



Kinlessness and Social Isolation among African Americans

Presentation to the Seminar on Kinless and Living Alone
in Older Ages

National Academies: Committee on Population

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Outline

- ▶ Racial Differences in Extended Kinship
- ▶ National Survey of American Life (NSAL)
- ▶ Social Isolation and Mental Health
- ▶ Issues to Consider when Measuring Kinlessness and Social Isolation
- ▶ (Not reviewing research on Family, Friend and Church Support networks).
- ▶ (Not reviewing research on negative interactions)

Racial Differences in Extended Kinship: PSID

(Daw, Verdery, Margolis, 2016)

- ▶ Whites are more likely than blacks to have two living parents
- ▶ Whites have more full siblings
- ▶ Blacks have more half siblings
- ▶ Whites are more likely to be married
- ▶ Whites are more likely to have grandparents
- ▶ Blacks have more grandchildren
- ▶ Blacks have more cousins

Percent Kinless -- HRS 55+, 1998-2010,
N = 116,245 Person Waves (Margolis & Verdery, 2017)

	No spouse or Biological Children	
	Men	Women
Non-Hispanic White	6.29	6.72
Non-Hispanic Black	7.02	9.26
Hispanic	3.15	4.90

Sociodemographic Factors and Neighborhood/Environmental Conditions Associated with Social Isolation Among Black Older Adults

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Abstract

Objectives: To investigate sociodemographic factors and neighborhood/environmental conditions associated with social isolation (SI) among Black older adults. **Methods:** We utilized data from the 2014 and 2016 Leave-Behind Questionnaire from the Health and Retirement Study (HRS LBQ) among those who self-identified as Black ($N = 2,323$). Outcome variables for our study included SI from adult children, other family members, friends, disengagement from social participation and religious services, being unmarried, and living alone. These indicators were also combined into an overall SI index. Critical predictors included gender, age, household income, education, employment status, neighborhood cohesion, neighborhood disorder, urbanicity, and region of residence. **Results:** Sociodemographic factors of gender, education and household income were significantly associated with SI indicators. Additionally, some neighborhood/environmental conditions were associated with SI indicators. **Discussion:** SI was found to be patterned by sociodemographic factors. These results can be used to develop effective interventions to mitigate SI among Black older adults.

Keywords

African Americans, environment, neighborhoods, social support

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Social Isolation Indicators and Index ($N = 2.323$).

Variable	Percent (%)	<i>n</i>
Social isolation from adult children		
Isolated from children	20.94	424
Not isolated from children	79.06	1823
Social isolation from other family members		
Isolated from other family members	17.86	360
Not isolated from other family members	82.14	1920
Social isolation from friends		
Isolated from friends	21.45	460
Not isolated from friends	78.55	1824



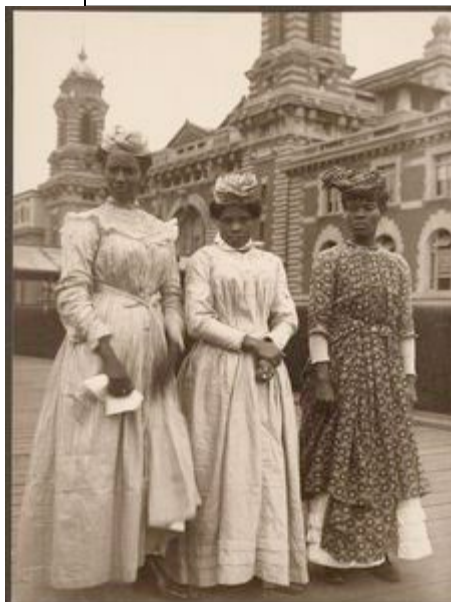
National Survey of American Life: 2001-2003

- ▶ 6,082 Adult interviews
 - ▶ 3,570 African Americans
 - ▶ 1,623 Black-Caribbeans
 - ▶ 891 Non-Hispanic Whites
- ▶ James S. Jackson PI



