

In U.S., Hispanics outlive whites

By MIKE STOBBE
AP Medical Writer

ATLANTA — U.S. Hispanics can expect to outlive whites by more than two years and blacks by more than seven, government researchers say in a startling report that is the first to calculate Hispanic life expectancy in this country.

The report released Wednesday is the strongest evidence yet of what some experts call the "Hispanic paradox" — longevity for a population with a large share of poor, undereducated members. A leading theory is that Hispanics who manage to immigrate to the U.S. are among the healthiest from their countries.

A Hispanic born in 2006 could expect to live about 80 years and seven months, the government estimates. Life expectancy for a white is about 78, and for a black, just shy of 73 years.

Researchers have seen signs of Hispanic longevity for years. But until recently, the government didn't calculate life expectancy for Hispanics as a separate group; they were included among the black and white populations. The new report projecting future life spans is based on death certificates from 2006.

By breaking out the longer-living Hispanics, the life expectancies for non-Hispanic whites and blacks both declined slightly, said the report's author, Elizabeth Arias of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Hispanics are the largest, fastest growing minority in the United States, accounting for 15 percent of the population.

An estimated 40 percent of them are immigrants, who in some cases arrived



The American Bar Association's first Hispanic-American President Steve Zack, right, and Cesar Alvarez, chairman of the newly formed ABA Commission on Hispanic Legal Rights and Responsibilities, stand during a news conference Thursday.

AP Photo/Manuel Balce Ceneta

after arduous journeys to do taxing manual labor. It takes a fit person to accomplish that, suggesting that the United States is gaining some of the healthiest people born in Mexico and other countries, said Dr. Peter Muennig of Columbia University's school of public health who has studied life expectancy in different countries.

Compared to the estimate for all U.S. Hispanics, life expectancy is nearly two years lower in Puerto Rico, more than two years lower in Cuba, and more than four years lower in Mexico,

according to World Health Organization figures.

However, experts say that immigrant hardiness diminishes within a couple of generations of living here. Many believe it's because the children of immigrants take up smoking, fast-food diets and other habits blamed for wrecking the health of other ethnic populations.

"The American lifestyle is very sedentary. That's not a good thing," said Jane Delgado, president of the National Alliance for Hispanic Health,

which focuses on improving health services for Hispanics.

Health researchers have seen a strong link between poverty, lack of education and life-shortening health problems. Hispanics are disadvantaged in those areas: About 19 percent of Hispanics live at or below the federal poverty level — three times more than whites. As for education, fewer than 13 percent of Hispanics have a college degree, compared to 17 percent of blacks and 30 percent of whites.

Indeed, past CDC studies have shown that Hispanics suffer some diseases at higher rates than whites, including diabetes and heart disease. But their death rates from those diseases were lower, not higher.

As early as 1986, some researchers had been reporting what appeared to be lower death rates among Hispanics compared to other groups in some parts of the country. But a national estimate was difficult.

Calculating life expectancy is a tough task that requires analyzing extensive information about how people died and how old they were, as well as statistical modeling to predict how long people born today will live if current trends continue.

Until fairly recently, there was significant uncertainty about the accuracy of death records for Hispanics. Most health records only had data on blacks and whites. U.S. death certificates didn't provide for a way to identify someone as Hispanic until 1989.

Arias' new report suggests that the life expectancy for non-Hispanic blacks and whites is lower by a couple of months than was previously estimated.

Shellfish Festival

area. Doherty said about 550 of the photographs were supplied by Allen and Saunya Alloway of Wind and Water Charters.

The Ketchikan High School Lady Kings basketball team and their coach, Kelly Smith, worked throughout the evening to bus tables and wash dishes.

Between ticket holders and all other participants, about 330 people attended the event, said Doherty.

"At the end of the evening, I don't think any-

body walked away hungry," he said.

