study has found that the teens' psychological adjustment also suffers when their parents face ethnic discrimination. Parents' discussions with their teens about culture, race and ethnicity, and discrimination can play a role in their teens' psychological adjustment, but the content matters.

These findings come from researchers at the California State University, Fullerton, Arizona State University, and the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). They are published in the journal *Child Development*.

The researchers asked 344 high school students in Los Angeles (ages 14 to 16 and mostly low-income) from primarily second-generation Mexican or Mexican-American families and their parents or primary caregivers (mostly mothers) to complete two surveys across a one-year span. The youth reported on their psychological adjustment, including internalizing problems (e.g., anxiety, depression) and externalizing problems (e.g., aggression), self-esteem, and use of substances. They also reported on their experiences with discrimination, and how often their parents talked to them about culture, race and ethnicity, discrimination, being prepared for bias, and mistrusting members of other ethnic groups. The parents and caregivers answered questions about how often they experienced discrimination (e.g., being ignored or excluded because of ethnicity, and being yelled at with a racial slur or racial insult).

Experiences of discrimination among parents and caregivers were related to lower feelings of self-esteem and greater internalizing problems among teens a year later, the researchers found. Parents' experiences with discrimination were not related to externalizing problems and substance use among the adolescents.

Parents' discussions with their teens about their culture and ethnic background, especially efforts to teach about ethnic heritage and history, were related to more positive adjustment in the teens, specifically higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of both internalizing and externalizing problems. But when parents had

both experiences of discrimination and talked to their children about culture, race and ethnicity, discrimination, being prepared for bias, and mistrusting members of other ethnic groups, the teens reported lower self-esteem. Self-esteem was lowest when parents had been discriminated against and talked to their youth about mistrusting other ethnic groups (e.g., when parents had done or said things to "keep [teens] from trusting kids from other ethnic groups" or to encourage them to "keep their distance from kids of other ethnicities").

"Incidents of discrimination have implications for the family as a whole, not just the individual who experienced them," according to Guadalupe Espinoza, assistant professor of child and adolescent studies at California State University, Fullerton, who led the study. "Such incidents continue to reverberate even a year later. Parents should be aware that the messages they convey about their own cultural group, but also about other cultural groups, will play a role in shaping their children's reactions to those experiences."

Nancy A. Gonzales Foundation Professor of Psychology at Arizona State University, the study's coauthor, explains further: "It may be difficult for parents to shield their adolescents from threats to their self-esteem when they themselves have been recent victims of discrimination. Parents' efforts to instill a positive sense of cultural identity are very important, but can be undermined or even sensitize adolescents to feel more threatened when they are aware that their parents are experiencing discrimination."

The study was funded by the *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the UCLA California Center for Population Research.

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Summarized from *Child Development*, Parent Discrimination Predicts Mexican-American Adolescent Psychological Adjustment One Year Later by Espinoza, G (California State University, Fullerton), Gonzales, NA (Arizona State University), and Fuligni, AJ (University of California, Los Angeles). Copyright 2016 The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc. All rights reserved.