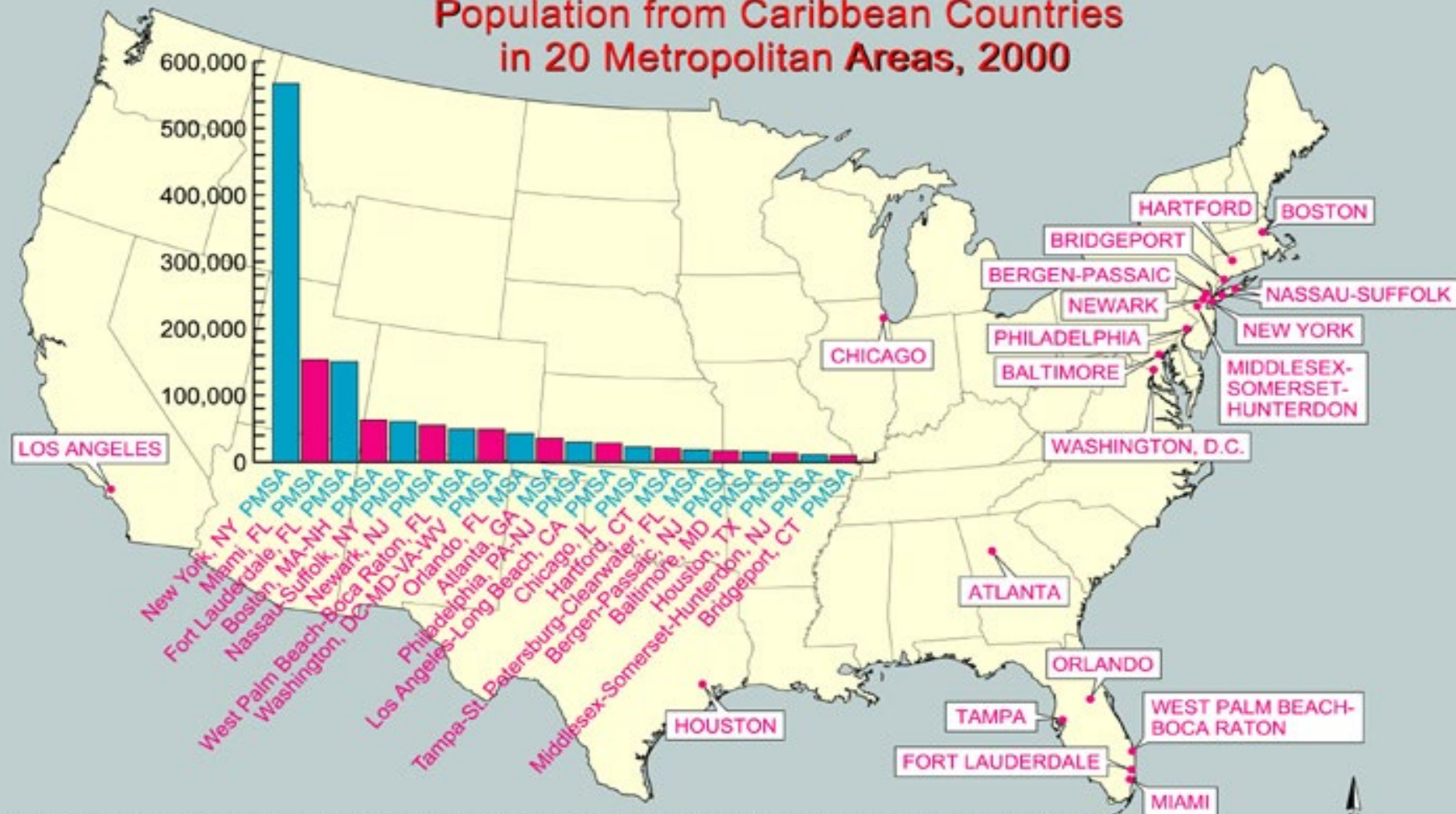


Black Caribbeans In US



From: The Schomburg Center for Research on Black Culture

Population from Caribbean Countries in 20 Metropolitan Areas, 2000



The general concept underlying "Metropolitan Areas" (MAs) is that of a core area containing a large population nucleus together with adjacent communities having a high degree of economic and social integration with that core. Some areas are defined around two, three, or more central cities and most or all of their suburbs.

The major purpose of defining MAs is to enable all federal statistical agencies to use the same geographic definitions in tabulating and publishing data for metropolitan areas.

