



The Effects of Discrimination on Overall Health and Quality of Life

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Absract

Discrimination has well-documented effects on health and quality of life for various demographic groups. However, majority of previous studies have only focused on the impact of broad discrimination on health and/or quality of life and did not address the differential effect of various experience of discrimination. The present study aimed to examine the effects of various types of discrimination on middle-aged women in the United States. The current study utilized secondary data from the Survey of Women Across the Nation (SWAN) Study and examined the effects of discrimination regarding gender, age, race, ethnicity, income, language, weight, and sexuality on the quality of life and overall health. The study utilized survey results from 1,029 ($N = 1,029$) diverse middle-aged US women from across the country, with a mean age of 48.84 years ($SD = 2.6$). The current study conducted two statistical analyses: binary logistic regression and linear regression. The current study found language-based discrimination and weight-based discrimination significantly and negatively predicted quality of life and overall health. Individuals who were discriminated against based on gender were more likely to report higher overall health. Findings of the current study support the hypothesis that certain types of discrimination have different impacts on overall health and quality of life. The present study highlights the importance of implementing anti-discrimination policies, as well as the need for psychoeducation regarding the types and impacts of discrimination.

Introduction

- Women are at increased risk for experiencing discrimination
- Women are more likely to experience negative effects of discrimination, especially if they belong to other minority groups
- Types of discrimination include: race-based, ethnicity-based, gender-based, age-based, income-based, language-based, weight-based, and sexuality-based
- Not all types of discrimination have been heavily researched
- Existing research has only compared experiences of discrimination to those who have no experienced discrimination
- Current research is only comparing experiences of discrimination to each other, grouped by type

Lituratione Review

- Research exploring the effects of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, age, income, language, weight, and sexual orientation have found that discrimination has a negative impact on health and quality of life
- Research has also found correlation between discrimination and negative health outcomes including chronic illnesses and discrimination from health care professionals

Methods

- The current study was conducted using secondary data analysis; data used was from the Survey of Women Across the Nation, or SWAN, study
- SWAN was a longitudinal, multi-site study that collected data from diverse samples of women at seven different locations across the United States: Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Boston, Massachusetts, Detroit, Michigan, Chicago, Illinois, Los Angeles, California, Oakland, California, and Newark, New Jersey
- Only participants who answered "yes" to questions regarding discrimination, overall health, and quality of life were included in the current study
- Current study retained 1,029 of the 3,306 participants initially sampled
- Data was collected using a self report survey from the 1999-2001 wave
- Mean age of participants was 48.84 ($SD = 2.6$)
- 34.8% of participants identified as black, 9.2% as Chinese/Chinese American, 6.5% Japanese/Japanese American, 45.6% Caucasian/White Non-Hispanic, 3.9% Hispanic
- 92.2% utilized English surveys, 3.0% utilized Spanish, 3.1% utilized Cantonese, 1.7% Japanese
- 58.9% of participants identified as partnered, 41.1% identified as unpartnered
- 57.4% had income of \$50,000 or more, 42.6 had income of \$49,999 or less annually

Measures

Independent Variable

- Discrimination was defined by eight variables: Race, ethnicity, gender, age, income, language, weight and sexual orientation

Dependent Variables

- Overall health: Fair/Poor or Good/Very Good/Excellent
- Quality of life: ten-point Likert scale, 1 being lowest or worst possible quality of life, 10 being highest or best quality of life

Variables	n	%
Independent Variables		
Race Based Discrimination	449	44.3%
Ethnicity Based Discrimination	323	32.1%
Gender-Based Discrimination	551	54.4%
Age-Based Discrimination	342	33.9%
Income-Based Discrimination	227	22.7%
Language-Based Discrimination	144	14.3%
Weight Based Discrimination	250	24.9%
Sexual Orientation Based Discrimination	79	7.9%
Dependent Variables		
Overall Health		
Fair/Poor	166	16.3%
Good, Very Good, Excellent	852	83.7%
Quality of Life		
	M = 7.32	SD = 1.690

Results: Overall Health

- Results of logistic analysis found three factors significantly contribute to overall health, while other variables remain constant ($\chi^2 = 99.201$, $df = 12$, $p < .001$ with Nagelkerke $R^2 = .174$)
- Individuals who experienced gender-based discrimination were 62.4% more likely to report higher overall health than those who did not
- Individuals who reported language-based discrimination were 71.6% more likely to have lower overall health than those who did not
- Individuals who experienced weight-based discrimination were 53.5% more likely to have lower overall health than those who did not

