

Spring 5-2021

## **Racial/Ethnic Differences in the Benefit of Social Networks on Anxiety Symptoms**

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### **Recommended Citation**

Vargas Calderon, Melissa and Robinette, Jennifer, "Racial/Ethnic Differences in the Benefit of Social Networks on Anxiety Symptoms" (2021). *Student Scholar Symposium Abstracts and Posters*. 467. [https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/cusrd\\_abstracts/467](https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/cusrd_abstracts/467)

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# Racial/Ethnic Differences in the Benefit of Social Networks on Anxiety Symptoms

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## Background

Anxiety affects 40 million adults in the U.S. annually<sup>1</sup>

Communities of color have lower prevalence rates of anxiety disorders relative to Non-Hispanic Whites, despite experiencing more lifetime adversity characteristics<sup>2-3</sup>

Contact with social network, particularly closely knit social networks among Hispanics, buffer against anxiety<sup>4</sup>

### Research Questions:

Are there racial/ethnic differences in anxiety symptoms, and in the benefit of social contact on anxiety?

## Method

### Data:

Health and Retirement Study (HRS): nationally representative of adults aged 51+ in the United States

- 2010/2012 waves were used to incorporate anxiety symptoms

### Outcome:

 Beck Anxiety Inventory

“How often did you feel that way during the past week?”

- E.g., I had fear of the worst happening, was nervous, hands trembling, fear of dying, felt faint.
- 1 = never – 4 = most of the time ( $\alpha = 0.82$ )

**Contact with Social Network:** with children, other family members, and friends

- “How often do you do each of the following: meet up, speak on the phone, write or email?”
- 1 = three times or more/week – 6 = less than once a year/never ( $\alpha = 0.50$ ,  $\alpha = 0.53$ ,  $\alpha = 0.53$ )

**Covariates:** age, sex, education, household wealth

### Analysis:

Two weighted linear regression models were used to predict the hypothesized main effects and interactions

## Results

Figure 1. Race/ethnicity x social contact interaction predicting anxiety

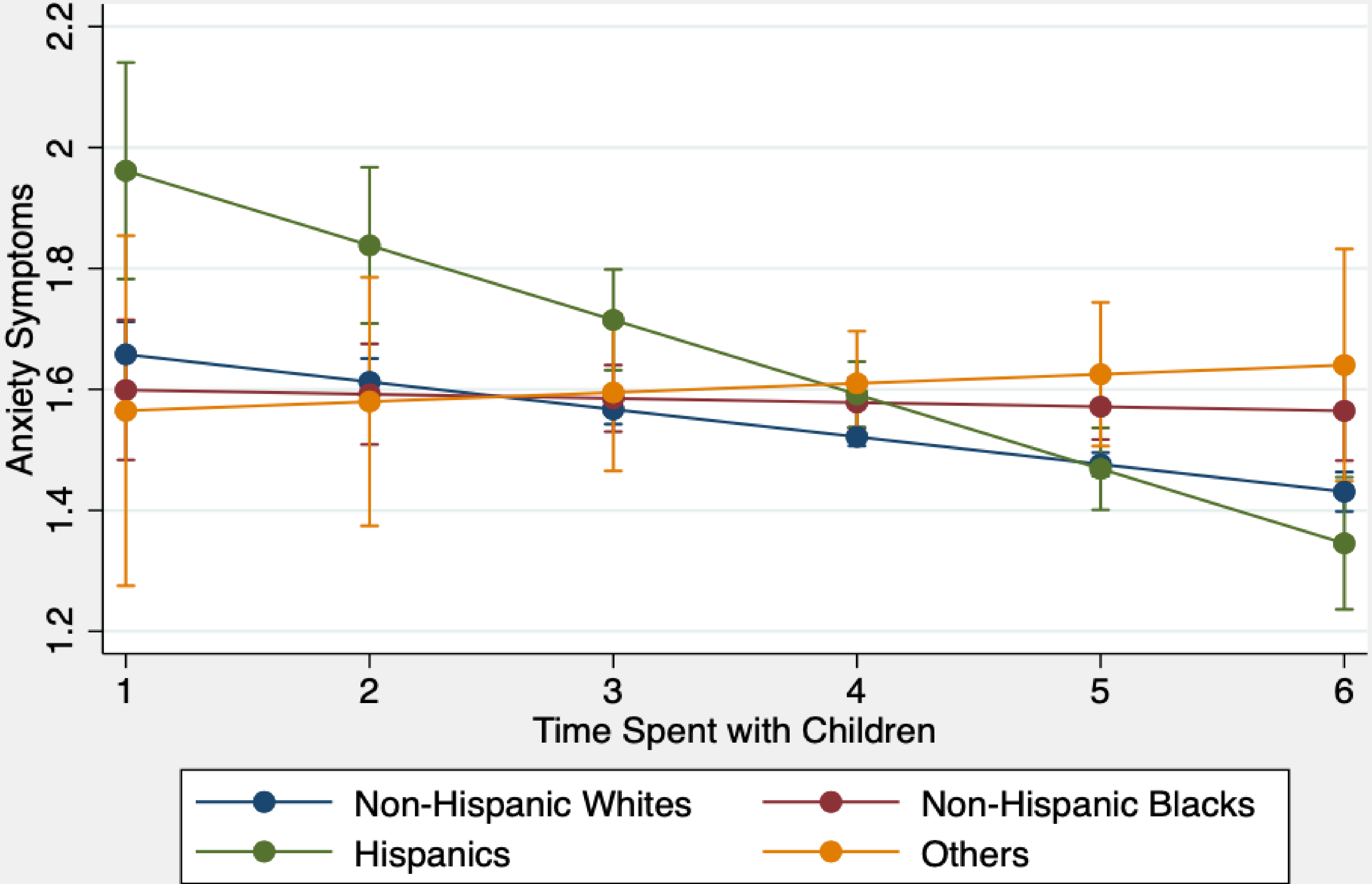


Table 1. Weighted linear regression predicting anxiety symptoms

	Model 1	Model 2
Race/Ethnicity <sup>a</sup>		
Non-Hispanic Black	0.05* (0.02)	0.17** (0.06)
Hispanic	0.08* (0.01)	-0.16* (0.08)
Non-Hispanic Other	0.09 (0.05)	0.27 (0.06)
Time Spent with Children	0.05*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)
Time Spent with Friends	0.04*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)
Time Spent with Family	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.50)
Race/Ethnicity x Time Spent with Children		
Non-Hispanic Black		-0.04* (0.02)
Hispanic		0.01** (0.03)
Non-Hispanic Other		-0.06 (0.05)

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

Note. All models adjusted for age, sex, household wealth, and education

<sup>a</sup>Compared to Non-Hispanic Whites

### Model 1: Main Effects

Non-Hispanic Blacks and Hispanics reported more anxiety symptoms relative to non-Hispanic Whites

Reporting more social contact with children and friends was related to less anxiety symptoms

### Model 2: Interaction Effects

Compared to non-Hispanic Whites, time away from children was more strongly linked to anxiety among Hispanics and less strongly related to anxiety among Blacks (Figure 1)

## Discussion

**Implications:** Hispanics may benefit more from spending time with their children relative to other racial/ethnic groups

Findings support familism<sup>4</sup> as a cultural protective factor to explain the Latino health paradox<sup>4</sup>. Tight knit family and community groups may protect the mental health of this marginalized group

**Limitations:** Both anxiety symptoms and contact with social network were self-reported.

**Future Directions:** Future research should use other measures of social support and include more racial/ethnic groups (e.g., Asians)

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## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the members of the C.A.R.E. Lab for their generous support and feedback in making this research project possible.



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