

Do social interactions explain ethnic differences in psychological distress and the protective effect of local ethnic density? A cross-sectional study of 226 487 adults in Australia

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Key Words:

mental health, psychological distress, social interactions, ethnic density, neighbourhood

Research aim:

Examined the hypothesis that ethnic density benefits mental health through increasing social interactions. We examined this hypothesis in 226 487 adults from 19 ethnic groups aged 45 years and older in Australia.

Results/Conclusion:

Psychological distress was reported by 11% of Australians born in Australia. The risk of experiencing psychological distress varied among ethnic minorities and by country of birth (eg, 33% for the Lebanese born in Lebanon and 4% for the Swiss born in Switzerland). These differences remained after full adjustment. Social interactions varied between ethnic groups and were associated with lower psychological distress and ethnic density. Ethnic density was associated with reduced psychological distress for some groups. This association, however, was explained by individual and neighbourhood characteristics and not by social interactions.

Implications:

Social interactions are important correlates of mental health, but fully explain neither the ethnic differences in psychological distress nor the protective effect of own-group density.

Cultural Group(s):

CALD (19 'ethnic groups')

Location of study:

New South Wales

Age group:

45+

Number included in study:

226,487

Type of participants:

adults from 19 ethnic groups (including Australia born)

Research approach:

Quantitative

Type of data:

Secondary data sources used:

45 and Up Study

Specific scales or analytical techniques used:

Kessler Psychological Distress Scale, Duke Social Support Index

Implications/ Recommendations:

Notes:

Larger study - data from 45 and Up Study in NSW