Contributing Factors	B	SE	Significance	Odds Ratio
Constant	1.981	1.818	.276	7.250
Age at current visit	.022	.037	.555	1.022
Marital Status	-.238	.109	.029	.788
Income	-1.240	.224	.000	.289
Race Based Discrimination	-.323	.243	.183	.724
Ethnicity Based Discrimination	.048	.267	.857	1.049
Gender Based Discrimination	.485	.219	.026	1.624
Age Based Discrimination	-.155	.227	.494	.856
Income Based Discrimination	-.018	.241	.941	.982
Language Based Discrimination	-1.258	.237	.000	.284
Weight Based Discrimination	-.765	.227	.001	.465
Sexual Orientation Based Discrimination	.354	.376	.346	1.424

Results: Quality of Life

- 9.4% of the variance in quality of life was explained by the linear regression model ($F(12,929) = 7.989$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .094$)

Language-Based Discrimination

- Language-based discrimination negatively predicted quality of life ($b = -.335$, $p < .01$)

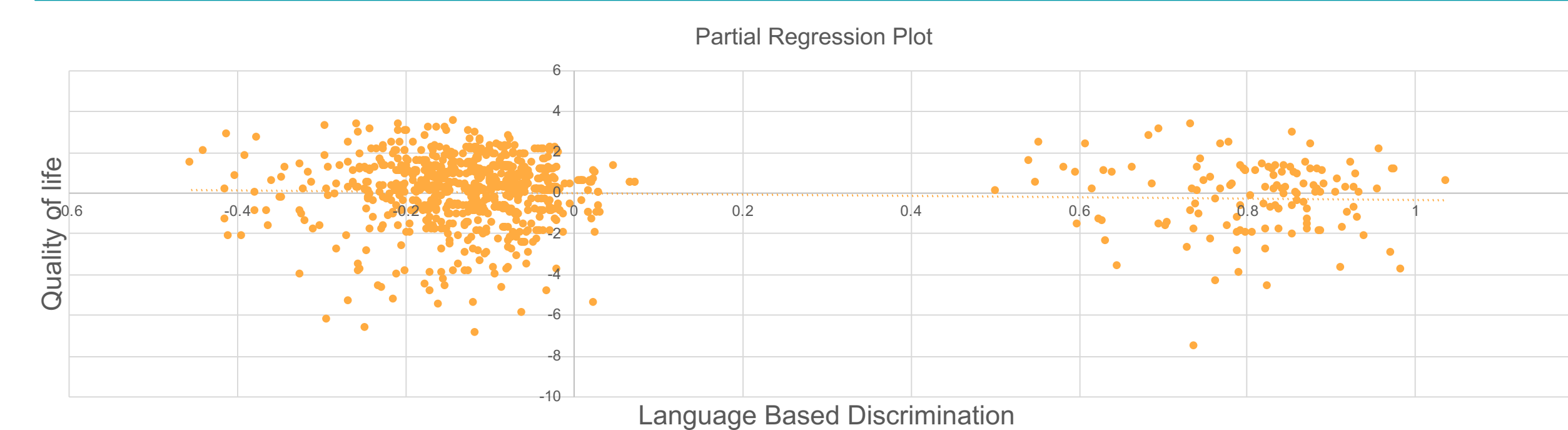


Figure 1. Partial regression plot of language predicting experience of discrimination among United States Women.

Results: Quality of Life

Weight-Based Discrimination

- Weight-based discrimination negatively predicted quality of life ($b = -.445$, $p < .01$)



Figure 2. Partial regression plot of weight predicting experience of discrimination among United States Women.

Discussion

Summary of Findings

- Weight and language had a significant negative impact on overall health and quality of life, which is consistent with existing research
- Race, ethnicity, age, income level and sexual orientation did not have significant impacts on overall health or quality of life, which is not consistent with existing research
- Gender positively correlated with overall health which is not consistent with existing research
 - Does not mean gender-based discrimination is not encouraged or interpreted as a positive experience; rather, results are more likely attributed to a confounding variable such as education or social support

Implications

- Current study contributes to the understanding of the unique impact various types of discrimination has on overall health and quality of life on middle-aged US women
- Highlight the need for further research aimed at investigating language-based discrimination, as existing body of research is limited
- Highlight need for further research aimed at discovering confounding variables and protective factors against gender-based discrimination

Strengths and Limitations

- Limitations include use of secondary data, data collected from cities only not rural areas, and only female study population
- Strengths include comparison between types of discrimination, diverse sample of women, and a large sample size

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