

## Ethnic Identity as an Asset: Linking Ethnic Identity, Perceived Social Support, and Mental Health among Indigenous Adults in Taiwan

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**Abstract :** In Taiwan, there are 16 official indigenous groups, accounting for 2.3% of the total population. Like other indigenous populations worldwide, indigenous peoples in Taiwan have poorer mental health because of their history of oppression and colonisation. Amid the negative narratives, the ethnic identity of cultural minorities is their unique psychological and cultural asset. Moreover, positive socialisation is found to be related to strong ethnic identity. Based on Phinney's theory on ethnic identity development and social support theory, this study adopted a strength-based approach conceptualising ethnic identity as the central organising principle that linked perceived social support and mental health among indigenous adults in Taiwan. Aims. Overall aim is to examine the effect of ethnic identity and social support on mental health. Specific aims were to examine : (1) the association between ethnic identity and mental health; (2) the association between perceived social support and mental health ; (3) the indirect effect of ethnic identity linking perceived social support and mental health. Methods. Participants were indigenous adults in Taiwan (n=200; mean age=29.51; Female=31%, Male=61%, Others=8%). A cross-sectional quantitative design was implemented using data collected in the year 2020. Respondent-driven sampling was used. Standardised measurements were: Ethnic Identity Scale(6-item); Social Support Questionnaire-SF(6 items); Patient Health Questionnaire(9-item); and Generalised Anxiety Disorder(7-item). Covariates were age, gender and economic satisfaction. A four-stage structural equation modelling (SEM) with robust maximum likelihood estimation was employed using Mplus8.0. Step 1: A measurement model was built and tested using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Step 2: Factor covariates were re-specified as direct effects in the SEM. Covariates were added. The direct effects of (1) ethnic identity and social support on depression and anxiety and (2) social support on ethnic identity were tested. The indirect effect of ethnic identity was examined with the bootstrapping technique. Results. The CFA model showed satisfactory fit statistics:  $\chi^2(df)=869.69(608)$ ,  $p<.05$ ; Comparative fit index (CFI)/ Tucker-Lewis fit index (TLI)=0.95/0.94; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)=0.05; Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual (SRMR)=0.05. Ethnic identity is represented by two latent factors: ethnic identity-commitment and ethnic identity-exploration. Depression, anxiety and social support are single-factor latent variables. For the SEM, model fit statistics were:  $\chi^2(df)=779.26(527)$ ,  $p<.05$ ; CFI/TLI=0.94/0.93; RMSEA=0.05; SRMR=0.05. Ethnic identity-commitment ( $b=-0.30$ ) and social support ( $b=-0.33$ ) had direct negative effects on depression, but ethnic identity-exploration did not. Ethnic identity-commitment ( $b=-0.43$ ) and social support ( $b=-0.31$ ) had direct negative effects on anxiety, while identity-exploration ( $b=0.24$ ) demonstrated a positive effect. Social support had direct positive effects on ethnic identity-exploration ( $b=0.26$ ) and ethnic identity-commitment ( $b=0.31$ ). Mediation analysis demonstrated the indirect effect of ethnic identity-commitment linking social support and depression ( $b=0.22$ ). Implications: Results underscore the role of social support in preventing depression via ethnic identity commitment among indigenous adults in Taiwan. Adopting the strength-based approach, mental health practitioners can mobilise indigenous peoples' commitment to their group to promote their well-being.

**Keywords :** ethnic identity, indigenous population, mental health, perceived social support

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