

Psychosocial and Economic Health of Older Latinos in California

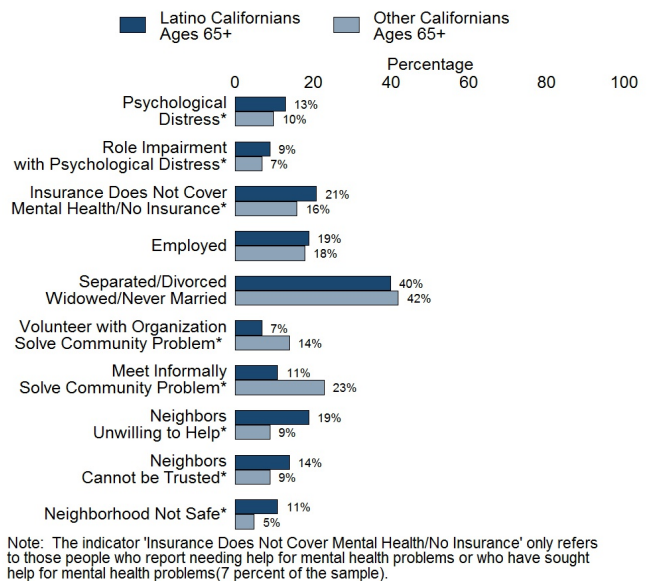
Latino and Latina Californians (hereafter, Latinos), at birth, can expect to live to age 83.¹ This estimate is three years longer than the average Californian at birth, and neighborhood socioeconomic status (SES) appears to have little influence on this number.² Life expectancy at birth for Latinos is longer for women (86) than it is for men (80).¹ This Short Subject employs California Health Information Survey (CHIS)³ indicators of mental health, social environment, and economic security to better understand the increasing number of older Latinos.

MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

It is worth noting that indicators in this report may be associated with nativity and country of origin. Studies have found, for example, that people who are U.S.-born are more likely than those foreign-born to have had major depression in the past year.⁴ Beyond nativity, country of origin (e.g., Mexico, El Salvador) might also be associated with mental health distress. However, because of smaller sample sizes when dividing Latinos by birthplace or country of origin, we choose to present information about Latinos as an aggregated group. Most older Latinos in the CHIS data were categorized as being foreign-born (roughly 54 percent) and of Mexican descent (roughly 75 percent).

Figure 1 reveals that older Latinos appear largely similar to other older Californians across mental health indicators presented. However, there are significant comparisons to make. Older Latinos were 30 percent more likely than were other older Californians to have had mild to severe psychological distress in the past 12 months (13 and 10 percent, respectively). They are also 29 percent more likely than other older Californians to have experienced some kind of role impairment (i.e., social, family, work, and/or chore) with at least moderate psychological distress. Those older Latinos who sought help or thought they should

Figure 1. Mental Health and Community Involvement³



seek help were 31 percent more likely than their counterparts to not have health insurance plans covering mental health care or to report having no insurance.

Being connected to a community through such things as employment, volunteering, or problem solving can facilitate and reinforce mental health, even as being less connected can contribute to and exacerbate poor mental health. Older Latinos were approximately 50 percent less likely than were other older Californians to either seek to solve community problems by volunteering with a formal organization or informally meeting with others, though they did report staying active socially through employment (19 percent). Forty percent reported being separated/divorced/widowed/never married.

Where older adults live and their perceptions of their neighbors and neighborhood might also be related to mental health. Older Latinos were more than twice as likely as other Californians to view their neighbors

as unwilling to help, 50 percent more likely to not trust their neighbors, and 120 percent more likely to not feel safe at least some of the time in their neighborhoods.

ECONOMIC SECURITY

Figure 2 offers a comparison across economic indicators. Overall, older Latinos experienced far less economic security than did other older Californians across each indicator presented. They were roughly four times as likely as other older Californians to experience some combination of not being able to afford food, skipping meals, going hungry, and not eating balanced meals. They were also more likely than other older Californians to be below 100 percent of the poverty level (244 percent more likely), below 200 percent of the poverty level (135 percent more likely), receiving public assistance (114 percent more likely), and paying rent or mortgage (24 percent more likely).

