

Acculturation, Pregnancy-Related Stress and Birth Outcomes in Mexican and Mexican American Women

This prospective study examined how acculturation, stress and stress buffers affected birth outcomes among 81 pregnant Mexican and Mexican American women. Despite socioeconomic disadvantages, Latinas have similar birth outcomes to Caucasian women. However, immigrant Latinas have better birth outcomes than US-born Latinas. This has been called the “Latina paradox.”

Acculturation (ARSMA-II), stress (STAI and PSS), pregnancy-related distress (Lobel), social support (ISEL-12), coping with pregnancy (Lobel) and optimism (LOT-R) were the variables and questionnaires used to collect data during in-home interviews. Data analysis using SPSS 16.0 revealed significant relationships:

1. Acculturation was moderately and negatively correlated with age ($r = -.378$; $p = .001$) and with social support ($r = -.367$; $p = .001$).
2. Birth weight was moderately and positively correlated with mother’s age ($r = .227$; $p = 0.05$) and with spiritual/positive coping style, a subcategory of coping ($r = .262$; $p = 0.05$).
3. Weeks of gestation were moderately and negatively correlated with pregnancy-related distress ($r = -.245$; $p = 0.05$).

Though no significant correlations were found between acculturation and birth outcomes, certain trends emerged. Women who were bicultural had the highest mean birth weight. There was a drop in birth weight when the women became more acculturated. Women who were Very Mexican Oriented had the highest number of weeks of gestation. Significant predictors of birth weight were spiritual/positive coping and age; and for weeks of gestation: pregnancy distress and a sense of belonging. The 3rd trimester of pregnancy was significantly different from the 2nd trimester for stress, coping and social support.

These important findings may be utilized to improve prenatal services offered to Mexican and Mexican American women in the areas of social support and coping.

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