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One of the areas being studied by the Patterns of Care project in San Diego is the impact of self-esteem and affiliation with one's cultural community on internalizing problems across cultures. Previous studies have shown that adolescent Latino girls with low self-esteem are at increased risk of developing internalizing problems when compared to Latino girls with high self-esteem. Other studies suggest that a close identification with Latino and Mexican culture may inhibit the development of internalizing problems among Hispanic youth. The current study investigates the extent to which self-esteem and identification with Mexican culture moderate the effects of internalizing problems. The authors found that low self-esteem is a risk factor for internalizing problems among Mexican girls with low affiliation to their ethnic culture.

Participants were a subsample of the Patterns of Care (POC) project participants from San Diego County<sup>1</sup>. The current study included Mexican American adolescents ( $N = 94$ ) who were receiving services from one or more of the following sectors: alcohol and drug treatment (2%) mental health (62%), schools (23%), child welfare (30%) and juvenile justice (15%). The average age of participants was 13.40 years ( $SD = 1.54$ ), and there were more boys (55%) than girls in the sample. Almost all adolescents (89%) and under half (41%) of all parents were born in the United States. Data on the participants were collected with the Youth Self Report, the Child Health Questionnaire (which utilized a self-esteem subscale), and the Pan Acculturation Scale. Youth and their caretakers were interviewed about psychological symptoms, self-esteem and level of affiliation with Mexican culture at entry into the study and two years later.

While girls had more internalizing symptoms than boys, self-esteem was associated with internalizing symptoms for both boys and girls. Further analysis revealed that higher self-esteem at baseline predicted lower internalizing scores for both boys and girls, although this finding was not significant for boys. However, girls who had low self-esteem were significantly more likely to develop internalizing problems if they were not highly affiliated with Mexican culture. No significant relationship was found between cultural identity and gender for boys, suggesting that "for boys, self-esteem is related to internalizing symptoms regardless of affiliation with Mexican culture" (p. 169).

According to the authors, Mexican culture tends to emphasize interpersonal relationships, sharing, and cooperation. Yet within Mexican culture, boys are often encouraged to think independently and to develop assertiveness skills, while girls tend to derive their identity from relationships. Given this distinction in gender roles, it is not surprising that girls' affiliation with Mexican culture would act as a moderating influence on the development of internalizing disorders. This study supports the suggestion that "maintaining affiliation with traditional Mexican cultural values and familial support systems may protect Mexican American [girls] living in the United States from the development of mental health problems" (p. 164). Overall, the study promotes the value of having a close association with one's cultural background, at least for Mexican girls.

Note: <sup>1</sup>For more information about the POC study, see *Data Trends* #35, #55, #86 and #101.