As the Alaska Shellfish Festival wasn't intended to be a fund-raiser for the organizers, Doherty noted that proceeds from the ticket sales and donations would cover the groups' costs for the event.

"They'll be donating at least \$1,000 to the Kayhi Lady Kings basketball team, he said.

On Friday, organizers were quite pleased about the events success.

"I've been getting a lot of positive feedback

from people who attended," said Mitchel, adding that it brought some good attention to Alaska's shellfish industry.

There was significantly greater demand than there were tickets for the premier Alaska Shellfish Festival.

And even before Thursday's event was through, organizers were fielding queries from people wondering whether the festival would return.

"Everyone I've talked to said, 'You'd better bring it back next year,'" Doherty said.

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Whale migration

were almost hunted to extinction in the mid-20th century. But improvements have been uneven and scientists have been studying the whales and their movements to understand why.

It's to that end that Stevick and other experts have been trawling the Web for photos taken by tourists and whale-watchers, hoping to help build on a worldwide catalog of humpback whales which can be used to track where they travel.

It was by browsing photo-sharing site Flickr that one of Stevick's colleagues found a photo of this particular humpback, taken by a Norwegian tourist from a whale-watching vessel off the coast of Madagascar in 2001. The photo had

been taken with a film camera and the negative sat undeveloped in a drawer for years. Eventually, it was scanned and posted to the Web, where it was spotted and added to the catalog.

Stevick's colleagues matched the Flickr photo to a picture of the whale taken two years earlier in Abrolhos, an area of small volcanic islands off the Brazilian coast.

So how did Stevick and his colleagues recognize the whale as the same one photographed by researchers in 1999? Carole Carlson, Stevick's colleague, said the key to identifying humpback whales is in their tails.

Humpbacks have big tail fins called "flukes," which are spotted

and ridged. Carlson compared them to "huge fingerprints."

Stevick elaborated: "There's an enormous amount of information in those natural markings. There's the basic underlying pattern of the black and white pigment on it, numerous scars across the tail, and the edge is very jagged — each of those things provides a piece of information."

"The likelihood that two animals would have every single one of those things identical would be vanishingly small."

Simon Ingram, a professor of marine conservation at the University of Plymouth in southern England, expressed confidence the two photos showed the same whale, saying that photo identification was

a "very, very powerful technique."

But Ingram, who wasn't involved in the research, said he was less excited by the length of the whale's trip than its destination.

"To my mind, the remarkable thing isn't the distance but the difference," he said. Whale communities were sometimes thought of as discrete communities, seldom mixing. This shows that's not always the case, he said.

As to why the whale went the way it did, Ingram said that, "the fact is, we just don't know. You can track them, but you don't know what's motivating them."

AP Writer Gillian Smith in London contributed to this report.

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Mussel menace

U.S. Geological Survey fisheries biologist. "They are very flexible fish."

Bighead and silver carp — Asian varieties threatening to enter Lake Michigan through Chicago-area rivers and canals — are filter feeders that consume up to 40 percent of their body weight daily. The biggest can grow to 4 feet in length and weigh 100 pounds.

But Fahnenstiel said that if carp evade electronic barriers and reach the lake, they'll probably find so little nourishment they'll either go back or starve.

Chapman is based at the Columbia Environmental Research Center in Missouri, where researchers are measuring Asian carp's appetite for substances that will remain abundant in the Great Lakes even where plankton runs short. One example: bits of food the mussels spit out rather than digest.

Another is cladophora, a green algae that annoys beachgoers by washing ashore in stinky, rotting clumps. The cause of its resurgence in recent years is unknown but some believe it's linked to the mussels, which improve clarity as they filter water, allowing

sunlight to penetrate deeper.

"Chances are pretty good that Asian carp would do just fine eating that stuff, but we're going to test it to make sure," Chapman said.

Quagga and zebra mussels, believed to have hitched a ride from Europe to the Great Lakes in ballast tanks of freighter ships in the 1980s, have wreaked ecological havoc and done hundreds of millions in damage to all the lakes except Superior, where only isolated colonies have been found.

