

What is the Relationship Between Domestic Violence and Mental Health among Latinas?

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Abstract

Society has acknowledged the negative effects that domestic violence has on women. Nonetheless, the role of intersectionality when discussing the impact of domestic violence within Latinas is crucial. The purpose of the current study was to examine the relationship between domestic violence and mental health among Latina women. The current study concluded that higher levels of domestic violence were negatively correlated with both lower levels of mental health and self-esteem. The current study also reaffirmed prior research studies regarding the harmful and disproportionate effects domestic violence has on Latina women's mental health.



Introduction

Significance of Study

- Women who experienced domestic violence are more likely to have mental health issues related to depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicidal ideation (Pico-Alfonso et al., 2006).
- 34.4% of Latina women experience domestic violence by their intimate partner in their lifetime (Smith et al., 2017).
- Many research studies have found no statistically significant differences between Latinas and non-Latinas who have experienced domestic violence, while other studies found the opposite (Edelson et al., 2007).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to increase the knowledge about the effects cultural ideals have on domestic violence.

Research Question

What is the relationship between domestic violence and mental health among Latina women?

Hypothesis

The hypothesis for this study predicts that Latina women who experience domestic violence by their previous or current intimate partner will have increased mental health issues.

Literature Review

Domestic Violence in Latina Women

- Past research has demonstrated disparities in the prevalence of domestic violence experienced by Latinas ranging from 9-80% (Cavanaugh et al., 2014; Cho, 2012; Gonzalez et al., 2020).
- Cultural ideals may also influence attitudes and responses to domestic violence. Latinas' attitudes surrounding partner violence such as rape are more likely to include victim-blaming from their community (Ahrens et al., 2010; Jimenez & Abreu, 2003; Ullman & Filipas, 2001).
- Latinas often have difficulties recognizing intimate partner violence within their marriages because of traditional gender roles and the lack of discussion surrounding the topic of sex (Ahrens et al., 2010).

Impacts of Domestic Violence on Mental Health in Latinas

- Compared to 20% of their White counterparts, 38% of Latinas who experienced domestic violence were diagnosed with depression (Kelly, 2010).
- Latinas have been found to experience post-traumatic stress disorder at higher rates and experience symptoms more intensely (Benuto & Bennett, 2015; Marques et al., 2011; Marshall et al., 2009).
- Latinas affected by domestic violence experience anxiety, low self-esteem, somatic symptoms, suicidal ideation, and disordered eating and sleeping habits (Edelson et al., 2007; Howard et al., 2010; Marques et al., 2011; Ramos & Carlson, 2004).

Gaps in Research

- Inconsistent research has resulted in disparities when discussing intersectionality and domestic violence.
- Prior research neglects the subcultures that exist within Latinx culture.

Research Design

The current study is a secondary data analysis utilizing data collected from the third wave of Welfare, Children, and Families: A Three-City Study (WCF). The third wave of the original study included low-income household participants from February 2005 to January 2006. A cross-sectional survey study design is used for the current study to evaluate the relationship between domestic violence and mental health among Latina women.

Sampling Method

The current study utilized participants who were caregivers and identified as female and Latina from the WCF study. Study participants who failed to fully complete all the domestic violence and mental health questions were excluded from the study. This resulted in a final sample size of 810 Latinas.

Measures

Independent Variable

The independent variable of the current study was domestic violence experienced by caregivers, which was defined as physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, or emotional threats and abuse.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable of the current study was mental health, which was measured using the Brief Symptom Inventory.



Results

- A moderate correlation between domestic violence and mental health, higher levels of domestic violence were related to lower levels of mental health.
- A weak correlation between domestic violence and self-esteem, higher levels of domestic violence were related to lower levels of self-esteem.
- Age and education were not significant predictors of mental health among the study participants.
- Education and domestic violence were significant predictors of self-esteem among the study participants.

Table 2

Regression Model for Mental Health			
Predictor	B	SE	β
Constant***	3.45	.205	
Age [†]	1.32	.102	.123
Education	-.043	.009	-.081
Domestic violence***	.071	.007	.143

Reference group: HS or More. ***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05; [†]p < .10



Table 3

Regression Model for Self-Esteem			
Predictor	B	SE	β
Constant***	3.45	.205	
Age	1.32	.102	.123
Education***	-.043	.009	-.081
Domestic violence***	.071	.007	.143

Reference group: HS or More. ***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05; [†]p < .10

Methods

Conclusion

Among Latinas, increased levels of domestic violence led to lower levels of mental health including somatization, depression, and anxiety symptoms. Among participants, education and domestic violence were significant predictors of self-esteem. Lower levels of education and increased levels of domestic violence generally predicted lower levels of self-esteem. These findings, along with previous studies, indicate a greater need for more research to understand the risk and resiliency factors within Latinas who have experienced domestic violence.

Implications For Future Research

- Increased research on domestic violence effects on mental health within Latinas as this population continues to grow including Latinx subcultures to evaluate risk and resiliency factors.



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