An area qualifies for recognition as a "Metropolitan Statistical Area" (MSAs) in one of two ways: (1) if it includes a city of at least 50,000 people, or (2) if it includes a Census Bureau-defined urbanized area (of at least 50,000 people) with a total metropolitan population of at least 100,000 (75,000 in New England).

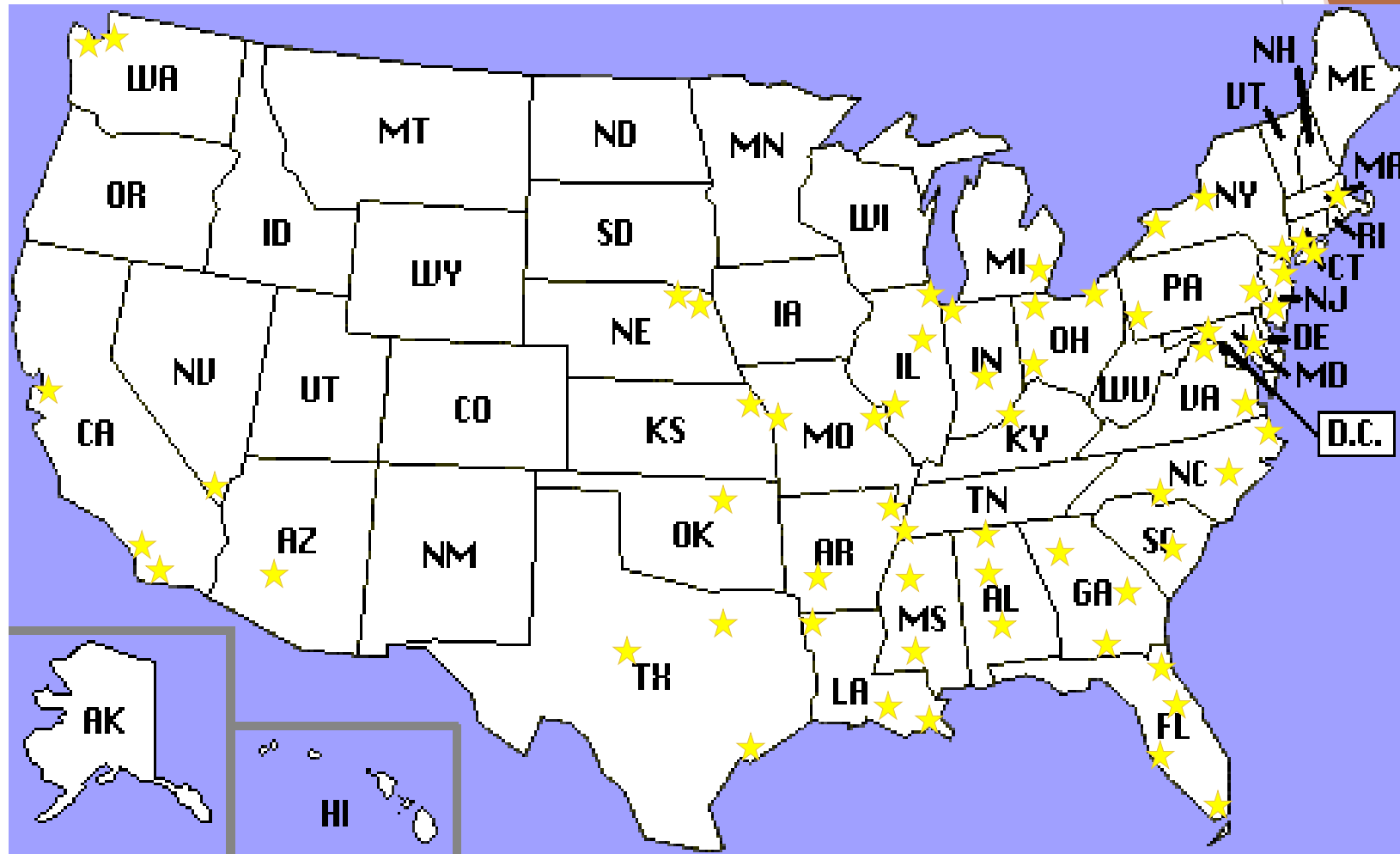
A "Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area" (PMSA) is a subdivision of a large Metropolitan Statistical Area.