Fahnenstiel and Michigan Tech University biologist Charles Kerfoot were among co-authors of a series in the Journal of Great Lakes Research that described the quagga mussel's takeover of southern Lake Michigan this decade.

Quaggas — which unlike zebra mussels thrive in cold, deep waters — are a likely culprit in the disappearance of phytoplankton blooms that feed opossum shrimp, the scientists said.

Those tiny invertebrates, crucial food for prey fish, have plummeted by more than 70 percent, said Steve Pothoven, a biologist with the

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration field station in Muskegon.

Scientists say whitefish and salmon, two of Lake Michigan's most popular species, have gotten smaller in recent years, a probable sign of malnutrition from a deteriorating food web.

"We are really getting a genuine collapse in the third-largest freshwater lake in the world," Kerfoot said.

The quagga population should outgrow its food supply and level off sometime. How soon that happens will determine how severely fish populations suffer, Tom Nalepa, another NOAA researcher.

If Asian carp arrive in large numbers and successfully reproduce, the

situation would get even more dire.

Even as scientists debate how likely that is, five Great Lakes states are suing in federal court, demanding closure of Chicago shipping locks and separation of the lakes from the Mississippi River basin to block the path of Asian carp and other invaders. Chicago business interests say doing so would cripple the local economy.

Marc Gaden, spokesman for the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, says he hopes never to find out how well the carp would fare in Lake Michigan.

"What's important is to focus on the prevention," Gaden said. "Once you let the invaders in and they spread, it's permanent."



KETCHIKAN GATEWAY BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

School Board Goals for 2010-2011

During a Board retreat in May, the School Board established goals for this school year.

In summary, the goals focus on the following:

- Expansion of the one-to-one laptop program through 12th grade (currently at Schoenbar in 7th grade)
- Continuing universal preschool (4-year-olds) through FY 12
- Determining whether food service program should be self-sustaining, district-subsidized or contracted out.
- Continuing and expanding the Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) program and determine how to measure its success
- Exploring funding sources to expand Social Emotional Learning to complement PBS
- Increasing Board's community involvement and communication (student involvement in meetings, Board participation in community groups)
- Developing a Board member training plan

IN BRIEF

Brain study: Romance can ease pain

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sometimes love does feel like it should. Falling in love can act as a potent painkiller, and now scientists have figured out why: It stimulates the brain's reward pathway, much like the rush of an addictive drug.

The next question is whether better understanding of the love-pain relationship might somehow help scientists tackle chronic pain. Falling head over heels isn't exactly something a doctor can prescribe.

But "maybe prescribing a little passion in one's relationship can go a long way toward helping with one's chronic pain — assuming it's passion with the one you're with," said study co-author Dr. Sean Mackey, chief of pain management at Stanford University. The story begins with psychology professor Arthur Aron of the State University of New York at Stony Brook, who studies the neurology of love. His work has linked that euphoric phase of a fresh romance to brain regions rich in the chemical dopamine. Dopamine is key to what's called the brain's reward pathway, the feel-good mechanisms that encourage certain behaviors. Eating sweets, for example, boosts this system — and addictive drugs like cocaine hijack it.

Then pain specialists noticed that if someone in an intense romance gazes at a picture of his or her amour while being poked or prodded, they feel less pain.

Is that because their love is distracting them from the pain? After all, specialists often advise sufferers to listen to music or try other steps to take their mind off the pain. Or did love work some other way? To find out, fifteen people underwent a battery of tests. They looked at either a picture of their new love or a picture of an attractive acquaintance, or were given distracting tasks such as to list sports that don't involve balls. Researchers touched them with a hot wand to induce moderate pain, and scanned their brains. Looking at their loved one and distraction produced equal pain relief — but the distraction worked through cognitive pathways while the romance triggered a surge in that reward pathway.

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