



Title: Perceived Discrimination and Health: The Mediating Effect of Social Capital

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Research Question:

The purpose of this study was to explore whether social capital mediated the association between perceived discrimination and health. Data were derived from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC) 2001-2005, a survey designed to capture the factors that may bolster or hinder the settlement process. A series of logistic regression analyses were undertaken to examine the role of social capital (social network density and diversity) on the relationship between perceived discrimination and health (poor self-assessed health, emotional and physical health problems), with appropriate adjustment for known confounds.

Importance:

During the settlement process, newcomers encounter a variety of stressors with the potential to negatively affect their health. We approached the question of healthy communities with an interest in interactions of newcomers with the majority of Canadians and the impacts of discrimination in particular. Our study also emphasized the role of social capital in facilitating the settlement process and thereby promoting health. By explaining the effects of perceived discrimination and social capital on health, we provide policy makers with a more refined tool with which to address settlement concerns.

Research Findings:

The data showed that exposure to discrimination had a negative effect on emotional health and to a lesser extent self-assessed and physical health. Results also indicated that this main effect occurs even at low exposure levels to discrimination. In general, there was a main effect of social network density and diversity on the health outcomes. Neither social network density nor diversity mediated the association between perceived discrimination and health. Findings suggest that perceived discrimination and social capital have unique and independent effects on the health of newcomers to Canada.

Implications:

We recommend that the Canadian government supply sufficient, long-term funding for advocacy and vigorously confront public attitudes concerning immigrants through non-stigmatizing public education.