

Healthiest pregnant women feel a strong sense of community

August 2 2010

(PhysOrg.com) -- It takes a village to keep a pregnant woman at her healthiest, a new University of Michigan study shows.

The study compared African American and European American women and women of lower and higher socioeconomic status to see what effects communalism, or a strong sense of community, had on African American women and women of lower socioeconomic status.

The pregnant [African American women](#) and women of lower socioeconomic status had overall higher levels of stress, negative effect and blood pressure than women of higher status based on race or education and income. However, these ethnic and socioeconomic disparities were not observed among women with higher communalism.

The study followed 297 African American and European American women through 32 weeks of pregnancy. Results suggest that a sense of community was more important for a pregnant woman's mental health than ethnicity or socioeconomic status over the lifespan, said Cleopatra Abdou, a social health psychologist who completed the study as a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health and Society Scholar at U-M School of Public Health.

The findings of Abdou and her colleagues also suggest that communalism negates the effects of [ethnic minority](#) status and lower socioeconomic status on a pregnant woman's blood pressure.

"This paper suggests that it can be very important to distinguish culture from ethnicity and social status, not only as concepts, but also in terms of effects on health and other important life outcomes," said Abdou, who starts this fall as assistant professor at USC in the Davis School of [Gerontology](#).

"I think it's critical to put these results in context. Communalism is associated with better health, especially for women of color and women who have experienced socioeconomic disadvantage at some point in the lifespan," Abdou said. "Nevertheless, we see very clear evidence that higher [socioeconomic status](#) is associated with higher communalism, regardless of your [ethnic background](#). It seems that it's just easier to have more of every type of resource, including cultural resources, in this case communalism, when you have more money,"

The paper is scheduled to appear this month in the American Psychological Association's *Journal of Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*.

Provided by University of Michigan

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