NEIGHBORHOOD SOCIAL COHESION AND THE HEALTH OF NATIVE HAWAIIAN AND OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER OLDER ADULTS

KEY FINDINGS

- Respondents with higher perceived neighborhood social cohesion levels were less likely to have serious psychological distress than respondents with lower levels of perceived social cohesion.

- Respondents with higher levels of perceived neighborhood social cohesion were less likely to have a memory problem than respondents with lower levels of perceived social cohesion.

- There was no statistical association between social cohesion and self-rated health.

Why study neighborhood social cohesion and the health of Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander (NHPI) kūpuna?

Despite the growing evidence of the positive impact of neighborhood social cohesion on the health and well-being of older adults, little is known about this association among NHPI older adults. It is important to explore potential new pathways for decreasing persistent inequities faced by NHPI older adults. Thus, examining the association between neighborhood social cohesion and health may help direct prevention strategies to promote health equity.

Social Cohesion

Social cohesion is the presence of strong social bonds and the absence of conflict. To measure neighborhood social cohesion, respondents rated their level of agreement (1 = definitely agree, 4 = definitely disagree) with four statements about their neighborhood: “People in this neighborhood help each other out;” “There are people I can count on in this neighborhood;” “People in this neighborhood can be trusted;” and “This is a close-knit neighborhood.” The average of the reverse-coded summed score was used, where a higher score indicates greater levels of social cohesion.

Implications

NHPI cultural values stress the importance of family and community to health and well-being. Strengthening social cohesion may present a viable avenue for reducing the health inequities of NHPI older adults. Policy and program implications include addressing two issues that threaten neighborhood cohesiveness. One is the growing epidemic of social isolation among older adults, partially due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, but also due to the increased geographic dispersal of family members and the need for members of low-income families to work multiple jobs. The other is the rapidly growing cost of housing which may force older adults, especially those on fixed incomes, to relocate from their neighborhoods, jeopardizing their ability to age in place.