

Multiracial youths show similar vulnerability to peer pressure as whites

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Researchers who studied a large sample of middle- and high-school students in Washington state found that mixed-race adolescents are more similar to their white counterparts than previously believed.

Experts have thought that multiracial [adolescents](#), the fastest growing youth group in the United States, use drugs and engage in violence more than their single-race peers. [Racial discrimination](#) and greater vulnerability to peer pressure have been blamed for these problems, due to the belief that as mixed-race [youngsters](#) struggle to fit in they become more likely to fall in with bad crowds.

Multiracial youth in the new study, by researchers at the University of Washington and the University of Chicago, reported fewer behavioral problems than seen in previous studies. The findings are published in the July issue of the [Journal of Youth and Adolescence](#).

Youth who reported greater use of alcohol and instances of violent fights also reported having friends with similar problem behaviors. But when asked how likely they would be to cave to peer pressure, multi- and single-race participants did not differ.

[Family background](#), including income level and parental marital status, also had a role. Multiracial youths who reported higher rates of problem behaviors were more likely to come from [poor families](#).

"People usually portray multiracial children as facing greater challenges

growing up than single-race children," said Yoonsun Choi, lead author and associate professor at the UChicago's School of Social Service Administration.

"What we're finding is that they do have an increased risk for problems with drugs and violence, but those problems aren't as extensive as what has been found before. Maybe there's a trend going on, where problems are declining for multiracial youth," she said.

The study suggests that [prevention programs](#) aimed to reduce the negative influences of peers will likely have a universal effect across adolescents.

"We consistently find a strong connection between negative social influences of peers and [problem behaviors](#)," said co-author Todd Herrenkohl, professor in UW's School of Social Work. "Intervention programs need to recognize the strong social and environmental influences that reinforce those behaviors."

About 1,800 seventh and ninth graders attending public and private schools completed a survey twice – one year apart – that included questions about violence, yielding to [peer pressure](#), drug use, and whether their friends used drugs.

For alcohol use, for instance, 55 percent of multiracial youths compared with 47 percent of whites indicated that they had tried alcohol during the first year that they completed the survey.

At that same time-point, 11 percent of multiracial youths compared with 5 percent of white youths reported violent behavior, measured by a question about whether participants had ever beat up anyone so badly that the person had to see a doctor or nurse.

The participants comprised an even mix of boys and girls at different socioeconomic levels. About 13 percent of the students were from various multiracial backgrounds, including Latino and white, Native American and white, Asian-American and white, and others. Of the single-race students, most – 71 percent – were white. The rest of the single-race participants were Latino or Asian-American. Native Americans and African-Americans were left out because too few were in the sample.

The survey is part of the International Youth Development Study, which investigates predictors of alcohol use and other behavior problems and is led by UW's Social Development Research Group.

Provided by University of Washington

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