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The logo features the letters "ASU" in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The letter "A" is stylized with a white sunburst or starburst pattern radiating from its center. To the right of "ASU", the words "News Release" are written in a large, black, sans-serif font.

# ASU News Release

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## **Researchers address ties between acculturation, drug use in Hispanic communities**

Tempe, AZ - The process of assisting a child to incorporate the patterns or customs of their surrounding culture is a learning experience that usually has a positive outcome. Flavio Marsiglia and Stephen Kulis have embarked on a study that challenges this theory when measuring drug use and the effectiveness of drug prevention programs in certain neighborhoods.

Marsiglia, foundation professor of cultural diversity and health, with ASU's School of Social Work and Kulis, ASU professor of sociology, presented their findings during the 3rd Annual Southwest Interdisciplinary Research Center (SIRC) "Evidence-Based Drug Research In Partnership with Communities," Conference, in Tempe. Both say their findings provide information that leads to better development of drug resistance programs in Arizona schools.

"Our studies examine whether ethnicity, acculturation and ethnic identity moderate the effects of a culturally grounded substance use prevention intervention for Mexican and Mexican American middle school students in Phoenix, Arizona," says Marsiglia, who is also director of the ASU's Southwest Interdisciplinary Research Center (SIRC).

"The main hypothesis is that prevention programs will vary in effectiveness depending on the degree to which they are culturally consistent with the student's ethnic background and acculturation status. Data for their series of studies came from a randomized trial of a substance use prevention program called "keepin' it REAL," which was administered to a predominantly Mexican American sample of over 6,000 middle school students in

Phoenix, beginning in 1998. The original study was conducted in partnership with researchers from Penn State University and was funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). The “keepin’ it REAL (Refuse, Explain, Avoid, Leave)” program received an excellence award by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) in January 2005, and is now one of 22 model prevention programs recognized by SAMSHA.

“Community partners were able to identify that proper representation of culture of origin in prevention messages, produced more effectiveness in prevention intervention,” said Marsiglia of the ‘keepin’ it REAL’ program. “They recommended to us that the ‘keepin’ it REAL,’ campaign be taken to local governments in order to seek broader adoption of this program throughout the state.”

Since then Marsiglia said additional requests have been made by social services agencies and school districts, mostly in Metro Phoenix and Tucson. In addition, requests have been made by communities in Texas, mostly Houston and border towns. ‘keepin’ it REAL’ has since been licensed by ASU and Penn State University and distributed through a national campaign by ETR Publishing.

“The Next Generation Study,” picks up where “keepin’ it REAL” left off. Marsiglia, Kulis, and their team examined how a student’s acculturation status, neighborhood characteristics and school ethnic composition affect program efficacy for “keepin’ it REAL.” In fact, Marsiglia says, “The reason for its name is that it addresses the next generation of questions about culture and prevention that weren’t asked in the previous study.”

“The Next Generation Study” was also funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and focuses on the importance of cultural identity and cultural context in prevention. The study was conducted using data collected from the 35 middle schools in the “keepin’ it REAL” randomized trial, and matched data about their neighborhoods and schools, utilizing the U.S. Census of 2000 and crime rate data provided by the City of Phoenix. The schools were mostly located in the south and central parts of Phoenix.

Findings showed that “keepin’ it REAL” was particularly effective at preventing substance use among highly acculturated Latino students who were found to be initiating drug use at much higher rates than their less acculturated peers. Effects at the neighborhood and school level showed that the possible benefits of being less acculturated or bicultural operate community-wide.

“We discovered that Latino students in neighborhoods with many recent immigrants have lower alcohol use than in other neighborhoods, but high violent crime rates in the neighborhood are associated with more drug use, especially for more acculturated Latino students,” Kulis says. Findings at the school level echo the neighborhood findings. When schools had a high enrollment of recent Mexican immigrant students, the less acculturated Latino students reported lower overall drug use rates, and the “keepin’ it REAL” prevention program was more effective for them. In essence, the program was more effective in schools with many children from monolingual Spanish families.

Marsiglia and Kulis say many of the families that come to Phoenix from rural areas in Sinaloa and Sonora have very traditional anti-drug values that protect the children against drug use. "These parents are also very involved in the lives of their children," Kulis says. "As the children become more acculturated they are placed at risk of increased drug use as their social networks expand." Marsiglia says a communication barrier may be the cause for this increase in drug use.

"Adults learn English at a slower pace and children will learn English at a faster rate," he says. "This will create a communication gap between the parent and the child, which weakens the parents' abilities to monitor their children's behavior."

"Acculturation to the host culture may be inevitable" Kulis says. "Young people need help during this process to preserve the protective aspects of their cultures of origin and avoid disruptive impacts of rapid acculturation. We think the family and the schools need to work together."

Marsiglia and Kulis currently have a proposal under review by the National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA) under the National Institutes of Health titled, "Universal Prevention for Diverse Groups and Context," which challenges the idea of universal drug prevention using the "one size fits all" theory for designing drug prevention programs.

"We are looking at whether programs that are designed to prevent the initiation of use can help substance using adolescents reduce their use," Marsiglia said. "We also want to take a look at gender, ethnicity and acculturation in combination. Is a drug prevention program effectively equally for all the groups that fall at the intersections of these statuses? Does one size fit all?"

SIRC will be sharing findings from this and other on-going studies during their brown-bag series, which will continue in the fall 05-06 semester, and is scheduled tentatively at noon, on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month, at the SIRC offices. For more information about the Southwest Interdisciplinary Research Center, call (480) 965-4699 or visit the Web at ([www.sirc.asu.edu](http://www.sirc.asu.edu)).

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