Most Latino COVID-19 Deaths a Result of Workplace Exposure

Latinos of working age experienced more deaths from COVID-19 than whites the same age.

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Many Latinos died of COVID-19 at a much higher rate than whites due to workplace exposure to the coronavirus, suggest new findings published in the journal Demographic Research, reports Ohio State News, the official news hub of Ohio State University (OSU).

For the study, OSU scientists compared the proportion of COVID-19 deaths attributed to whites and Latinos with each group's relative population size using data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Data showed that Latino deaths were disproportionately high, while deaths among whites were disproportionately low nationally and in most states in every range below age 75.

For example, Latinos ages 35 to 44 and 55 to 64 experienced deaths at rates that were respectively 15.4 and 8 percentage points higher than expected. Meanwhile, white people in those same age groups had mortality rates that were respectively 23 and 17 percentage points lower than expected.

When looking at CDC case surveillance data, such patterns were also seen at the county level. Whites were disproportionately underrepresented among COVID-19 cases, while Hispanics were overrepresented. What's more, the greatest excess in cases was among those of working age (30 to 59).

Researchers also found that more Latinos of working age died of COVID-19 than whites in the same age groups, leading scientists to conclude that excess deaths among this population were initially masked.

Among reported cases, Latinos were more likely to have fewer preexisting health conditions than whites. What's more, no significant differences in the proportion of infections that led to death between working-age Latinos and whites were noted. Both these findings led researchers to conclude that the data do not support the theory that preexisting comorbidities and/or lower-quality health care are the driving factors of excess Latino mortality.

Instead, researchers believe that greater workplace exposure caused a higher case burden, thus

leading to higher mortality among Latinos.

“This evidence can hopefully set the record straight about why the Hispanic community, along with other groups overrepresented among frontline workers, took such a heavy hit from this pandemic—that it was because they were doing their jobs and putting themselves on the line,” said Reanna Frank, PhD, professor of sociology at The Ohio State University and one of the study’s coauthors.

In addition, researchers hope the findings can lead to better workplace protections for employees during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

For related coverage, read “Structural Racism Puts Latinos at Risk for COVID-19” and “Latinos Working in Food Processing and Agriculture Face Greater COVID-19 Risk.”

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