

Young whites usually more optimistic than minority peers about likelihood of living to 35

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A new study of young people finds that, with one exception, whites are more optimistic—sometimes drastically so—than their minority peers about their likelihood of living to 35.

"Whites are not subject to the racism and discrimination, at institutional and individual levels, experienced by immigrants and U.S.-born racial and ethnic minorities that undermine health, well-being, and real and/or perceived life chances," said Tara D. Warner, the lead author of the study and an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. "Such experiences—including fear of victimization and/or deportation—can be a source of chronic stress for racial and ethnic minorities, as well as immigrants, that further undermines well-being, even among youth."

According to Warner, on average, across adolescence and the transition to young adulthood, approximately 66 percent of whites were "almost certain" about their chances of surviving to age 35, while only 38 percent of foreign-born Mexicans, 46 percent of second-generation Mexicans (U.S.-born respondent and immigrant mother), and 50 percent of blacks were "almost certain."

Titled, "Adolescent Survival Expectations: Variations by Race, Ethnicity, and Nativity," the study, which is the first to document patterns of survival expectations across racial, ethnic, and immigrant groups, appears in the December issue of the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*. It relies on data from the first three waves of the National

Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health) and considers the responses of 17,100 people who range in age from 12 to 25. Warner and her co-author Raymond R. Swisher, a sociology professor at Bowling Green State University, limited their respondents to people who self-identified as white, black, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or Asian.

"Our most surprising finding is that foreign-born Mexican [young people](#) are the most pessimistic about their future survival—even more pessimistic than their black peers," Warner said. "This pessimism remains even after accounting for a number of risk factors known to undermine survival, such as lack of routine health care, exposure to neighborhood poverty, and experiences with violence. That young foreign-born Mexicans were the most pessimistic about their chances of survival is particularly surprising given extensive literature documenting 'immigrant advantages' among Hispanics."

In addition to being more optimistic about their chances of living to 35 than foreign-born Mexicans, second generation Mexicans, and blacks, whites were also more optimistic than Puerto Ricans, third-generation Mexicans (U.S.-born respondent and mother), foreign-born Cubans, foreign-born Asians, second-generation Asians, and third-generation Asians.

The one exception? U.S-born Cubans.

Their survival expectations were virtually indistinguishable from those of whites, according to Warner. In fact, U.S-born Cubans even appeared slightly more optimistic than their white peers about their likelihood of living to 35 when the researchers controlled for family structure and family socioeconomic status.

"Young people of Cuban descent who are born in the United States tend

to be more economically advantaged than their minority peers, so their more positive expectations for future survival are not all that surprising," Warner said. "U.S.-born Cubans also have higher aspirations and expectations, even compared to whites, for significant events, including attending college and getting married."

In terms of the study's implications, Warner said young people's survival expectations are important because they shape how young people plan for their future, and low survival expectations are associated with numerous risky behaviors, such as substance use and violence, that contribute to continued racial, ethnic, and immigrant disparities in health and well-being across the life course.

"If young people don't expect to live very long, they may engage in [risky behaviors](#) that help make those survival expectations a reality," Warner said. "We should be thinking of ways to change that."

Provided by American Sociological Association

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