Map by Michael Siegel
Rutgers Cartography 2005

Source: Census Bureau



NSAL Sampling Area



Social Isolation from Family and Friends


- ▶ Objective Social isolation - Frequency of Contact
- ▶ Subjective Social Isolation - Subjective Closeness
 - How close are you to your family members?--

Social Isolation from Family and Friends

- ▶ Isolated from both Family and Friends
- ▶ Isolated from Family Only
- ▶ Isolated from Friends Only
- ▶ Not Isolated from either group

Article

Correlates of Objective Social Isolation from Family and Friends among Older Adults

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Abstract: This study examined the correlates of objective social isolation from extended family members and friends among older adults. The analysis is based on the older adult sub-sample of the National Survey of American Life ($n = 1321$). Multinomial logistic regression analyses examined race/ethnicity, demographics, functional health and family and friend network factors as correlates of objective isolation from family and friends. Only 4.47% of respondents were objectively isolated from both their extended family and friends, 10.82% were isolated from their friends, and 7.43% were isolated from their family members. Men were more likely to be objectively isolated from both family and friends and older adults who live with others were significantly more likely to be objectively isolated from their friends. When controlling for subjective social isolation, the two measures of functional health were significantly associated with objective social isolation. In particular, higher levels of self-care impairment decreased the risk of being objectively isolated from friends only, whereas higher mobility impairment was associated with an increased likelihood of being objectively isolated from friends only. Subjective evaluations of social isolation from family and friends were consistently associated with being objectively isolated from family and friends. There were no significant differences between African-Americans, Black Caribbeans and non-Hispanic Whites in objective isolation. These and other findings are discussed in detail.

Keywords: African-American; Afro-Caribbean; social support; extended family; kinship; support network

No Racial/Ethnic
Differences in
Objective
Isolation

Living Alone not
associated with
objective
isolation

Objective and Subjective Isolation among African Americans and Black Caribbeans (18 and older) (Taylor, Taylor & Chatters, 2016)

	African American	Caribbean	Total
	n = 3570	n = 1621	N = 5191
Objective Social Isolation n (%)			
Objective Isolation from Both Family and Friends	146 (4.24)	50 (3.30)	196 (4.17)
Objective Isolation from Family Only	191 (6.05)	108 (8.30)	299 (6.21)
Objective Isolation from Friends Only	494 (14.49)	159 (11.31)	653 (14.26)
Not Objectively Isolated from either group	2705 (75.22)	1290 (77.09)	3995 (75.35)
Subjective Social Isolation n (%)			
Subjective Isolation from Both Family and Friends	74 (2.12)	35 (2.16)	109 (2.12)
Subjective Isolation from Family Only	150 (4.34)	76 (3.16)	226 (4.25)
Subjective Isolation from Friends Only	388 (10.81)	186 (11.47)	574 (10.85)
Not Subjectively Isolated from either group	2843 (82.74)	1289 (83.21)	4132 (82.77)

Social Isolation From Family and Friends and Mental Health Among African Americans and Black Caribbeans

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Social isolation is a significant social problem in the United States that many health and welfare organizations have begun to acknowledge and address. Unfortunately, extremely little research focuses on social isolation among ethnic minority populations. This study investigated the association between social isolation from family and friends and the mental health of African Americans and Black Caribbeans. Using data from the National Survey of American Life (2001–2003), we explore 2 indicators of mental health: depressive symptoms (CES-D) and serious psychological distress (Kessler 6). The negative binomial regression analysis examined both objective isolation (infrequent contact) and subjective isolation (lack of emotional closeness) from family and friends. Overall study findings indicated that infrequent contact (objective social isolation) and diminished emotional closeness (subjective social isolation) from family and friends were associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms and serious psychological distress for both African Americans and Black Caribbeans. The addition of subjective social isolation to regression models attenuated the association between objective social isolation and depressive symptoms for both groups. However, the addition of subjective social isolation attenuated the association between serious psychological distress for African Americans but not for Black Caribbeans. These findings contribute to the very limited, but growing body of research on the negative association between social isolation and the mental and physical health of ethnic minorities.

