

## DO HISPANICS REALLY LIVE LONGER OR IS ETHNICITY REPORTED INCORRECTLY ON DEATH CERTIFICATES?

### DATA QUALITY AND ADJUSTED HISPANIC MORTALITY IN THE US, 1989–1991

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When we look at how long individuals in the United States live, Hispanics appear to live longer than other persons do. In order to find out how long an average person would live, we need to know how many people in a group died each year. Using information from the US census, researchers organize people in common groups by the way they have reported their sex, race, and ethnicity. The number of deaths in a population is found out by looking at death certificates, where ethnicity is not reported by the individual but assigned by local record keepers.

In this study, the authors asked if the reports that say that Hispanics live longer may be due to poor data or, more specifically, to incorrect ethnicity reported on death certificates. If this is the case, the authors ask, “Can we use correct data to find out how long Hispanics could be expected to live?”

Using the National Mortality Follow-Back Survey of 1993

(NMFS), the authors found out what percent of Hispanics were correctly classified on the death certificate. The NMFS was a survey of the next-of-kin of 22,957 persons who died in 1993. We found that almost everyone reported as Hispanic on the death certificate really was Hispanic (98.7% agreed), but that many people who considered themselves Hispanic were missed by the death certificates (15.2%). This was found to be especially true among the non-White race groups.

With this new data to make adjustments, the study found that the average White non-Hispanic lived to 72.79 years and the average Hispanic length of life fell to 70.96 years. For females, White non-Hispanics go from 79.28 to 79.33, and Hispanics fall from 81.11 to 79.49 years.

In conclusion, the authors have found that the longer life reported for Hispanics can be explained by the wrong ethnicity assigned on the death certificates.