

Study finds strong ethnic neighborhoods can boost health of seniors

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A new study from the Mailman School of Public Health suggests that African-American and Mexican-American seniors are less likely to have cancer or heart disease if they live in an ethnically homogeneous community.

Contrary to earlier studies, the researchers found that "living in the barrio or ethnically dense communities isn't always bad for your health," said Kimberly Alvarez, a Ph.D. candidate at Mailman who conducted the study with Becca Levy, associate professor of epidemiology and psychology at the Yale School of Public Health.

The researchers used survey data from 2,367 Mexican-Americans and 2,790 African-Americans over age 65 living in communities with high percentages of residents of the same [ethnic background](#).

Among African-Americans, those living in a county with an ethnic density of 50 percent or more were 46 percent less likely to report doctor-diagnosed heart disease and 77 percent less likely to report cancer than those who lived in a community with an ethnic density of less than 25 percent. Mexican-Americans living in a county with an ethnic density of 50 percent or more were 33 percent and 62 percent less likely to report heart disease and cancer, respectively, than those who lived in a community with an ethnic density of less than 25 percent.

Cultural factors such as respect for elders and close-knit families could help explain the phenomenon. "These networks may facilitate better

[health behaviors](#) and, in turn, better [health outcomes](#)," Alvarez said.

The study was published online last month in the [American Journal of Public Health](#).

Provided by Columbia University

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