Exploring Social Network Factors of Weight Satisfaction in Mexican Immigrants

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ABSTRACT

Latinos are disproportionately affected by obesity in the United States (U.S.), with Latinos being 1.2 times more likely to be obese when compared to their non-Latino white counterparts. Nativity and length of stay in the U.S. is also positively correlated to obesity, and this association is strongest among certain subgroups (e.g., Mexicans). Obesity is associated with a myriad of other health concerns, including psychological consequences, such as weight dissatisfaction and poor body image. Yet we know little about the relationship between weight satisfaction among immigrant Latinos, and how social networks norms around obesity and body image might affect the individual. We leverage existing egocentric social network data from a study designed to investigate how Mexican American's social network influenced and related to diabetes-related health behaviors The sample consisted ($N=80_{egos}$; $1,600_{alters}$), and during the social network interview each ego was asked to rate each of their 20 alters along a validated body image scale as well as the extent to which the alter eats a traditional or "American" diet. Ego's BMI was calculated using objectively measured anthropometric data, and sex, marital status, were obtained through interview administered surveys. Crude and adjusted regression models found only the network-level variable of higher proportion of the network overweight or obese to be significantly associated with lower weight satisfactions by the ego. Sex, relationship status, and BMI were individual-level indicators that were significantly associated with weight satisfaction. This study addressed a gap in the research on both individual and network level factors among Mexican Americans and their impact on weight satisfaction. The findings of this study will help to further obesity research among Latinos which may potentially develop interventions that incorporate social network relationships.