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Lower Cardiovascular Risk for Self-Employed Latinas

A study links self-employment to lower rates of high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes, overall poor health and binge drinking in Latinas.

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A study published in Ethnicity & Disease found a connection between cardiovascular disease and work structure among Latinas. Specifically, self-employed Latinas reported lower rates of high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes, poor health and binge drinking compared with Latinas who work for a salary.

"Hispanic women experience a disproportionate burden of heart disease compared to non-Hispanic women," said senior study author Kimberly Narain, MD, MPH, PhD, in a University of California, Los Angeles press release. "This is the first study to link the structure of work with risks for heart disease among this group of women."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), heart disease is the leading cause of death for men and women in the United States, and Latinos have a higher burden of risk factors for cardiovascular disease, including obesity, high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes. In 2024, Latino adults were 13% more likely to have diabetes and 12% more likely to have obesity, according to the Office of Minority Health.

Using Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System data from 2003 to 2022, researchers examined the association between employment type, cardiovascular disease and health outcomes for 165,600 Latinas. About 21,000 or 13% of Latinas in the study were self-employed.

Self-employed Latinas reported fewer risk factors associated with cardiovascular disease, including a 1.7 percentage-point reduction in diabetes (23% decline), 3.3 percentage-point decrease in high blood pressure (17% decline) and 5.9 percentage-point decrease in obesity (15% decline). Self-employed Latinas were 11% more likely to report exercising and reported lower rates of binge drinking (2 percentage-point lower chance and 2% decline) and overall poor health (2.5 percentage-point lower chance and 13% decline).

The researchers noted some limitations of their study, particularly the self-reported nature of the survey data. Such data may be less reliable among ethnic and racial minorities or those from a lower socioeconomic background, the researchers wrote. Additionally, the survey did not ask the women to disclose their specific occupations.

While the researchers found a relationship between self-employment and lower chronic illness and cardiovascular disease risk, the study did not prove a causal association.

“The next step in the research is to conduct studies that are able to better assess whether the structure of work is a cause of higher heart disease risks among Hispanic women,” Narain said.

To learn more about cardiovascular disease and health disparities, read:

- “Heart Disease, Stroke Deaths Down, Yet Still Kill More in U.S. Than Any Other Cause,”
- “Single Blood Test Predicts 30-Year Cardiovascular Disease Risks for Women” and
- “How Exercise May Prevent Cardiovascular Disease in Breast Cancer Survivors.”

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