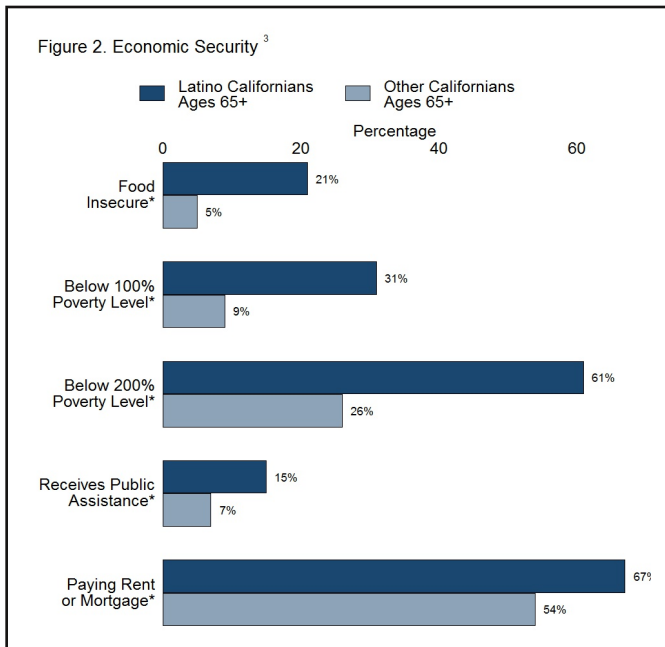
There are three primary housing options important to economic security for older adults: renting, home ownership with a mortgage, and homeownership without a mortgage. Thirty-two percent of older Latinos were renters, 35 percent were home owners with a mortgage, and 33 percent owned their homes outright (not depicted). Presumably, renters and those with a mortgage payment are less secure financially because they have less wealth from home equity than home owners without a mortgage do or no home equity at all. Further, the Institute on Assets and Social Policy (IASP) estimates that 62 percent of Latino senior households nationally spend 30 percent or more of their incomes on housing costs and that 90 percent will have insufficient assets for their remaining years.⁵

BRIEF DISCUSSION

The IASP suggests that economic issues for current and future older Latinos can be addressed by reinforcing social supports such as Social Security, enhancing supports and incentives for employer-based pensions, sustaining funding for senior support services, and fostering sustainable home ownership by prohibiting predatory home loans among other things.⁵

ENDNOTES

1. Burd-Sharps, Sarah and Kristin Lewis. (2011). A Portrait of California: California Human Development Report 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.measureofamerica.org/docs/APortraitOfCA.pdf>
Life expectancy at birth is affected by factors such as infant and youth mortality. Generally, as people live longer, their life expectancy also increases. See for instance Census tables here: <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s0105.pdf>



2. Clarke, Christina A. and Amal Harrati. (2011). Life Expectancy in California's Diverse Population: Recent Estimates by Race/Ethnicity and Neighborhood Social Class. In Nari Rhee (Ed.) Meeting California's Retirement Security Challenge. Berkeley, Ca.: UC Berkeley Center for Labor Research and Education.
In this study, SES was assigned based on block group characteristics.
3. California Health Interview Survey. CHIS 2011 Adult Public Use File, (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, November 2013). Retrieved from <http://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/chis/data/Pages/public-use-data.aspx>. Comparative statements in this report in reference to CHIS data have undergone statistical testing. Comparisons are significant at the .10 level unless otherwise noted. Significant differences in figures are noted with an *.
4. González, Hector M. et al. (2010). "The Epidemiology of Major Depression and Ethnicity in the United States." Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2963677/>
5. Meschede, Tajana, Martha Cronin, Laura Sullivan, and Thomas Shapiro. (2011). "The Crisis of Economic Insecurity for African-American and Latino Seniors." Retrieved from <http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/IASP%20Demos%20Senior%20of%20Color%20Brief%20September%202011.pdf>

This Short Subject was requested by Assembly Member Mariko Yamada, Chair of the Committee on Aging and Longterm Care.

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