Public Policy Relevance Statement

Objective and subjective social isolation is harmful to the mental health of African Americans and Black Caribbeans. However, affective features of social isolation (lacking feelings of closeness to family members and friends) are more important than social contact with family and friends for mental health. Policies targeting both subjective isolation (e.g., changing perceptions of closeness to family members and friends) and objective isolation (increasing frequency of contact with family members and friends) are important in reducing symptoms of depression and psychological distress. Policy and practice efforts that focus on interventions that strengthen social integration and connections can yield benefits in terms of mental health and well-being.

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The authors have no conflicts of interest.

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Negative Binominal Regression Analysis of Social Isolation, Depressive Symptoms (CES-D) and SPD (Kessler 6) Among African Americans

	Depressive Symptoms		Serious Psychological Distress	
Objective Social Isolation	b(se)	b(se)	b(se)	b(se)
Objective Isolation from Both Family and Friends	0.35(0.06)***	0.24(0.07)**	0.32(0.10)**	0.26(0.10)*
Objective Isolation from Family Only	0.13(0.06)*	0.10(0.06)	0.28(0.10)**	0.24(0.10)*
Objective Isolation from Friends Only	0.17(0.04)***	0.11(0.05)*	0.15(0.05)**	0.11(0.05)*
Not Objectively Isolated from either group	1	1	1	1
Subjective Social Isolation				
Subjective Isolation from Both Family and Friends	--	0.34(0.07)***	--	0.27(0.10)*
Subjective Isolation from Family Only	--	0.18(0.09)*	--	0.19(0.10)
Subjective Isolation from Friends Only	--	0.22(0.05)***	--	0.18(0.08)*
Not Subjectively Isolated from either group	--	1	--	1



Objective and Subjective Social Isolation and Psychiatric Disorders Among African Americans

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Abstract

Social isolation is a major problem in the United States that has adverse impacts on health and well-being. However, few studies investigate social isolation among African Americans or the impact of social isolation on psychiatric disorders. This study addresses this gap by investigating the impact of objective (absence of contact with others) and subjective (lacking feelings of closeness to others) social isolation on psychiatric disorders among African Americans. The sample includes 3570 African Americans from the National Survey of American Life. Regression models were used to test the impact of objective and subjective isolation on 12-month MDD, any 12-month DSM disorder and number of 12-month DSM disorders. Analyses indicated that subjective isolation from family only, friends only, and both groups were associated with greater odds of meeting criteria for 12-month MDD, any 12-month disorder and number of 12-month DSM disorders. However, objective isolation was unrelated to either measure of psychiatric disorder. Study findings indicate that affective characteristics of social isolation (feelings of closeness with family and friends) are more significant for psychiatric disorders than are objective features (social contact). Our discussion notes that the connections between subjective and objective social isolation and psychiatric disorders are complex and potentially reciprocally associated with one another. Clinical practice should focus on both possible associations.

Keywords Social disconnectedness · African American mental health · Social relationships · Social networks

Social isolation has become a major public health crisis in many industrialized countries, including the United States. This is because social isolation is associated with many negative mental and physical health outcomes including mortality (Alcaraz et al. 2018; Holt-Lunstad et al. 2015; Holt-Lunstad et al. 2010), worse self-rated physical health (Cornwell and Waite 2009; Coyle and Dugan 2012; Miyawaki 2015), and greater cognitive decline and impairment (Shankar et al. 2013; Zunzunegui et al. 2003). Given the numerous physical and mental health problems associated with social isolation, many prominent organizations are dedicated to preventing and mitigating its negative effects. This includes the AARP

Foundation (Elder and Retrum 2012; Li et al. 2019), the American Public Health Association (Klineberg 2016), the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the National Academies of Engineering, Medicine, and Science (Institute of Medicine 2014), and the World Health Organization (2007). In addition, the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare has declared the Eradication of Social Isolation as one of 12 Grand Challenges of Social Work (Lubben et al. 2015).

