Factors Contributing to Seeking Preventive Dental Visits among Mexican Americans in Central Indiana
An Integrative Model Approach

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Background

• Latinos in the USA: large, expanding, and highly diverse ethnic minority
• Health disparities population
• Understanding causes of poorer health status → Better health and health care programs
• Multiple manifestations and impacts of poor oral health: Are they important?
Background

• They are! Dental caries (tooth decay) commonest childhood chronic disease: 5+ times more than asthma in USA
• Also common in adults and older adults
• Affects disproportionately minorities and low income people
• 51 M school hours and 164 M work hours lost each year due to dental problems
Background

- Periodontal (gum) diseases are also common in adults and older adults
- Affect disproportionately minorities and low income people
- Periodontitis is linked to T2 diabetes
- Evidence supports associations between oral and systemic conditions, including CVD, asthma, stroke, PT/LBW pregnancy
Current Situation

- Latinos and oral health disparities
- High experience of tooth decay
- Gingivitis and periodontal (gum) disease
- Considerable barriers in access to care
- Low socio-economic status
- So, the solution is we need more dentists and more dental care. Right?
Partial knowledge

• NB: Focus on Mexican-Americans (people of Mexican origin). MAs ~2/3 of Latinos
• Norms about oral health and dental care
• Dental culture of episodic clinical care
• Access to decay-inducing food/drinks?
• Self-care and prevention – use of tap water, brushing, flossing, mouth rinses
Partial knowledge

• We know, however, that MAs:
  o Rely on peer support to seek care and info
  o Incorporate familismo and personalismo
  o Lack many formal health resources
  o Vary in their health status and need profiles
  o Share some traits across subgroups (eg, rural vs. urban) but are also quite diverse
Theoretical Framework for Understanding the Behavior of Seeking Preventive Dental Care

Background Influence

Demographics (Sex, Age)  Dental insurance  Dental beliefs  Past behavior

Attitudes toward going regularly to a dentist for preventive care

Perceived norms regarding going regularly to a dentist for preventive care

Self-efficacy for going regularly to a dentist for preventive care

Intention to go regularly to a dentist for preventive care

1Hypothesized to influence intention through attitudes, perceived norms, and/or self-efficacy.
Study Objectives

• To test theory-based predictors of intention to seek preventive dental care in a sample of Mexican Americans in Central Indiana

• To test whether the effects of background variables on intention to seek preventive dental care are mediated through attitudes, perceived norms, or self-efficacy
Methods

• 160 Mexican Americans recruited from church congregations and lay community organizations in Central Indiana
• 64% female
• Age: 34 ± 11 years
• Structural Equation Modeling used to test hypothesized paths
Results
(standardized coefficients and p-values for significant paths shown)
Key Findings

• **Attitudes** and **self-efficacy** were significantly associated with **intention** to seek preventive dental care.

• The effect of **dental beliefs** on **intention** was mediated by **attitudes** and **self-efficacy**.

• The effect of **past behavior** on **intention** was mediated by **self-efficacy**.

• **Past behavior** was related to **perceived norms**.

• **Having dental insurance** was marginally significantly associated with **self-efficacy**.
Limitations

- Relatively small sample size
- Sample limited to Mexican Americans in Central Indiana; no claims for wide generalizability
- Urban-based Mexican Americans
- We omit an investigation of important structural influences (e.g., health systems, public policies)
- Cross-sectional design precludes solid suggestions about causality
- Largely recruited in Catholic parishes or ancillary groups
Strengths

• Few studies in a new, evolving Midwest gateway location for Latinos: faster growth than traditional Latino areas
• Novel use of IM framework to disaggregate factors underlying oral health disparities
• Controlling for nationality of origin instead of aggregating all Latinos in one large category – effects unknown
• Yields insights into clinical care implications, and supports culturally sensitive understanding of oral health
Implications

• Interventions to increase preventive dental care seeking behavior among Mexican Americans should focus on changing attitudes and increasing self-efficacy
• Findings support use of interventions to influence dental beliefs
• Previous experience with preventive dental care generally positive; increases self-efficacy
• Improving access to dental insurance also will likely increase self-efficacy
Thanks for your time!

Questions, comments?

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