

Childhood, Adulthood, and Cumulative Traumatic Experiences as a Predictor of Deportation Fears

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Background

The current political climate has increased deportation fears and these fears may be magnified by prior or current traumatic experiences. While research has focused on the causality of deportation to trauma for Latino children (Rojas-Flores et al., 2017), it has not examined prior traumatic experiences in relation to heightened deportation fears among adults.

The cumulative risk theory states that it is the accumulation of traumatic events rather than one particular traumatic event that influences a particular outcome (Rutter, 1979; Sameroff, 1998). The summation of trauma scores (rather than an individual trauma item) provides a useful basis for distinguishing various domains of trauma that could contribute to deportation fears.

Aim: Building on the theory above, the purpose of the study is to examine four types of trauma indices, along with a cumulative trauma measure, in relation to deportation fears among low-income Latino immigrants. **Hypothesis:** Ask Me!

Methods

The “Stress and Health” Study was a cross-sectional pilot study designed to examine the impact of individual and cumulative stressors through the use of subjective and objective measures of health among low-income Latino adults. Data collection occurred August 2018 – April 2019 at Houston-area community centers. Participants were self-identifying Latinos, ages ranging between 21-36. The study collected surveys, anthropometric measurements, and blood samples.

Trauma. Four subscales and a total score from the Early Trauma Inventory Self Report-Short Form (ETISR-SF) were calculated based on participants’ affirmative responses. Higher scores suggest greater trauma experienced (Bremner, et al., 2007).

Deportation Fears. A one-item question measured the anxiety of deportation on a 5-point Likert scale from *not at all worried* to *extremely worried*. This item was created for this study based on the immigration stress subscale within the Hispanic Stress Inventory-2 (Cervantes, et al., 2016).

Covariates. Included in the regression models were education, employment, marital status, income, number of years living in the US, and generation status.

Analytic Plan. A series of linear regression models were conducted for each trauma subscale, in addition to the cumulative trauma measure, as predictors of deportation fears.

Results

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables (N = 69) [M (SD) [Range] or %]

Dependent Variable	
Deportation Fears	2.86 (1.57) [1-5]
Independent Variables	
Childhood Trauma (Before age 18)	
Physical Trauma	1.38 (1.59) [0 - 4]
Emotional Trauma	1.71 (1.86) [0 - 5]
Sexual Abuse	0.96 (1.59) [0 - 6]
Adulthood Trauma (At the age of 18 or older)	
General Trauma	2.97 (2.50) [0 - 8]
Cumulative Trauma Score	7.06 (6.05) [0 - 21]
Control Variables	
Education	
< High School Degree	36%
High School Degree or More	64%
Employment Status	
Unemployed	62%
Employed	38%
Marital Status	
Single	25%
Married/Cohabiting	75%
Income	
≤ \$29,999	80%
≥ \$30,000	20%
Number of years in the U.S.	10.64 (7.41) [0 - 24]
Generation Status	
1.00 Generation	58%

1.00 Generation = Migrated to the U.S. at 18 years or older of age.

Conclusions

The findings suggest that specific and cumulative traumatic experiences place individuals at risk for greater deportation fears. The unaddressed chronic stress associated with the cumulative traumatic experiences places individuals at risk for many negative health outcomes, including cardiovascular disorders and cancer (Khansari, et al., 2009). Further, the trauma associated with deportation could lead to severe mental health disorders, such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Garcini et al., 2017). Addressing Latino immigrants’ health needs through trauma-informed care is important as prior research suggests that negative health consequences appear to be transmitted to the next generation (Novak, et al., 2017).

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Table 2. Linear Regression Models Predicting the Association between Various Types of Trauma and Deportation Fears (N = 69) [B and (SE of B)]

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Childhood Trauma (<18 years)					
Physical Trauma	0.36 (0.11)**	--	--	--	--
Emotional Trauma	--	0.30 (0.10)**	--	--	--
Sexual Abuse	--	--	0.23 (0.12)	--	--
Adulthood Trauma (≥18 years)					
General Trauma	--	--	--	0.18 (0.74)*	--
Cumulative Trauma Score	--	--	--	--	0.10 (0.03)***
Control Variables					
Education					
< High School Degree	-0.06 (0.39)	-0.23 (0.40)	-0.14 (0.41)	-0.50 (0.41)	-0.11 (0.39)
≥ High School Degree	--	--	--	--	--
Employment Status					
Unemployed	--	--	--	--	--
Employed	-0.37 (0.41)	-0.47 (0.41)	-0.47 (0.43)	-0.38 (0.42)	-0.44 (0.40)
Marital Status					
Single	-0.59 (0.42)	-0.64 (0.43)	-0.55 (0.45)	-0.43 (0.43)	-0.66 (0.42)
Married/Cohabiting	--	--	--	--	--
Income					
≤ \$29,999	0.85 (0.47)	0.64 (0.48)	0.58 (0.51)	0.63 (0.49)	0.58 (0.47)
≥ \$30,000	--	--	--	--	--
Numbers of years in the U.S.	-0.08 (0.04)*	-0.08 (0.04)*	-0.08 (0.04)*	-0.06 (0.04)	-0.07 (0.04)*
Generation Status					
1.00 Generation	-1.55 (0.54)**	-1.48 (0.54)**	-1.31 (0.57)*	-1.26 (0.56)*	-1.39 (0.53)*

1.00 Generation = Migrated to the U.S. at 18 years or older of age.

***p<.001; **p<.01; *p<.05.

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