The Eradicate Social Isolation Grand Challenge for Social Work (Lubben et al. 2015) clearly and succinctly lays out research that documents the importance of social isolation as a major risk factor for morbidity, mortality and mental disorders. Social isolation is commonly perceived as an issue that mostly concerns older adults. However, the Grand Challenges report documents its impacts on adults of all ages, children, and adolescents and underscores the importance of family and friend support networks and ties for understanding isolation. Despite these contributions, the report does not discuss social isolation among ethnic minorities, especially among African Americans, due to

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Logistic regression analysis of social isolation and Any 12 month DSM-IV disorder among African Americans

Objective Social Isolation	OR (95%CI)	OR (95%CI)
Objective Isolation from Both Family and Friends	1.52 (0.80, 2.87)	1.05 (0.51, 2.17)
Objective Isolation from Family Only	1.39 (0.84, 2.32)	1.14 (0.60, 2.16)
Objective Isolation from Friends Only	1.21 (0.87, 1.70)	1.08 (0.73, 1.60)
Not Objectively Isolated from either group	1.00	1.00
Subjective Social Isolation		
Subjective Isolation from Both Family and Friends	-	3.24 (1.52, 6.91)**
Subjective Isolation from Family Only	-	2.18 (1.02, 4.66)*
Subjective Isolation from Friends Only	-	1.46 (1.03, 2.06)*
Not Subjectively Isolated from either group	-	1.00



The Intersection of Pain Outcomes and Social Isolation Among African Americans

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Abstract

There is increasing evidence suggesting the influence social isolation has on health outcomes and mental well-being. Chronic medical conditions, such as pain, have been shown to impact social relationships and isolation among majority populations, but there is little evidence documenting this relationship among African Americans. To address this lack of scholarly work, the current study aimed to examine subjective and objective social isolation, pain interference with daily life, and problems with pain in a sample of African American adults 18+ years of age. Taken from the National Survey of American Life: Coping with Stress in the 21st Century (NSAL), results showed that participants who were objectively isolated from family only were more likely to have a chronic health problem that was associated with increased pain. Data further showed that those reporting subjective isolation from both family and friends experienced greater interference from pain than those who were not isolated from family and friends. Findings from this study acknowledge a larger issue that addresses the impact social isolation has on health, quality of life, and general well-being. Recognizing the influence of such may allow systems to acknowledge the determinants that perpetuate social isolation, while still recognizing the needs of marginalized groups.

Logistic regression analysis of social isolation and Chronic pain among African Americans

Objective Social Isolation	OR (95%CI)	OR (95%CI)
Objective Isolation from Both Family and Friends	1.39(0.93,2.08)	1.15(0.72,1.84)
Objective Isolation from Family Only	1.46(1.03,2.08)*	1.27(0.85,1.89)
Objective Isolation from Friends Only	1.25(0.99,1.58)	1.17(0.90,1.53)
Not Objectively Isolated from either group	1	1
Subjective Social Isolation		
Subjective Isolation from Both Family and Friends	--	2.45(1.27,4.70)**
Subjective Isolation from Family Only	--	1.89(1.22,2.94)**
Subjective Isolation from Friends Only	--	1.11(0.86,1.43)
Not Subjectively Isolated from either group		1

Special Issue: Aging Alone? International Perspectives on Social Integration and Isolation

Race and Objective Social Isolation: Older African Americans, Black Caribbeans, and Non-Hispanic Whites

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Decision Editor: Deborah Carr, PhD

Abstract

Objectives: Social isolation is a major risk factor for poor physical and mental health among older adults. This study investigates the correlates of objective social isolation among older African Americans, Black Caribbean immigrants, and non-Hispanic Whites.

Methods: The analysis is based on the older subsample ($n = 1,439$) of the National Survey of American Life. There are eight indicators of objective social isolation: no contact with neighbors, neighborhood groups, friends, family members, religious congregation members, not being married and no romantic involvement, living alone, and not being a parent.

Results: Very few older Americans are socially isolated from family and friends. Non-Hispanic Whites are more likely than both African Americans and Black Caribbeans to live alone, to be childless, and have limited contact with religious congregation members. For both African Americans and Black Caribbeans, being female is protective against social isolation, but for both populations, men are more likely to be married or have a romantic partner. For African Americans, residing in the South is also protective against social isolation.

Discussion: This analysis provides greater clarity on racial and ethnic differences in social isolation among older adults, as well as within-group differences in objective social isolation among African Americans and Black Caribbeans.

