

The Power of Community: Health Behaviors, Discrimination, Social Connection & Latinx Health

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Introduction

- Health behaviors are associated with health benefits; yet, community context may be even more impactful to health outcomes than individual health behaviors.
- For example, discrimination has been associated with less engagement with health care (Valdovinos et al., 2016) and psychological distress (Lee et al., 2022).
- Also, social connection can significantly impact self-rated physical and mental health including depressive symptoms and healthcare access (Documét et al., 2013; George et al., 2009; Mora et al., 2013; Zhang & Ta, 2009).
- Improving health outcomes for Latinxs will require attention to both individual health behaviors and community context including experiences of discrimination and social/neighborhood connection.

Hypotheses

H1: Individual health behaviors will predict mental and physical health.

H2: Community context (discrimination & social connection) will predict mental and physical health over and above individual health behaviors.

Methods

Participants:

- 150 self-identified Latinxs
- Age: 18 - 75 ($M = 40.39$, $SD = 14.86$)
- Gender: Women (67.3%), Men (32.7%)
- Spanish-speaking (75.7%)
- Foreign-Born (84.6%)
- Heritage
 - Dominican (70.7%)
 - Mexican (10%)
 - Puerto-Rican (8.7%)
- Skin Tone (light to dark)

Procedures:

- IRB approval/informed consent process
- Purposive, convenience, & snowball sampling
- Participants completed a 30-45 minute structured interview by telephone & received a \$10 gift card by mail.

Measures :

- Demographic Characteristics
- Promis Global Health Scale v1.2
- Health Behaviors Variables:
 - Stages of Change: Smoking, Exercise/Physical Activity, & Fruits and Vegetables
- Social Connection Variables:
 - Perceived Ethnic Discrimination
 - Neighborhood (Social) Connection

Analysis:

- Two Hierarchical Multiple Regressions
- DV: (1) Mental Health, (2) Physical Health
- Step 1: Demographics
- Step 2: Health Behaviors
- Step 3: Community Context

Results

Summary of Regression Analyses for Predictors of Self-Rated Mental and Physical Health

	Mental Health			Physical Health		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Demographics						
Age	-.009	.004	-.179*	-.012	.005	-.211*
Gender	-.125	.133	-.080	-.315	.144	-.182*
Education	.043	.035	.107	.083	.038	.188*
Nativity	.074	.173	.037	-.157	.188	-.071
Skin Tone	-.083	.093	-.076	.028	.101	.023
Health Behaviors						
Fruits & Vegetables	.008	.052	.013	.000	.056	.000
Exercise	.040	.045	.081	.127	.049	.230*
Smoking	.035	.053	.057	-.007	.058	-.010
Community Context						
Ethnic Discrimination	-.347	.133	-.232**	-.376	.145	-.228**
Social Connection	.337	.092	.326***	.069	.100	.059
R^2			.206			.232
ΔR^2			.164			.170

Note. $N = 150$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

H1 was partially supported.

No health behaviors predicted Self-rated Mental Health.

Exercise predicted Self-rated Physical Health.

H2 was supported.

Self-rated Mental Health (SrMH): Social connection was positively and discrimination inversely related to SrMH. After controlling for health behaviors 16.4% of the variance was explained by this model.

Self-rated Physical Health (SrPH): Ethnic discrimination was inversely related to SrPH. After controlling for health behaviors 17% of the variance was explained by this model.

Discussion

- The benefits of individual health behaviors may be limited in the face of marginalizing community contexts, including ethnic discrimination and social disconnection (Phongsavan et al., 2006; Shell et al., 2013).
- The results compel us to think of health and wellness in more holistic terms and provide evidence for the need to find ways to eliminate discrimination and cultivate a sense of community. This may be especially important in new settlement communities as reflected by this sample.
- Future Research should examine the influence of multilevel health promotion and disease prevention interventions. Considering individual, community, and policy-level interventions represents a promising direction for Latinx health.

Limitations:

- Moderate sample size; The predominantly Dominican sample limits generalizability to other Latinx populations.