

Using Prayer and Yoga to Reduce Stress among Hispanics with Chronic Conditions

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The purpose of this pilot and formative study was to explore the receptivity of using prayer and yoga to reduce stress among Montana (MT) Hispanics with diabetes and/or hypertension. Stress is a known contributor to poorer diabetes and cardiovascular management. Yet, daily stress is one of the most common complaints among Hispanics with chronic conditions, including diabetes and/or hypertension. Evidence supports that meditation and/or meditative type activities such as yoga are effective in reducing stress biomarkers and positively impact metabolic and cardiovascular health. Evidence also supports that Hispanics are responsive to parish-linked services. This is not surprising since religion and health are tightly connected in most Hispanic cultures and nearly 70% Hispanics identify as being Roman Catholic, with the majority being actively involved in religious services. Thus anchoring a self-management health intervention (prayer/yoga for reducing stress) within a faith-based institution has great potential for success.

In a review of the literature, no studies could be identified that combined prayer and yoga as an activity to reduce stress among Hispanics with chronic disease. The purpose of the pilot study was to specifically evaluate if using prayer and yoga could reduce stress and if the population of focus was receptive to such an approach. The pilot study involved the targeted/ recruitment of n=30 Hispanic men and women, residing in MT, with hypertension and/or diabetes. Criteria for participation in the study were: self-identified Latino/Hispanic; adult persons 21 years and older that have diabetes or hypertension; able to speak Spanish or English languages; reside in MT; open to prayer, in the Catholic form, as part of the activity (participants were not required to be Catholic to take part, but had to be comfortable with using Catholic doctrine during the yoga activity and yoga sessions as these were held in the Catholic parishes across rural Montana; self-identified as being able to independently engage in yoga – level activity.

The specific aims of the study were to: 1) Evaluate the receptivity of using a prayer/yoga session as a venue for reducing stress among Hispanics with diabetes or hypertension that reside in MT participatory action based –approach; 2) Employ the results from the pilot study to inform and aid in the design of an intervention study. The pilot study employed an exploratory descriptive (formative) methodology that used Participatory Action Research (PAR) as the guiding approach. Multi-methods were used for the gathering of data and to address the aims of this investigation. An interpretive descriptive methodology was used for the qualitative arm of the study. Data from debriefing groups (post yoga), participant observation, and field notes were the methods for collecting qualitative data. The quantifiable (quantitative) arm of the study used a descriptive approach and data sources were the pre/post stress surveys [Stress scale and Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-4)] and demographic information collected from all participants. To characterize the study group, demographic characteristics and key variables for all participants were summarized for the group. These attributes included age, gender, acculturation (primary language spoken), and stress experience.

Biography:

Dr. Benavides-Vaello is an associate professor in the College of Nursing at Montana State University-Bozeman, and Director (Department Chairperson) for the Missoula Nursing Campus. The focus of her research is the sociocultural experiences (food practices, health status monitoring, cultural values and norms, behavioral health concerns), social determinants, and self-care of low income Hispanics with chronic conditions. She is an international scholar, researcher and the author of numerous peer reviewed scholarly publications and co-authored chapters in two books: U.S.-Mexico Border Health: Issues For Regional And Migrant Populations, and AIDS Crossing Borders, The Spread Of HIV Among Migrant Latinos. Dr. Benavides-Vaello holds a bachelor's in nursing and doctorate in nursing from The University of Texas, School of Nursing, Austin, Texas, and a Master of Public Affairs (focus on health policy) also from The University of Texas, LBJ School of Public Affairs, Austin, Texas.