

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE

**7:00 p.m. Central
Friday, April 13, 2012**

CONTACT:

Sara L. Tamers, PhD, MPH
sara_tamers@dfci.harvard.edu

Bill Schaller
Director of Media Relations
Dana-Farber Cancer Institute
617-632-5357

Exploring the Role of Family, Friend, and Neighbor Social Ties and Social Support on Dietary and Physical Activity Behaviors

New Orleans, LA - Numerous studies have shown that social relationships can have a 'positive' impact on diet and physical activity; others have suggested that such relationships may also have a 'negative' impact on these behaviors. "This potentially 'negative' impact may be even more pronounced and may have even greater consequences for racial/ethnic minorities of lower socio-economic status (SES), given the limited resources they already have," said Sara L. Tamers, PhD, MPH, a post-doctoral scholar at the Harvard School of Public Health and the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute.

Tamers is the lead author on a study exploring the role of social relationships on health behaviors associated with obesity among lower income individuals, presented at the Society of Behavioral Medicine's 33rd Annual Meeting and Scientific Sessions in New Orleans, LA.

The research team analyzed data from the Health in Common (HIC) study to examine the association between family, friend, and neighbor social ties and social support and diet and physical activity. The HIC study assessed cancer risks for 828 racially/ethnically diverse low-income individuals residing in both publicly and privately managed housing in the Greater Boston area. Results showed that, in some instances, social ties had a 'positive' impact on diet and physical activity:

- Having more friend social ties was significantly associated with more fruit and vegetables per day and with more daily vigorous physical activity.

In other instances, social ties and social support had an opposite or 'negative' impact on these behaviors:

- Having more family social ties was associated with more sugary drinks and fast food per day;
- Having more neighbor social ties was associated with more fast food per day; and
- Having more overall total social support from family, friends, and neighbors was significantly associated with more red meat consumption per day.

However, it is important to note that additional relationships that were tested were not found to be significant.

"Our results suggest that there may be both a 'positive' side and 'negative' side to social relationships that could impact lifestyle risk factors," said Tamers. This distinction has important public health

implications because negative social experiences derived from relationships may have an even greater impact on health than positive ones.

To inform health promotion interventions, “future research should continue to disentangle the different functions of social relationships on diet and physical activity, which could help explicate whether this ‘negative’ impact is due to social norms or to external constraints, including social ones, which can hinder healthy living, especially among racial/ethnic minorities of lower SES,” concluded the authors.

The study’s additional authors are Cassandra Okechukwu, ScD, MSN, MPH; Jennifer Allen, ScD, MPH, RN; May Yang MPH; Anne Stoddard, ScD; Reginald Tucker-Seeley, ScD, ScM, MA; and Glorian Sorensen, PhD, MPH from the Harvard School of Public Health, the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, and the New England Research Institutes.

The Society of Behavioral Medicine is a multidisciplinary organization of clinicians, educators, and scientists dedicated to promoting the study of the interactions of behavior with biology and the environment and the application of that knowledge to improve the health and well being of individuals, families, communities, and populations. www.sbm.org

This study was presented during the 2012 Annual Meeting and Scientific Session of the Society of Behavioral Medicine (SBM) from April 11-14 in New Orleans, LA. The poster presentation was held on April 13, 2012 from 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., in the Hilton Exhibition Center (HEC) at the Hilton Riverside.

Given that this study was presented at a scientific meeting, the data and conclusions reached should be regarded as preliminary, until they are published in a peer-reviewed journal. This research was supported by the National Cancer Institute (NCI), (R01 CA111310-01A1; PI: Glorian Sorensen, PhD, MPH) and the NCI Harvard Education Program in Cancer Prevention and Control (R25 CA057713; PI: Glorian Sorensen, PhD, MPH). Funding agencies played no role in this study.

###