I. Social Relations and Mental Health Among Arab-American Elders

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Objectives

To document family support situations among elderly Arab Americans and their relation to mental health and well-being.

Methods

One hundred Arab-American elders, ages 60 years and older, participated in a pilot study funded by the National Institute of Aging. The study group comprised both immigrant and US-born elders who answered survey questions about social relations and health. Univariate analyses focused on how immigrant status and gender related to social relations, followed by regression models that examined whether social relations predicted depression.

Results

Those who are US-born report larger networks and a lower proportion of other Arabs in their networks than do immigrants. However, among those who are US-born, women report a higher proportion of Arabs in their networks than do men. Immigrants confided more in their networks and also rated their relationship with network members better than those who were US-born. Men were more likely than women to perceive that sick care is available from network members. Those who reported poor health, immigrant status, and discrimination were more likely to report feeling depressed. While network structure is not significantly associated with depression, quality and type of support explained more variance in depression; and those who reported that financial help is not available from their networks were more likely to report feeling depressed.

Conclusions

While these results are preliminary, they offer some empirical evidence about the reality of family support situations among Arab-American elders, and how that support relates to mental well-being.

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