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Perceptions of discrimination may adversely affect health of immigrants' children, study shows

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Children of recent immigrants are more likely to make sick visits to the doctor if their mothers see themselves as targets of ethnic or language-based discrimination, researchers at New York University report in a new study. Their research, which appears in the journal *Health Psychology*, provides new evidence that perceptions of discrimination by a mother could have a negative effect on the health of her child within the first 14 months of her child's life.

Previous scholarship has shown associations between discrimination and health. More recently, researchers have found that a mother's psychological response to discrimination—notably, high levels of stress during pregnancy—may have implications for the health of her child, such as low birth weight.

In the Health Psychology study, the NYU researchers explored the possibility that perceptions of discrimination may be associated with the health of young children.

To do so, they interviewed 98 immigrant mothers from the Dominican Republic and Mexico who had normally developing 14-month-old children. To gauge perceptions of ethnic and language discrimination, they adapted an established survey, the Everyday Discrimination Scale, which asks such questions as: "How often have you been treated poorly at work by supervisors because of your ethnicity" or "How often have

you been treated with less courtesy than other people because of how you wrote or spoke English?" The mothers also reported the number of times their child visited the doctor for well-visits (regular checkups) and for sick visits (trips to the hospital or emergency room, a clinic, or a private office visit because the child was ill).

To measure ethnic-group attachment, the study employed a commonly used survey instrument, "The Ethnic Identity Scale," drawing upon responses to a pair of questions: "I have a strong sense of belonging to my ethnic group" and "I feel a strong attachment to my ethnic group".

Their findings showed distinctions between recent immigrants (those who had been in the U.S. about three years, on average) and those who had been in the U.S. for longer periods (about 14 years, on average), as well as between perceptions of language and ethnic discrimination:

- Among more recent immigrants, greater perceived ethnic and language-based discrimination were both associated with more frequent sick-child visits, but only among those who reported less attachment to their ethnic group.
- The associations between both forms of perceived discrimination and sick-child visits were not observed among recent immigrant mothers reporting high ethnic-group attachment.
- By contrast, among more established immigrants, perceived language-based discrimination was associated with more frequent sick-child visits across all levels of ethnic-group attachment.

"This study is the first to link greater language-based discrimination perceived by mothers to poorer health in their children," said David Amodio, an associate professor in NYU's Department of Psychology and one of the study's co-authors. "Moreover, these findings highlight the impact of language-based discrimination on Latino immigrants in the

U.S., which is distinct from discrimination based on ethnicity."

Provided by New York University

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