

Hispanic women's upbeat outlook may boost heart health

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Study finds they worry less about weight, diet than whites, and have better cardiac profiles.

(HealthDay)—Hispanic women tend to exercise less and fret less about their weight than white women, and their heart disease risks are also lower, a new study suggests.

Examining data from female employees of a Miami-based [health](#) system, researchers theorized that a more upbeat attitude among Hispanic [women](#) might contribute to their better [cardiovascular health](#).

Hispanic women logged more favorable results in 10 of 12 heart conditions and risk factors—such as high [blood pressure](#) or cholesterol—than non-Hispanic women, according to the research, published April 29 in the journal *Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes*.

"Obviously, this group has something that is set apart," said study author Emir Veledar, a biostatistician at Baptist Health South Florida in Miami.

"There is no difference among all these women in knowledge, but in positive attitude," he added. "Hispanic women are more satisfied with their jobs and their lives. They don't think they need to get more exercise; they have good or excellent health, and they're happy with their weight."

This so-called "Hispanic paradox," Veledar said, extends to the significant gap in average life expectancies between Hispanic and white women. Female Hispanics in the United States are expected to live for 87 years, about six years longer than white females.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for adults of both genders and all races, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Nearly 422,000 American women die of heart disease each year.

Veledar and his colleagues studied annual health-fair and test results gathered from nearly 7,700 female employees at Baptist Health South Florida. Of those, more than half were Hispanic.

Nearly two dozen measures of cardiovascular health were examined, including blood pressure, blood sugar levels and body mass index (BMI), a ratio of weight to height. The women's knowledge of [cardiovascular risk](#) factors was assessed and they were also asked about their attitudes about their job, weight and desire for more exercise.

With equal access to health care and benefits because of their shared employment situation, the women had notably different [cardiovascular risk factors](#). Not only did Hispanics have lower rates of type 1 diabetes, [high blood pressure](#) and high cholesterol, they reported job and life

satisfaction in greater numbers, the investigators found.

More than half of both Hispanic and non-Hispanic women wished to lose weight, but that number was about 54 percent among Hispanics and nearly 60 percent among non-Hispanics. Fewer Hispanics wished to get more exercise—less than 33 percent compared to over 37 percent, the findings showed.

Veledar said there's no way to know if a more upbeat attitude among Hispanic women has any direct relationship to their better cardiovascular risk profile, but he said all ethnicities could benefit from a "balance in attitude."

Dr. Miguel Quinones, chairman of cardiology at Houston Methodist DeBakey Heart and Vascular Center, said research has long linked lower stress levels—which can be influenced by a positive attitude—with lower heart disease risks.

"There's no question that stress is one of the factors that modifies whether someone who is at risk for heart disease presents with [heart disease](#)," said Quinones, who wasn't involved with the new research. "For Hispanic women, if they have a less stressful environment because their family and cultural life is better, that may potentially be good."

Quinones explained that female Hispanics' lower heart risks likely have little to do with shared genetics, since Hispanics' roots may be, among others, Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, African or European.

"Ethnicity does not equal race," he said.

Quinones also noted that the association between an upbeat attitude and improved cardiovascular health does not mean the former caused the latter.

More information: The American Heart Association offers more about risks for [heart disease and stroke among Hispanics](#).

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