

LETTER

Social capital and perceived stress related to coronavirus disease in Colombia




In Latin America, emotional response to the coronavirus disease (COVID) epidemic is related to the social determinants of health due to disparities in access to health.¹ In Colombia, during the confinement that 14.3% of a reported high perceived stress related to coronavirus epidemic. Perceived stress was significantly associated with the perception of inconsistency between scientific recommendations and measures taken by the government authorities. Authors stated that the relationship was possibly explained by the country's low social capital.² Social capital is a resource favouring social action, and adaptive responses, then, individual and communities psychological well-being.³

An online cross-sectional study was carried out with the participation of adults residing in Colombia. The project was approved by an ethics board. Participants completed the Social Capital Scale, a five-item scale with four ordinal options. Total scores are between 0 and 15. Scores >5 were categorised as low social capital ($\alpha=0.79$).⁴ Moreover, the Scale of Perceived Stress Related to COVID-19 was fulfilled. It is a 10-item instrument with five ordinal responses. Total scores range from 0 to 40; scores >25 were categorised as high perceived stress related to COVID-19 ($\alpha=0.88$).² Crude and adjusted ORs were determined by age, gender and working in the health sector.

A total of 700 adults answered the questionnaire, in ages between 18 and 76 years (mean =37.1, SD =12.7), 68% female,

52% without a permanent partner, 60% reside in low or medium socioeconomic status (Colombian classification of six status) and 90% with higher education (college or more). Also, 24.0% (n=168) participants scored low social capital and 7.6% (n=53) reported high perceived stress related to COVID-19. Low social capital was associated with high perceived stress related to COVID-19, crude (OR 2.23, 95% CI 1.25 to 2.99) and adjusted for age, gender and working in the health sector (OR 1.99, 95% CI 1.10 to 3.61).

Social capital is associated with psychological distress both in regular times and in unexpected crises. It corroborates the hypothesis presented by a previous Colombian study that suggested that mistrust in government measures to control the epidemic by COVID was a stressful element.² Political decisions are frequent far from scientific suggestions and, consequently, undermine trust in institutions, a central component of the construction of social capital.⁵ In Latin America, research is needed on the effect of social capital on the psychological well-being of collectives.

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