

PRESS RELEASE

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FSU Researcher to Study Obesity Prevention in Latino Children

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By Meredith Fraser

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. -- Latino children have been particularly hard hit by the childhood obesity epidemic in America, but a Florida State University College of Medicine researcher is looking at ways rural clinics and school health programs can help curb the trend.

Javier Rosado has received a \$75,000 grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) to conduct a two-year study on how rural clinics and school health programs inform Latino parents about their children's weight. RWJF created the "Salud America!" program in late 2007 to provide support for researchers studying the obesity epidemic in Latino children.

Rosado's study will be based in Quincy, Fla., and Immokalee, about 30 miles southeast of Fort Myers in Florida's Collier County. Rosado, a postdoctoral psychology fellow, works at the College of Medicine's clinical training site in Immokalee, which serves a large, predominantly Latino population of migrant workers.

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 are 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."

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 deliver 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.

"Dr. Rosado's findings will directly translate to helping other communities throughout our country," said Myra Hurt, the college's senior associate dean for research and graduate programs.