

Intergenerational Influences of Citizenship Status, Family Factors, and Neighborhood Context on Educational Attainment among Second-Generation Immigrant Youth

Introduction

Education is one of the major predictors of economic advancement and social mobility. Additionally, four-year college degrees have the highest economic value where adults with a bachelor's degree typically earn 50 percent more than high school graduates do. Despite the well-known social benefits bestowed by an educational degree, differences have been noted in rates of educational attainment among immigrants and their children; however, limited literature exists for understanding factors that may affect their educational outcomes as it may have implications for their social mobility. While several studies have examined critical family and neighborhood contextual factors on educational attainment, few studies have assessed parental citizenship status in conjunction with these factors that have been associated with educational outcomes. This paper addresses this gap in the literature by examining these links.

The intergenerational drag hypothesis posits that inequities and social resources are passed down from one generation to their descendants. This perspective considers the cumulative effects of macro-level system factors that interact with one another in generating or sustaining present day inequities. Prior research has found that the inequities of educational attainment and wealth of one generation contributes to socioeconomic inequities for the succeeding generations. These effects may also generate inequities for immigrant families.

Parent citizenship status has become increasingly recognized as a critical aspect of immigrant children's development and well-being. It may also influence their educational attainment. Among immigrant families, unauthorized immigrants and visa holders are ineligible for federal financial aid. Several states have instituted policies for out-of-state immigrant students to pay in-state tuition under certain circumstances, but these policies do not resolve issues related to employment, citizenship status, and financial aid eligibility for federal loans to cover tuition costs. While second-generation citizen children are eligible for financial aid, they may face challenges in taking out enough financial aid to cover tuition without the support of their parents, which may also be compounded by challenges in navigating the complex process of applying for financial aid. These findings suggest that citizenship status and financial aid may be critical dimensions for understanding educational attainment among second-generation immigrant young adults.

Strong family relationships through parenting practices have the potential to exert a far-reaching influence on educational trajectories for immigrant children. Parents who engage in open and frequent communication with their children and the encouraging nature of their communication have been significantly associated with academic achievement outcomes. Additionally, substantial research has examined the role of parental expectations and children's academic achievement. High parental expectations have been positively linked to their children's academic performance. However, most of the literature in this area has focused on European and middle class samples, although within the recent decades this area has expanded to include diverse racial and ethnic samples. Several studies show immigrant adolescents with parents who place high value on their educational achievement were more likely to invest time and effort into their academics and value educational success, which in turn, led to greater educational attainment. These findings imply that strong family influences through parent-child communication and parent educational expectations may be a critical element for post-secondary educational trajectories for immigrant youth.

From a developmental and life course perspective, examining the effects of the neighborhood social context on adolescents and their educational outcomes is important as it represents a critical period where children are most susceptible to influences outside the home. Research has begun to examine how the neighborhood social context, specifically, how living in co-ethnic or immigrant enclaves, may influence immigrant children's education and schooling. Immigrant children who live in neighborhoods with many other foreign-born co-ethnic peers, or immigrant ethnic enclaves, are presented with limited opportunities to become proficient in English. The prevalence of limited English proficiency among immigrant children is hypothesized to have negative consequences for education and academic performance, although the few studies in this area have shown mixed findings. For immigrant young adults, living in a co-ethnic immigrant enclave may be a critical influence on their educational attainment.

Previous literature has examined adolescent perceptions of neighborhood risk, including neighborhood safety, and academic performance; however, limited research has examined the influence of parent perceptions of neighborhood risk on their children's academic achievement. Overall, parents who are more economically disadvantaged are less likely to be optimistic about their children's educational success and less likely to engage in proactive parenting and promote their child's educational enrollment. Significant associations have also been found between parent perceptions of neighborhood safety and their psychological health; specifically, parents who are concerned about neighborhood safety may employ punitive and coercive parenting practices to protect their children. Parenting practices may be a potential mediator between neighborhood conditions and educational attainment; however, prior studies have not examined direct links between parent perceptions of neighborhood safety and post-secondary educational attainment for immigrant youth.

The literature on immigrant parent factors and their children's post-secondary educational attainment is scarce. Differences in educational attainment among immigrant families may be explained by the cumulative effects that are generated and sustained through the family, as posited by the intergenerational hypothesis. However, along with parent citizenship status, parent perceptions around critical family and neighborhood factors have not been adequately examined in the context of second-generation young adult educational attainment. This paper will specifically examine whether post-secondary educational attainment varies among second-generation immigrant young adults by parent citizenship status, parent perceptions of parent-child communication, educational expectations, and neighborhood context.

Methods

This study will use ordinal logistic regression to examine the relationships between parent reported measures of family factors, discrimination and citizenship status among second-generation immigrant young adults who resided in Florida (Miami/ Fort Lauderdale) and California (San Diego). Data are from the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS), a longitudinal study with three waves of survey data starting from 1992 (wave 1), 1995 (wave 2) through 2001-2003 (wave 3), among second-generation immigrant youth. For this analysis, the sample is comprised of parent data linked with data from surveys with young adults, or parent-young adult dyads (N= 1748). The parent survey occurred in 1995 (wave 2) and the young-adult survey was collected in 2001-2003 (wave 3), with approximately six to eight years elapsing between the two data collection points.