Keywords: Afro-Caribbean, Church support, Kinship, Social network, Social support

Logistic regression analysis of Race and Ethnicity Differences in Indicators of Objective Social Isolation (African Americans as Reference)

Objective Social Isolation	OR (95%CI)	OR (95%CI)
	Non-Latino Whites	Black Caribbeans
From Family		
From Friends		
Congregational Members	2.36(1.67-3.33)***	
Neighbors		
Neighborhood Groups		
Childless	1.70(1.05-2.75)*	0.33(0.12-0.90)*
Living Alone	2.15(1.33-3.47)**	
Unmarried and do not have Romantic Relationship		

Issues to Consider when Measuring Kinlessness and Social Isolation

- ▶ 1. Being Unmarried does not mean not having a romantic partner.

Marriage and Romantic Involvement Among Aged African Americans

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This study examined the extent and structural correlates of marriage, romantic involvement, and preference for romantic involvement among older adults in a national sample of African Americans. Multivariate analyses indicated that gender, age, education, income, and urban residence were important predictors of marriage and romantic involvement. In particular, men and younger respondents were more likely than women and older respondents to be married, have a romantic involvement, or be desirous of a romantic involvement. The effects of the decreased probability of marriage for future cohorts of older African American women on their supportive networks, living arrangements, and income adequacy are discussed.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Gender differences in marriage, romantic involvement, and desire for romantic involvement among older African Americans

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Table 2. Gender differences in romantic involvement/desire, African Americans aged 55 and older, National Survey of American Life (N = 766).

	Men (N = 273)		Women (N = 493)		Total (N = 766)
	N	%	N	%	N
Romantic Involvement/Desire					
Married or cohabiting	126	57.33	111	29.35	237
Romantically involved	45	13.14	53	10.07	98
Unpartnered but desire romantic involvement	28	7.51	53	10.86	81
Neither has nor desire main romantic involvement	74	22.01	276	49.72	350

Issues to Consider when Measuring Kinlessness and Social Isolation

- ▶ 2. Religious Service Attendance is an inaccurate proxy for isolation from church members.


Frequency see/write/phone church members (NSAL 18+ total sample)

	Percent	N
Few Times A Year	11.0%	667
Never	16.7%	1018

Issues to Consider when Measuring Kinlessness and Social Isolation

- ▶ 3. Fictive Kinship ties have only been measured in the NSAL.

Fictive Kin Networks among African Americans, Black Caribbeans, and Non-Latino Whites

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Christina J. Cross² , and Dawne Mouzon³**

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	%	N
Has Fictive Kin: Yes	87.43	5260
Receipt of Support from Fictive Kin		
Never	11.07	612
Not too often	27.35	1482
Fairly often	37.34	1716
Very often	24.24	1116

Reciprocal Family, Friendship and Church Support Networks of African Americans: Findings from the National Survey of American Life

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Abstract This study examined reciprocal support networks involving extended family, friends and church members among African Americans. Our analysis examined specific patterns of reciprocal support (i.e., received only, gave only, both gave and received, neither gave or received), as well as network characteristics (i.e., contact and subjective closeness) as correlates of reciprocal support. The analysis is based on the African American subsample of the National Survey of American Life. Overall, our findings indicate that African Americans are very involved in reciprocal support networks with their extended family, friends and church members. Respondents were most extensively involved in reciprocal supports with extended family members, followed closely by friends and church networks. Network characteristics (i.e., contact and subjective closeness) were significantly and consistently associated with involvement with reciprocal support exchanges for all three networks. These and other findings are discussed in detail. This study complements previous work on the complementary roles of family, friend and congregational support networks, as well as studies of racial differences in informal support networks.

