

Does Maternal Acculturation Matter? School Readiness among Young Children of Asian and Hispanic Immigrant Mothers

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Background and Purpose:

Over the past three decades, children living in immigrant families have been the fastest growing proportion of the young child population in the United States, and the majority of these children are Asian and Hispanic (Hernandez, 1999, 2004; Shields & Behrman, 2004). One in four children under age 6 in the United State are children of immigrants (Fortuny, Capps, Simms, & Chaudry, 2009), and by 2020, about 30% of all children will be living in families composed of at least one immigrant parent (Capps, Fix, Ost, Reardon-Anderson, & Passel, 2005). Despite this rapid change, there have been few studies on the early child development of young children of immigrants (Chase-Lansdale, Valdovinos D'Angelo, & Palacios, 2007; Fuligni & Yoshikawa, 2003; Glick, Bates, & Yabiku, 2009; Yoshikawa, 2011). In particular, although healthy development in the early years of life is important in helping children get ready for school, little is known about school readiness of children in immigrant families. Therefore, this study examines school readiness among children of Asian and Hispanic immigrant mothers, with particular attention to the role of maternal acculturation.

This study examines how maternal acculturation is associated with school readiness among children of Asian or Hispanic immigrant mothers. Maternal acculturation is one of the important factors in the early years of young children that is closely related to developmental outcomes (Chase-Lansdale et al., 2007; Garcia Coll et al., 1996). Acculturation means a process of adopting values and attitudes from the destination culture through a negotiation between the two cultures in ways that maintain values and attitudes of an immigrant's country of origin while also interacting with individuals from the destination culture (Berry, 2007; Garcia Coll et al., 1996; Quintana et al., 2006). For example, immigrant mothers bring with them from their culture of origin their own knowledge of child rearing and goals for their offspring to be successful, but they encounter new parenting concepts and practices in the host culture (Bornstein & Bohr, 2011). Therefore, acculturation involves a negotiation process between the two cultures' parenting concepts and practices.

Given that an immigrant family's experience and reception in the United States are related to its children's development (Hernandez & Charney, 1998) and that parents play a critical role in the development of young children, it is important to understand how maternal acculturation affects early child development and school readiness. However, surprisingly, very little is known about the association between maternal acculturation and the development of young children of immigrant families. In particular, almost no prior research exists about school readiness among preschool age children of Asian or Hispanic immigrant mothers. Therefore, using a sample of children of Asian and Hispanic immigrant mothers from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort (ECLS-B), this study examines how maternal acculturation is associated with a wide set of child school readiness outcomes (i.e., cognitive, socio-emotional, and health outcomes) at kindergarten entry.

Method:

This study analyzed a sample of about 1,500 children from the ECLS-B, whose mothers were foreign-born Asians ($n \approx 850$) or Hispanics ($n \approx 650$) and who had valid information on at

least one of the outcomes. Maternal primary language at home and English proficiency were used to create three maternal acculturation groups: 1) mothers who primarily used English at home; 2) mothers who primarily used their home language at home but also had high English proficiency (i.e., speaking, reading, writing, and understanding English very well or pretty well); and 3) mothers who primarily used their home language at home and had low English proficiency (i.e., speaking, reading, writing, or understanding English not very well or not well at all). Mothers' length of stay in the U.S. was measured by subtracting their current age from their age at arrival in the United States, and controlled for all analyses.

This study uses a comprehensive definition of school readiness, that is how ready a child is for school, cognitively, socio-emotionally, and physically. Cognitive/academic development is assessed using three direct assessment measures (i.e., early reading, expressive language, and mathematics). Socio-emotional development is assessed using two teacher-rated social skill measures (i.e., approaches to learning and pro-social behavior) and two teacher-rated behavior problem measures (i.e., externalizing and attention problems). Children's weight is assessed using a direct assessment measure (i.e., BMI scores).

To address missing information in covariates, this study conducts multiple imputation. And to examine the hypotheses stated above, this study specifies five models using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regressions. Model 1 examines the associations between maternal acculturation and school readiness outcomes, only controlling for mothers' length of US residency and child characteristics; Model 2 is the same as Model 1 but further adds earlier skills or weight variables; Model 3 is the same as Model 2 but further adds family background characteristics; Model 4 is the same as Model 3 but further adds parenting practices and home environment variables; and Model 5, the final model, is the same as Model 4 but further adds maternal employment and child care arrangements variables. In addition to these five models, an interaction model, Model 6, is specified to examine whether there is variation within each acculturation group according to length of U.S. residency. To make findings nationally representative, this study employs sampling weights for all analyses.

Results:

This study found that children of more acculturated mothers had better expressive language skills than children of less acculturated mothers in both Asian and Hispanic families. In addition, children of more acculturated Asian mothers had more pro-social behavior but also more behavior problems than children of less acculturated Asian mothers. Additional analyses found that longer residency in the U.S. was associated with better approaches to learning for children of bilingual Asian mothers and fewer behavior problems for children of bilingual Hispanic mothers.

This study also found beneficial associations between maternal acculturation and children's weight in the both Asian and Hispanic group. Children of bilingual and English dominant Asian mothers had lower BMI z -scores than those of home language Asian mothers; children of English dominant Asian mothers also had lower probability of being obese. In addition, children of bilingual Hispanic mothers had lower BMI z -scores than those of home language Hispanic mothers.