

May 10, 2005**Contact:** Jared Wadley**Phone:** (734) 936-7819**E-mail:** jwadley@umich.edu**Drug use differs considerably among Hispanic subgroups**

ANN ARBOR, Mich.—A greater percentage of Hispanic adolescents in eighth grade use drugs than adolescents in the general population, but there are some important differences among various Hispanic groups in their level of involvement, an article from the University of Michigan's Monitoring the Future study shows.

The article, of which U-M professor Jorge Delva is the lead author, appears in the April issue of the American Journal of Public Health.

Since 1991, the percentage of Mexican American, Puerto Rican and Cuban American adolescents who have used marijuana or cocaine in the prior year has been higher than the percentage of adolescents of "other Latin American" heritage (primarily Central and South Americans) and also higher than the percentage of youth who use these substances in the general population. Occasional heavy drinking, defined as having five or more drinks in a row in the prior two weeks, showed the same pattern of differences.

"Overall, substance use is very high among most Hispanic groups in early adolescence and there remain some serious social and economic obstacles to reducing it," Delva said. "These include, in particular, the higher proportions living in poverty and, related to that, their higher school dropout rates. In fact, addressing these socioeconomic factors should create conditions in the lives of these youth that might help prevent drug use."

The Monitoring the Future study showed an increase in the annual prevalence of marijuana and cocaine use during the 1990s, followed by a decrease in 2000-2002. Meanwhile, the prevalence of heavy drinking was highest in 1994-1996, followed by a small decline during 1997-1999 for all groups. These drug use trends also were observed among all of the Hispanic groups of eighth-grade students, said Delva, except that Cuban Americans experienced a slight increase in alcohol use in the late 1990s.

The authors also identified some associations that were consistent across most Hispanic groups studied. For example, boys and girls were equally likely to occasionally consume five or more drinks in a row and to use cocaine in all of the Hispanic subgroups. They also found that the percentage of adolescents who use drugs and alcohol tends to be consistently lower among those who live with both parents, compared to those who did not live with either of their parents—the one exception being for those of "other Latin American" heritage. Also, those who live with one parent also were less likely to use drugs when compared to those who did not live with either parent. These findings would suggest the need for more prevention services to target youths who live with other relatives or are in foster care, Delva said.

Although boys and girls did not differ in cocaine use and heavy drinking, more boys than girls used marijuana if they were of Mexican American, Puerto Rican and “other Latin American” heritage. Only among Cuban youth were there no gender differences in the use of marijuana; Cuban girls were as likely to use as Cuban boys.

In addition to Delva, other authors were John Wallace (now at the University of Pittsburgh), Patrick O’Malley, Jerald Bachman, Lloyd Johnston and John Schulenberg (all from the U-M Institute for Social Research). Delva is appointed at both the U-M School of Social Work and ISR. The analyses focused on a sample of 24,235 Hispanic students, surveyed between 1991 and 2002 as part of the annual Monitoring the Future surveys.

Among other notable findings, marijuana use was lower for Mexican American and other Latin American adolescents among those whose first language spoken was Spanish, rather than English. However, marijuana use did not vary according to first language spoken among youth of Puerto Rican and Cuban heritage. In addition, cocaine use was not associated with first language spoken for any of the groups. Among Mexican American adolescents, heavy drinking was less likely to occur for those whose first language spoken was Spanish, suggesting that recent immigrants are less likely to engage in heavy drinking. The other Hispanic groups did not show this difference in alcohol use, however.

Parent’s education level related to the use of some substances but not others. Alcohol and drug use were generally more likely to occur among adolescents whose parents have higher education, but these associations varied according to the substance used and the Hispanic heritage group. For example, marijuana use was actually less likely to occur among Puerto Rican and Cuban adolescents whose parents had a higher educational level. Cocaine use and heavy drinking were not associated with parental education in any of the Hispanic subgroups.

“The study concludes that to develop appropriately tailored interventions, further understanding is needed of the way risk and protective factors vary between Hispanic groups and how they may differentially influence their drug use,” said Delva.

Monitoring the Future has been funded under a series of competing, investigator-initiated research grants from the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Surveys of nationally representative samples of American high school seniors were begun in 1975, making the class of 2004 the 30th such class surveyed. Surveys of eighth and 10th graders were added to the design in 1991, making the 2004 nationally representative samples the 14th such classes surveyed. The sample sizes in 2004 were 17,413 eighth graders located in 147 schools, 16,839 10th graders located in 131 schools, and 15,222 12th graders located in 128 schools, for a total of 49,474 students in 406 secondary schools overall. The samples are drawn to be representative of students in private and public secondary schools across the 48 coterminous United States, selected with probability proportionate to estimated class size, to yield separate, nationally representative samples of students from each of the three grade levels.