Keywords Black family · Extended family · Social support · Informal support · Black church · Religion

Introduction

Extended family members are an important source of informal support to African Americans. Research has found that African American families are important when coping with mental health problems (Chatters et al. 2015; Levine et al. 2015; Lincoln et al. 2012; Taylor et al. 2015; Woodward et al. 2008) as well as providing economic assistance (O'Brien 2012), emotional support and tangible services to meet the challenges of daily life (Lincoln et al. 2013; Taylor et al. 2013). The vast majority of research on social support among African Americans investigates the receipt of support from extended family members, with considerably less attention on the role of friends and church members in social support networks. Further, research tends to be one directional, focusing on either providing or receiving support. Investigations of reciprocal patterns of support involving family, friends and church members are especially scarce. The goal of this study is to investigate the correlates of reciprocal support exchanges involving family, friends and church members using data from a national sample of African American adults. The literature review begins with a discussion of research on reciprocal support between family members, followed by research on friendship networks and church-based informal support networks. Next, we present information on social exchange

TABLE 2 Ordinary least squares regression models identifying correlates of subjective family closeness and frequency of family contact among African Americans, National Survey of American Life (NSAL)

	Model (1) Subjective family closeness		Model (2) Family contact		Model (3) Family contact	
	β	b(SE)	β	b(SE)	β	b(SE)
Age	-0.03	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.09*	-0.01 (0.00)*	-0.13**	-0.01 (0.00)**
Female (vs. male)	-0.05	-0.05 (0.03)	0.30***	0.30 (0.07)***	0.34***	0.34 (0.06)***
Education	0.01	0.00 (0.01)	0.04	0.02 (0.01)	0.03	0.01 (0.01)
Household income	0.02	0.02 (0.02)	0.05	0.05 (0.04)	0.03	0.04 (0.04)
Region (vs. South)						
Northeast	-0.03	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.27**	-0.27 (0.09)**	-0.25**	-0.25 (0.09)**
North Central	-0.05	-0.05 (0.04)	-0.00	-0.00 (0.09)	0.03	0.03 (0.08)
West	-0.16*	-0.16 (0.06)*	-0.32***	-0.32 (0.07)***	-0.22**	-0.22 (0.07)**
Marital status (vs. first marriage)						
Remarried	-0.08	-0.08 (0.06)	-0.04	-0.04 (0.08)	0.01	0.01 (0.09)
Cohabiting	-0.03	-0.03 (0.05)	0.03	0.03 (0.09)	0.06	0.06 (0.09)
Separated	-0.12*	-0.12 (0.06)*	-0.07	-0.07 (0.13)	0.02	0.02 (0.11)
Divorced	-0.09	-0.09 (0.05)	-0.03	-0.03 (0.11)	0.03	0.03 (0.10)
Widowed	0.01	0.01 (0.05)	0.13	0.13 (0.17)	0.10	0.10 (0.16)
Never married	-0.01	-0.01 (0.04)	-0.10	-0.10 (0.08)	-0.09	-0.09 (0.07)
Material hardship	-0.06***	-0.05 (0.01)***	-0.08**	-0.06 (0.02)**	-0.04	-0.03 (0.02)
Served in military (vs. did not serve)	-0.13**	-0.13 (0.04)**	-0.23*	-0.23 (0.11)*	-0.13	-0.13 (0.09)
Previously incarcerated (vs. never incarcerated)	-0.09*	-0.09 (0.04)*	-0.26*	-0.26 (0.10)*	-0.18*	-0.18 (0.09)*

Other Issues to Consider when Measuring Kinlessness and Social Isolation

- ▶ 1. More research is needed in general on Kinlessness and Social Isolation among African Americans
- ▶ 2. Both within group and work on racial differences is needed.
- ▶ 3. Research is needed on the growing immigrant population including African immigrants.
- ▶ 4. Oversampling minority groups is cost-effective but may reduce accuracy.
- ▶ 5. Research is needed on non-kin, church support, friends, and distant kin.
- ▶ 6. The term romantic involvement is more appropriate for Black Americans than Living Apart Together.
- ▶ 7. People who want to be alone and are off the “Grid” are not included in our surveys (living in rural Alaska).



Conclusion and Future Directions

- ▶ 1. Extremely little research on social isolation and loneliness among African Americans
- ▶ 2. Most people are not isolated from family and friends
- ▶ 3. Social Isolation is associated with more symptoms of depression and anxiety
- ▶ 4. Subjective isolation is a more consistent correlate of poor mental health than objective isolation.
- ▶ 5. More qualitative research on social isolation
- ▶ 6. More national probability studies on African Americans, Black Caribbeans, and African immigrants are needed.



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