

Abstract

The older adult population face different challenges as they age. With an increase in the number of older adults in the United States, it's important to shed light on some of the struggles that may accompany this population. Some of the challenges that older adults face includes lack of social connections, loneliness, lack of access to mental and physical health resources, and lastly, support. These challenges can be directly associated with depression and anxiety. The purpose of the current study was to analyze the effects of social isolation and social connectedness on the wellbeing of older Latinx adults. To identify factors that may influence the psychological and physical well-being of older adults, the current study hypothesized that there is a negative effect between social isolation and the psychological and physical wellbeing of older adults. The current study also hypothesized that among older Latinx adults, there is a positive relationship between the social connectedness to the Latinx community and psychological and physical wellbeing of older adults in this population. The current study is a secondary analysis of the data from The National Social Life, Health and Aging Project (NSHAP). The goal of this study was aimed to increase the understanding of the well-being of older adults who live in the community, by examining the interactions among their physical health, functioning, illness, emotional health, health behaviors, cognitive functioning, and social connectedness. The result findings were inconsistent with the current study's hypothesis as there were no significant results among the variables of social isolation and social connectedness on the psychological and physical wellbeing among older Latinx adults. Implications for future studies are explored. A suggestion for improvement may be to compare more than just two variables in the hopes of obtaining significance that may yield to better results.

Introduction

- Currently, more than 18% of the U.S. population identifies as Latino or Hispanic, of which 8% are over the age of 65.
- The proportion of general Latino population in the United States is projected to increase to 28% by 2060, with a projected increase of Latino older adults of 21% .
- Some of the challenges that older adults face includes lack of social connections, loneliness, lack of access to mental and physical health services, language barriers, and lastly, support.
- These challenges can put this vulnerable population at a greater risk for developing mental health problems that may include depression and anxiety, and physical health problems like diabetes and hypertension.

Purpose

To study the effects of social isolation and social connectedness on the wellbeing of older adults.

Research Questions

1. What is the effect of social isolation on the psychological well-being and physical health among older Latinx adults?
2. What is the relationship between social connectedness and psychological wellbeing and physical wellbeing among older Latinx adults?

Hypothesis

- There is a negative effect between social isolation and the psychological and physical wellbeing of older adults.
- Among older Latinx adults, there is a positive relationship between the social connectedness to the Latinx community and psychological and physical wellbeing of older adults in this population.

Methods

Research Design-

- The current study is a secondary analysis of the data from The National Social Life, Health and Aging Project (NSHAP).
- NSHAP is a longitudinal study that has three waves of data collection from 2005 until 2016. More than 3,000 interviews of adults ages 57 to 85 were conducted by The National Opinion Research Center (NORC), along with Principal Investigators at the University of Chicago.

Sample-

- The national sample from the NSHAP study included 4,777 community-dwelling American adults ages 57-85.
- 4,777 respondents were interviewed in Round 3.
- During the second wave of the NSHAP study, questions were asked entirely in an in-person interview or the leave behind questionnaires. Whereas in the third wave, there were separate leave- behind questionnaires for the new cohort and original cohort.

Measures-

Independent Variables

- Social Isolation- measured through a nominal scale through a self-reporting questionnaire of how often do you feel isolated from others and how often do you feel left out.
- Social Connectedness- measured through a nominal scale through a self-reporting questionnaire of how often did you get together socially with friends or relatives.

Dependent Variables

- Psychological Wellbeing- measured through a 5-point Likert Scale question.
- Physical Wellbeing – measured through a 5-point Likert Scale question.

Results

Analysis of Chi-Square Results-

- There **was no significant relationship** between social isolation and physical wellbeing among older Latinx adults (χ^2 (df) = 24, $p = .001$). Based on this sample, there is no relationship between social isolation and physical health and wellbeing among older Latinx adults.
- There **was no significant relationship** between social isolation and the psychological wellbeing among older Latinx adults (χ^2 (df) = 12, $p = .001$).

Table 3

Results of Chi-Square Test

Relationship between social isolation and physical wellbeing among older Latinx adults.

