

PRESS RELEASE

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FSU Receives Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Grant to Study Obesity Prevention in Latino Children

By Meredith Fraser

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. -- Childhood obesity has become increasingly worrisome for many American families, and Latino children in particular are more likely to gain dangerous extra pounds. Curbing this trend in the Latino population has been the focus of many national studies, one soon to be based in the Florida State University College of Medicine. With funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) – a first for the College of Medicine – Dr. Javier Rosado will run a two-year, \$75,000 project studying the rural Latino population across Florida. Specifically, he plans to study how well rural clinics and school health programs inform Latino parents about their children's weight. The study will be based in Immokalee, about 30 miles southeast of Fort Myers in Collier County, and Quincy. Rosado works as a postdoctoral psychology fellow at the college's clinical training site in Immokalee, which serves a large, predominantly Latino population of migrant workers. RWJF created the "Salud America!" program in late 2007 to provide support for researchers studying the obesity epidemic in Latino children. Last month, the foundation notified Rosado that his proposed project had gotten the green light. Latino kids' heightened susceptibility to obesity has been increasingly noted and analyzed over the past decade. According to a 2006 study by the Mathematica Policy Research Group, 25 percent of Latino children end up obese by age 3, compared with 16 percent of black children and 14 percent of whites. The disparity among racial groups remained after researchers accounted for possible confounding socioeconomic factors. Rosado and his colleagues will interview parents after children's routine medical checkups.

"The long-term goal is to change the policies of these clinics," he said. "We think BMI (body-mass index) will be the most helpful tool to explain children's weight to families. Hopefully we'll be able to show [the clinics] how they can use BMI information to improve their patients' care." Rosado says the interviewers plan to gather Latino parents' opinions on:

- Ideal body size and weight differences between males and females.
- The way the clinic or schools delivered weight-related information.
- Whether the parents fully understand their child's health situation.
- And what parents think they need to combat issues related to obesity.

In addition to the interviews in Immokalee, Rosado's study will gather information from parents of Latino children in Quincy, where a separate obesity study is under way. After those children receive BMI screenings at school, their parents receive a letter detailing the results. Rosado and his colleagues will interview those parents on the letter's content and learn what change, if any, they made in response to the letter's BMI report. Rosado hopes to shed light on how parents react to a BMI report and how such information could be presented most effectively. Said Myra Hurt, the college's senior associate dean for research and graduate programs, "Dr. Rosado's findings will directly translate to helping other communities throughout our country."