

# Latino/Hispanic Participation in Community Nutrition Research: An Interplay of Decisional Balance, Cultural Competency, and Formative Work

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## ARTICLE INFORMATION

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## ABSTRACT

**Background** Latinos/Hispanics are among the populations at high risk of nutrition disparities. Adequate participation of this group in community nutrition research is necessary to better understand such disparities and propose sensible solutions.

**Objective** To identify factors influencing participation and strategies to effectively reach Latinos/Hispanics for community nutrition research.

**Design** In-depth interviews with experienced community nutrition researchers across the United States, conducted from February to June 2013.

**Participants/setting** Nine academics, including four registered dietitian nutritionists with extensive experience in community nutrition research with Latino/Hispanic groups, were interviewed in person (n=3) or via telephone/Skype (n=6).

**Main outcome measures** Perceived participation barriers, facilitators, and structural factors affecting Latino/Hispanic participation were explored. Successful and unsuccessful recruitment strategies to reaching this group were identified.

**Analysis** A Grounded Theory approach was applied for inductive identification of relevant concepts and deductive interpretation of patterns and relationships among themes.

**Results** Formative work, cultural competency, and decisional balance emerged as the three interdependent factors influencing participation of Latinos/Hispanics in community nutrition research. Several approaches to influence participation were reported to be operationalized at the interpersonal, community and settings, and systems levels of influence. Trust, time, and tailoring were central concepts, postulated to moderate the relationship between the main themes and influence the effectiveness of recruitment tactics.

**Conclusions** Experienced community nutrition researchers identified actions ascribed to formative work as the bedrock of successful reach of Latinos/Hispanics. A robust formative work plan is necessary to achieving a functional level of trust, time, and tailoring tactics, which appear to critically influence participation.

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**R**ACIAL/ETHNIC MINORITY PARTICIPANTS ARE CRITICAL to the investigation of nutrition promotion efforts because of the diet-related health disparities that exist among these groups. Hispanic households are disproportionately affected by food insecurity,<sup>1</sup> and both children and adults present high obesity and chronic disease rates.<sup>2-4</sup>

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Standards of Practice and Standards of Professional Performance for Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (Competent, Proficient, and Expert) in Public Health and Community Nutrition<sup>5</sup> involve the application of culturally sensitive approaches to prevent diet-related conditions in vulnerable populations. However, low research participation levels of racial/ethnic minorities hinders the

ability to test such approaches.<sup>6,7</sup> Lower participation and high attrition rates coupled with a greater difficulty to maintain contact have been reported.<sup>8</sup> Modest improvements have been seen using comprehensive and individualized—albeit labor-intensive—recruitment strategies.<sup>9</sup>

Several perspectives on lessons learned to increase recruitment and retention of minority research study participants are reported. In a white paper, the Office of Women's Health<sup>10</sup> concluded that having women and minority physicians to serve as recruiters was a priority to increase participation, as well as building trust, working with the communities, and education to build awareness. The Cancer Therapy and Research Center<sup>11</sup> has developed a toolbox for recruitment of Hispanic individuals that primarily

includes language issues. Lessons learned from a feasibility trial for reducing high-risk behaviors in Latino adolescents found three strategies to be most effective: face-to-face recruitment, bicultural recruiters, and free child care.<sup>12</sup> Most lessons learned and best practices have been derived from feasibility trials and general guidelines have been generated from panel consensus and literature review. However, these are not specific to the community nutrition field nor have they exclusively focused on community nutrition research. Therefore, the objective of this study was to conduct in-depth interviews with experienced community nutrition researchers across the United States to explore perceived barriers and facilitators of recruitment of Latinos/Hispanics, and to identify best practices to sensibly reaching this group.

## METHODS

A literature search of nutrition research with Latino/Hispanic communities was conducted to identify experienced researchers in the field. A description of the study purpose and procedures was sent via e-mail to invitees by the first author. A \$100 electronic gift card was offered as compensation. Seventeen invitations were sent—two did not respond, three declined because of time constraints, and three initially accepted but later became unavailable. Informed consent was first implied upon agreeing to schedule an interview, and then corroborated verbally at the beginning of the interview. Interviews were conducted from February to June 2013. The

## RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

**Research Question:** What are the factors influencing participation of Latinos/Hispanics in research from the perspective of community nutrition researchers?

**Key Findings:** Latino/Hispanic participation in community nutrition research appears to be related to the extent to which formative work, cultural competency, and decisional balance are addressed and allowed to synergize, so that the conditions for empirical observation may take place.

Formative work, in particular, emerged as the cornerstone of successful reach. Trust, time, and tailoring tactics were concepts represented across themes that appear to influence recruitment success.

University of Illinois Institutional Review Board approved the study.

An interview guide was developed to explore perceived participation barriers and facilitators, structural factors affecting participation (ie, social, economic, cultural, political, and research-related), and successful and unsuccessful recruitment strategies after a literature search focusing on lessons learned in recruitment of Latino/Hispanic participants and evidenced-based guides for recruitment (Figure 1). Mock interviews were conducted to practice the interview style; evaluate the questions for flow and

1. Could you tell me what you do? What is your job about?
2. How is your job/work related to the Hispanic/Latino community?
  - a. What has been your experience working with Hispanics/Latinos?
3. How do you reach people from this population?
  - a. What is usually your recruitment strategy?
  - b. What are your most successful recruitment strategies? Why do you think they were successful?
  - c. What are the least successful recruitment strategies you have used? Why they didn't work?
4. Has recruiting Hispanic/Latino posed challenges for you or your research or program team?
  - a. Could you list the challenges you have faced trying to recruit Hispanics/Latinos?
  - b. How have you addressed each of those challenges?
  - c. Has there been any challenges you haven't been able to address? Which are those? Why?
5. In your experience, what are the most salient factors influencing participation of this population in nutrition education interventions?
  - a. To what extent do socioeconomic factors affect the decision of this people to participate? Which socioeconomic factors have you found to be the most important in this regard?
  - b. Do you think sociopolitical circumstances affect the decision to participate? How?
  - c. Have you noticed any cultural characteristics of this group that affects participation? Which are those?
  - d. In your opinion, to what extent does the researcher or recruiter influences the decision to participate? Do you think preconceived ideas about research studies influence willingness to participate? How?
6. In your opinion, which of all the barriers we have talked about are the most difficult to overcome?
  - a. Have you found effective ways to minimize those barriers? Could you share those with us?
  - b. Could you think of barriers that cannot be minimized or addressed by the researcher? Which are those?
7. If you were to give advice to somebody who was planning to do research with Hispanic/Latinos, what would you recommend?

**Figure 1.** Interview guide questions on Latino/Hispanic participation in community nutrition research.

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