Recruitment and Study Sample. This study was a large multi-city survey focused on second-generation immigrant youth living in Miami/Fort Lauderdale, Florida and San Diego,

California. The study examined the process of adaptation of second-generation immigrant youth and their educational trajectories. The initial data collection began when the participants were adolescents and followed them as they transitioned into young adulthood. Eligibility criteria for the study were that they either had to be born in the United States, or have lived in the US for at least 5 years and have at least one foreign born parent. The sample was drawn from 49 schools, and the cities were selected due to areas with concentrations of immigrant and native-born populations. Across three waves of data, 5,262 youth were initially surveyed in 1992 (wave 1), when they were either in the 8th or 9th grade (around 14 or 15 years of age). The second follow up survey was conducted three years later in 1995 (wave 2), with a total sample of 4,288 or 81.5 percent of the original sample. Most of the sample was in their junior or senior year of high school (about 17 or 18 years old). Coupled with the second follow-up, a parent survey (wave 2) was conducted to examine the contexts and characteristics of the immigrant parents (where they lived, aspirations, relationships with their children). The total sample of parents was 2,442 or approximately less than half (46 percent) of the original youth sample of 5,262. About a decade later, from 2001-2003, the third and last follow-up was conducted with a total of 3,613 or approximately more than half (68.9 percent) of the original sample. For wave 3, these second-generation immigrants were now young adults (about 24 or 25 years old).

Measures include youth reported educational attainment (dependent variable) and parent measures (primary independent variables) of citizenship status, family factors, and the neighborhood context.

Young adult educational attainment is a three category ordinal dependent variable. Respondents were asked: "What is the highest grade or year of school you have completed?" Responses included were: some high school, graduated from high school, 1 or 2 years of post-high school vocational training, graduated 2 year college/vocational school (associate's degree), 3 or more years of college, graduated from 4 or 5 year college (e.g., bachelor's degree), some graduate school, master's degree, professional/doctoral degree (JD, MD, DDS, Ph.D.), or other. Based on the distribution of the measure these categories were collapsed into three categories: less than high school/high school graduate, some college/vocational school, bachelor's degree or beyond (graduate degree).

Parent citizenship status is a dichotomous measure (yes/no) with one question asking: "Are you a U.S. citizen?"

Parent perceived frequency of parent-child communication is a continuous measure taking the average of two items ($\alpha = 0.77$): "How often do you or your spouse/partner talk with your child about his or her experiences in school?; How often do you or your spouse/partner talk with your child about his or her educational plans after high school?" Options were: not at all (1), rarely (2), occasionally (3), to regularly (4). Response categories of not at all and rarely were combined and collapsed to 0, and response categories of occasionally (1), and regularly (2) were recoded, with total mean scores ranging from 0 to 2.

Parent educational expectations is a categorical measure with one question asking: "How far in school do you expect your child to go?" Categories include: less than high school (1); high school graduate (2); less than two years of vocational training/ some college (3); two year or more of vocational training/ some college (4); bachelor's degree (5); master's degree (6); PhD or some advanced degree (7).

Parent report of living in an ethnic enclave is a dichotomous variable (yes/no), with participants reporting whether they lived in a neighborhood where residents are mostly from their own country.

Parent perceptions of neighborhood safety is a continuous measure using the average of five items ($\alpha = 0.86$) with the following questions: “In your neighborhood, how much of a problem is... different racial or cultural groups who do not get along with each other;” “Little respect for rules, laws, and authority;” “Assaults and muggings;” “delinquent gangs or drug gangs;” “Drug use of drug dealing in the open.” Responses were: not a problem (1), somewhat of a problem (2), a big problem (3). These options were reverse coded so that higher scores indicate higher perceptions of neighborhood safety and scores ranging from 1 to 3.

Parent demographic control variables include parent measures of birth year, year of immigration, English knowledge, family income, educational attainment, marital status, gender, and region/country of origin.

Analysis. Data will be analyzed using the STATA 14 software package. An ordinal logistic regression model will be used to understand associations between the predictors and the ordinal dependent variable, educational attainment. Differences in educational attainment for second-generation immigrant young adults will be assessed by parent citizenship status, parent family and neighborhood factors. Additionally, the parallel regression assumption test will be used to examine if there is a violation of this assumption, and if there is a violation, appropriate estimations will be considered (e.g., multinomial logistic regression). Additional sensitivity analyses will examine differences by citizenship status and other socio-demographic characteristics (e.g. country of origin).

Results

Descriptive statistics. Approximately half (54.2%) of respondents are U.S. citizens. Respondents reported high frequency ($M=1.71$, $SD=0.5$) of parent-child communication. More than three quarters (76.7%) of parents expected their children to obtain a bachelor’s degree or more. Additionally, more than a quarter (29.5%) of respondents live in an immigrant ethnic enclave and also reported high ($M=2.8$, $SD=0.4$) perceived neighborhood safety.

Preliminary analyses. Preliminary results suggest that educational attainment differed by parent citizenship status, where young adults with a citizen parent were more likely to report obtaining a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared to those with a non-citizen parent $X^2(2, N=1711) = 77.05$, $p < .001$. Participants with a non-citizen parent were more likely to report obtaining less than a high school or high school diploma compared to those with a citizen parent.

Anticipated results. Federal welfare and immigration laws, PWORA and IIRIRA of 1996, restricted non-US citizens to access financial aid. Therefore, immigrant youth whose parents report their US citizenship status may explain differences in their educational levels by their citizenship status. It is anticipated that immigrant youth whose parents report higher frequency of parent-child communication and higher educational expectations will be associated with higher educational levels. Additionally, it is hypothesized that young adults whose parents report living in immigrant ethnic enclaves will predict lower educational levels and those whose parents report higher perceptions of neighborhood safety will attain higher educational levels.

Implications

An emerging area of research has found that citizenship status as a social determinant of social mobility. As a novel contribution to the literature, this study is one of the first to examine parent citizenship status along with other critical family and neighborhood factors on educational outcomes of second-generation immigrant young adults. The results of this study may offer specific policy implications and programs designed to impact the social mobility of immigrants and their descendants.