



# Exploring the relationship between level of acculturation, educational attainment, and self-esteem among children of immigrants

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## Abstract

Children of immigrants are a growing population in the United States, yet this population may face more challenges integrating into the host county. The purpose of the study is to examine the relationship between level of acculturation, self-esteem, and education among children of immigrants. The present study utilizes secondary data from the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study from a sample of 5,262 children of immigrants. The present study findings suggest that there is a statistically significant relationship between level of acculturation, self-esteem, and educational attainment.

## Introduction and Literature Review

The number of children of immigrants has grown exponentially in the United States. As immigration and the number of children born to immigrants continues to rise, there is an increased need to research outcomes for this population in order to better serve this community. Lower levels of acculturation into the mainstream United States culture can become an issue when children of immigrants lack access to resources, which can result in diminished capability among children of immigrants to obtain higher levels of education or have negative self-esteem.

A main theme in the literature was the relationship between acculturative stress, and mental health. Despite there being a lack of research on acculturation and self-esteem, it stands to reason that that immigrant acculturation to the host county can influence self-esteem. Acculturative stress was found to negatively impact the mental health among children of immigrants. Additionally, the literature revealed a link between acculturative stress and educational attainment. When children of immigrants are faced with acculturation choices, they can begin to develop acculturative stress, which can negatively impact their educational attainment and achievement. However, an interesting phenomenon in the literature coined, the immigrant paradox, addresses some research with findings that stated children of immigrants graduate from college and the same or higher rates than their peers.

## Research Question and Hypothesis

What is the relationship between level of acculturation, educational attainment, and self-esteem among children of immigrants?

*Hypothesis:* Children of immigrants with higher levels of acculturation in the United States will have higher levels of educational attainment and self-esteem.

## Method

The Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS) was administered in three waves beginning in 1992 and surveyed 5,262 children of immigrants (Portes & Rumbaut, 2018). CILS-I survey data was collected from eighth and ninth graders in Miami/Fort Lauderdale, Florida and San Diego, California who attended public or private schools (Portes & Rumbaut, 2018). CILS-II retrieved surveys from 4,288 participants, 81.5 percent of the original sample (Portes & Rumbaut, 2018). CILS-III received surveys from 3,613 respondents, 68.9 percent of the original sample (Portes & Rumbaut, 2018). The present secondary data longitudinal study uses quantitative data from all three waves of CILS. Independent variables used by the present study included length of stay in the United States, citizenship, and language. Dependent variables utilized by the present study included self-esteem and educational attainment. Demographic variables included participant gender, age, race, current marital status, and employment.

## Results

A significant association was found between citizenship and educational attainment.

- Participants who reported being a United States citizen were more likely to have some college or vocational schooling (80.5%) versus 73.1% of participants who reported not being a United States citizen. In contrast, participants who reported not being a United States citizen were more likely to have a high school diploma.

*Prevalence of Educational Attainment by Respondent United States Citizenship*

	Educational Attainment Categories % (f)		
	No high school diploma	High school diploma	Some college or vocational school
U.S. Citizenship			
Yes	3.9 (84)	15.6 (334)	80.5 (1,725)
No	4.0 (33)	22.8 (186)	73.1 (596)

## Results (continued)

A significant association was found, indicating that the four length of stay groups differed from each other.

- Follow-up pairwise comparisons indicated that participants that resided in the United States all their lives had significantly lower self-esteem than participants that resided in the United States for less than five years.

*Significant Mean Rank Differences in Self-Esteem by Length of Stay*

Length of Stay 1- Length of Stay 2	Length of Stay 1 Mean Rank	Length of Stay 2 Mean Rank	p
All my life - Five to nine years	2,369.81	2,572.60	=.001
All my life - Less than five years	2,369.81	3,565.28	<.001
Ten years or more - Less than five years	2,449.97	3,565.28	<.001
Five to nine years - Less than five years	2,572.60	3,565.28	<.001

## Discussion

The primary purpose of the present study was to determine the relationships between level of acculturation, self-esteem, and educational attainment among children of immigrants. The present study found a significant relationships between levels of acculturation, self-esteem, and educational attainment. However, findings such as length of stay in the United States were found to have the opposite effect on study participants, which contradicted the present study hypothesis.

Findings from the present study can inform future research. Researchers can continue to explore the immigrant paradox and its role in the lives of children of immigrants. Additionally, researchers can further explore findings that suggest extended length of stay in the United States results in lower levels of self-esteem among children of immigrants. The present study strengths include use of longitudinal data and significant findings. The present study limitations include limited generalizability and use of secondary data.

## References

Portes, A., & Rumbaut, R. (2018). Children of immigrants longitudinal study. *Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research*. <https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR20520.v3>