

# Immigrant Families and Household Instability

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## 1. Introduction

Almost three decades of research have shown that household instability is a critical indicator of family health and well-being. However, while we have good estimates of family instability for children by race and SES, difference between native and migrant families are not-known. Immigrant families form a significant and growing proportion of all families in the United States (Foner and Dreby, 2011) and the number and proportion of children continue to increase when compared to those native born (Woods & Hanson, 2016). Thus, understanding to what extent household instability affects children in immigrant families is increasingly important.

While the bulk of household instability has focus on instability due to marital transition (Brown, 2010), recent research show that children experience varied forms of changes in household composition (Raley et al, 2017). As significant share of immigrants arriving in the United States come from countries where the imperative of marriage remains strong (Raley et al, 2015), children in immigrant families may experience lower incidence of partnership dissolution than their native peers. Yet since social structures shaping household instability among migrant families can differ considerably from those affecting native born folks, distinctively affecting children's exposure to instability.

Whereas immigrant children can less vulnerable to divorce, transnational family networks can increase their exposure to other sources of change in household composition. Even though physical distance from extended family members and friends can result in lower levels of exposure to household instability, the key component of social networks and families in the process of migration, can increase children's experiences of kin entering and leaving the household. The decision to migrate, choice of destination and the strategies for building new life are frequently driven by kin ties and bonds, (Glick, 2010) with new migrants commonly choosing to move to areas where other family members or acquaintances have already settled (Castles et al. 2013; Massey et al. 1993). Moreover, immigrant parents may leave and reenter the household not as a result of marital instability, but due to transnational family and work bonds as well temporary labor migration. Furthermore, extensive migration experience is itself a mechanism increasing the chance for union dissolution (Frank and Wildsmith, 2005). Thus, we anticipate that unique features of family complexity experienced by children in immigrant families will increase their exposure to household instability:

*H1: Children in immigrant families will experience more household instability than their native peers.*

Moreover, since family instability can be conceptualized as a mechanism of intergenerational transmission of inequality (Manning *et al* 2014), examining differences between first and second generation immigrant can shed light into perpetuation of disadvantage and social, economic and cultural assimilation. Moreover, as findings show that the cultural norms of the destination affect migrant's perception of family norms such as divorce (Furtado et al, 2013), an assimilation perspective and weakening transnational connections anticipates a convergence in levels and patterns of household instability across generations:

*H2: Second generation immigrant children will be exposed to less instability than their first generation peers, converging to household instability levels of native children.*

## 2. Study Design

*Data:* Our analysis compares estimates of children's household instability experiences by nativity using the 2008 SIPP. The SIPP is a nationally representative sample of households interviewed every four months for five years. In the interviews, householders were asked for the composition of the house and basic demography details on each member of the household. Our analysis is based on waves 1 to 15 of the SIPP. The large sample size (over 42,000 households in the first wave and) allow us to compare children's experiences by nativity, immigration generation and origin.

*Method:* We measure children’s instability as any change in household composition. Changes are measured between waves- any entrance or exit the household of individuals. We use life tables to estimate the instability rate by age for children up to age 16 and the cumulative number of transitions that children experienced by age 16.

We compare the estimates of household instability of natives and immigrants. Natives are defined as native born children with native born parents. Immigrants are defined as foreign born and/or children of foreign born. We also compare our estimates by immigration generation and origin. First-generation immigrants are foreign born children and second-generation are native born children of foreign born parents. We define origin of immigrants by the child’s race-ethnic category- Hispanic, Asian and others. In total, our sample include 35,125 children in 280,758 person waves. 23.9% of our sample are immigrants- 17% of them are first generation and 83% are second generation. Hispanic immigrants are 48% of the immigrants and Asians are 14.7%.

### 3. Results

Figure 1 describes the total number of household composition changes children experience in the U.S based on the years 2008-2013 using the 2008 SIPP. Native born children experienced on average 4.06 composition changes, while immigrant children experience on average 3.87 changes. This includes both first and second generation immigrants. Among immigrants, Hispanic children experience 4.49 transitions, Asians 2.6 and others 3.45 transitions (not shown).

Figure 2 shows the number of household composition transitions by origin and generation immigration. Although the household instability gap between natives and immigrants is relatively small, measuring instability by origin and immigration generation reveals significant variation between groups- Hispanic immigrant children are experiencing more instability than Asian and other immigrants in both generation, with some smaller gap among second generation immigrants. Second generation Hispanic immigrants experience on average 1.87 more household composition changes than Asians. Among first-generation this gap is even larger- 2.66 additional changes for Hispanic immigrants. Among first-generation immigrants, household instability is much more frequent than among second- generation (5.5 changes versus 3.7, respectively). A decline in the total number of household changes was observed in the three origin categories with the biggest decrease among other immigrants and the lowest among Asians.

