Public Abstract

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Title:The Role of Family Communication in Individual Attitudes and Behaviors Concerning Nutrition and Physical Activity

Despite the increasing popularity of family health communication studies, little attention has been paid to nutrition- and physical activity-related health communication in the family context. This mixed-method study explores the influence of family health communication on individual member attitudes and behaviors. Both phases of the study, grounded in Family Communication Patterns theory and Social Cognitive theory, revealed the importance of family communication as a contributor to physical health. Specifically, the first quantitative phase of study used structural equation modeling and an Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) to assess the relationships between a young adult's and corresponding family member's health attitudes and behaviors (N = 435 dyads). Moderating and mediating effects of communication and non-communication related variables were also examined. Results showed that one's own attitudes predicted self behaviors, but one's attitudes also predicted the behaviors of the other. This was particularly true of young adult-mother dyads. Among the additional variables tested, health competence mediated the relationship between family health communication and one's health behaviors. The second phase examined family health communication using a phenomenological, dyadic interview process (N = 15 dyads). Two overarching themes and corresponding subthemes developed from the analysis, emphasizing (a) the importance of nonverbal health communication and (b) health as a gendered experience. Practical and theoretical implications are offered at the conclusion of each phase chapter. An overall conclusion collapsing the findings from both phases of study is also provided.