Social Isolation	Self-rated Physical health									
	Poor		Fair		Good		Very Good		Excellent	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never	52	3.8%	241	17.7%	415	30.4%	471	34.6%	184	13.5%
Hardly Ever	35	2.9%	194	15.9%	422	34.6%	426	34.9%	142	11.6%
Some of the time	57	6.7%	183	21.6%	309	36.5%	240	28.4%	57	6.7%
Often	22	15.0%	49	33.3%	37	25.2%	32	21.8%	7	4.8%

* $p < .001$

Results of Chi-Square Test

Relationship between social isolation and psychological wellbeing among older Latinx adults.

Social Isolation	Self-rated mental health									
	Poor		Fair		Good		Very Good		Excellent	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never	7	0.5%	55	4.1%	188	14.1%	486	36.5%	596	44.7%
Hardly Ever	3	0.3%	55	4.6%	263	22.0%	598	50.1%	1194	100.0%
Some of the time	13	1.6%	129	15.7%	324	39.4%	273	33.2%	823	100.0%
Often	19	13.4%	40	28.2%	44	31.0%	29	20.4%	142	100.0%

* $p < .001$

Table 1

Sample Characteristics (N=4,377)

Characteristic	f	%
Gender		
Male	2003	45.8
Female	2374	54.2
Age in years	$M = 67.63$	$SD = 10.949$
Born in US?		
No	231	14.5
Yes	1358	85.5
Hispanic/ Latino Ethnicity		
No	3,859	88.2
Yes	509	11.6
Not Applicable	6	.1
Don't Know	2	.0
Refused	1	.0
Household Income (last year)		
0-24,999	835	19.1
25,000-49,999	876	20.0
50,000-99,999	1051	24.0
100K or Higher	732	16.7
Marital status	2755	62.9
Married	139	3.2
Living with a partner	85	1.9
Separated	542	12.4
Divorced	629	14.4
Widowed	227	5.2
Never married		
Race		
White/Caucasian	3194	73.2
Black/African American	719	16.5
Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaskan	452	10.4

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics: Study Variables (N = 4,377)

Variables	f	%
Feel Isolated		
Never	1363	38.1
Hardly Ever	1223	34.2
Some of the time	847	23.7
Often	147	4.1
Wellbeing		
Physical wellbeing	$M=3.23$	$SD=1.041$
Psychological wellbeing	$M=3.85$	$SD=.960$
Feeling left out	$M= 1.04$	$SD=.862$
Frequency of socializing	$M= 4.42$	$SD= 1.275$

Conclusions

- The findings were inconsistent with the current study's hypothesis as there were no significant results among the variables of social isolation and social connectedness on the psychological and physical wellbeing among older Latinx adults.

Strengths & Limitations

- A key strength of this study is the sample size.
- A limitation that is worth noting is that most of the participants from the current study are not of Hispanic or Latinx background, with only 11.6% self-identifying as Hispanic or Latinx background.
- the age of the data is also a limitation.
- defining "lifestyle" might be a difficult task that might make it challenging to summarize.
- secondary data analysis and research design were also limitations to the current study.

Implications for Practice & Policy

- We can encourage and motivate clients to incorporate physical health activities that will have lasting benefits on their mental health. During the biopsychosocial assessment, we can identify ways in which this population can improve their physical and emotional health outcomes and help them live out their golden years.
- These implications can also be moved from the social work role to the primary care physicians that provide direct care to this population.
- This study helps to inform social work practice by identifying possible psychological and physical risk factors that may prevent this vulnerable population from successfully aging.
- The present study adds to the current body of literature by identifying factors that may contribute to successful aging in the older adult population.
- Further research with different variables is needed to help determine whether there is a relationship between social connectedness and physical and mental wellbeing among older Latinx adults.
- Prior research suggests that other factors may contribute to the lack of connection or involvement within this community, for example, the impact of racial/ethnic discrimination on health is something that needs to be closely looked at.
- This study provided new insights into the cognitive health for the older Latinx population, and the negative impact of those that have experienced racism within the U.S. healthcare system.
- It was noted that discrimination was positively associated with depression, diabetes, and poor health management. It's important for social workers to understand the possible health implications of discrimination due to race-ethnicity may have on this population.
- By identifying mechanisms of how marginalized social ranks help shape health, social workers and the interdisciplinary team can have a positive impact on the health of older Latinx adults.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my parents, siblings, friends, and Professors who have supported me these past three years as a grad student. I would also like to thank my Cohort- I would have NOT made it without your help. Lastly, and most importantly, I want to thank my son, Christopher, for believing in me these past three years and giving me the motivation to keep going. Papa- we made it "out the trenches."