Table 1 presents the odds ratios for a household composition change using a discrete time hazard model. Model 1 includes seven categories of immigration generation and origin with control for age and sex of the child and in Model 2 we also control for the education of the householder. For Hispanic immigrants, SES explain some of the high levels of household instability. While the odds of first generation Hispanic immigrants to household composition are higher by 45 percent than the odds of natives, when

Figure 1. Total number of household composition changes by age 16, by nativity.

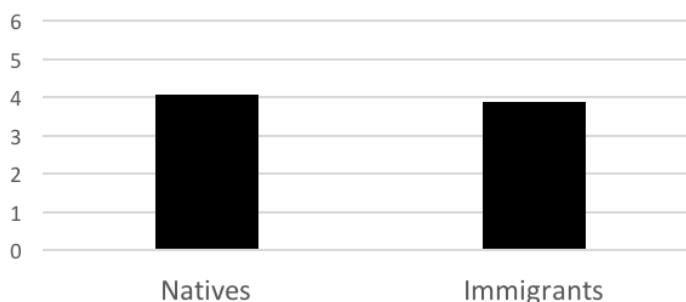
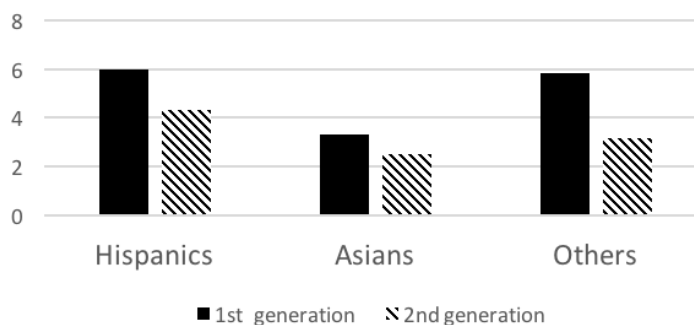


Figure 2. Total number of household composition changes by age 16, by immigration generation and origin.



controlling for education the odds of first generation Hispanic are higher by only 11 percent. Among second generation Hispanic the odds for a household composition change are slightly higher than native's in Model 1, but lower in Model 2 after controlling for SES. For first generation Asian immigrants, the lower household instability in comparison to natives is no longer significant when controlling for education. For second generation Asians SES explains some of the lower rate of household instability.

Several notable patterns are proposed by our results. One, on average immigrants experience less household instability than natives, but the large variation among immigrants requires additional comparison between immigrants' categories. Two, household instability among Asian immigrants is substantially lower than among Hispanic immigrants. An additional analysis is needed to test whether these gaps can be explained by family size. Three, the number of household instability among immigrants decreases substantially over time. Second-generation immigrants experience less household composition changes than first-generation immigrants. This suggest that in addition to the stress and struggles that immigrants children might experience (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco 2002; Smith et al. 2004) they are also at a higher risk of household instability and its ramifications. Last, SES explains some of the gap in household composition instability, especially for first generation Asians.

Table 1. Odds ratios for household composition change

	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>
<b>Origin+Generation:</b>		
Hispanic first generation	1.445*** (0.070)	1.107* (0.054)
Hispanic second generation	1.085*** (0.024)	0.842*** (0.020)
Asian first generation	0.713*** (0.064)	0.906 (0.081)
Asian second generation	0.608*** (0.032)	0.717*** (0.038)
Other first generation	1.284*** (0.065)	1.372*** (0.070)
Other second generation	0.767*** (0.022)	0.810*** (0.024)
<b>Householder's education:</b>		
High-school		0.821*** (0.018)
Some college		0.715*** (0.015)
College		0.373*** (0.009)
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N	256,535	

Notes: The models control for age and sex (not shown).

Native and Less than high-school are the omitted categories.

p< 0.5\*      p<0.01\*\*      p<0.001\*\*

#### 4. Next steps:

These preliminary results require further testing. Findings using 2008-2013 data indicate that immigrant children face different level of household instability than those native born, even after controlling for SES. However, immigrant families are influenced by structural conditions that shape global migration patterns. In this regard, recognizing that the recession and post-recession period may have changed internal pull factors and local socioeconomic conditions that affect children's experiences of household instability,

in subsequent analyses, we will compare these estimates with further analysis using the SIPP 2004. While the economic hit may have decreased immigrant family's exposure to incoming kin entering their household ((Massey, 2012; Villareal, 2014), for native born children the economic hit may have had the opposite effect, increasing prevalence of extended households and coming and going of kin as a strategy to cope with the crisis.

In addition, we will also include measures on the type of household structure. Specifically, previous findings show while multigenerational household experience greater continuity in composition when one individual or couple hold the bulk of the economic resources, co-residential households are more likely to remain intact when resources are more evenly distributed (Glick and Van Hook, 2011). In addition, we will also include measures of family size to control for the affects that larger households can potentially have on the number of transitions. Finally, as we investigate a period of extensive economic changes and downturns, we anticipate that co-residential households will be more vulnerable to household instability than multigenerational ones following the aftermath of the Great Recession.

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