



# Acculturation and Mental Health Among Young Adults

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## ABSTRACT

- The current study is a secondary analysis of the data from the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS), which focuses on exploring the process of adaptation of second-generation immigrants, which is defined as children born in the United States that have at least one parent that is foreign-born or children that were born abroad but brought to the United States when they were at a young age.
- The current study found that first generation immigrant adolescents who didn't feel like "home" in either country had significantly higher levels of depression than study participants who identified the United States as the country that feels like "home", that there is a positive relationship between migrant acculturation and the respondent's physical well-being and that there is a positive relationship between migrant acculturation and how close respondent's felt to their family members.

## INTRODUCTION & LITERATURE REVIEW

- The number of children of immigrants in the United States under age 18, with at least one parent that is an immigrant, has increased between 1980 and 2018 (Durt-Weisman, 2021).
- When studying the children of immigrants and comparing them to children that were born in the U.S., there are many differences across many domains of functioning that can lead to challenges in their physical, social and mental health (Durt-Weisman, 2021).
- Definitions of acculturation can be complex, but it can be explained as the process an individual experiences when they adapt to a new living environment and adopt the norms, values, and practices of the new country they have migrated to (Sharif & Alcala, 2019).
- Acculturation may have a significant impact on an individual's developmental outcomes. That developmental stage is crucial, and the effects on their mental and behavioral well-being may be impacted (Schwartz, 2015).
- When entering the U.S., individuals face many potential stressors, the risk factors that impact undocumented young adults' mental health and well-being increase as they navigate many challenges during an essential part of their developmental stage (Siemons et al., 2017).

## RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESES

What is the effect of migrant acculturation on the mental health and physical health of first generation immigrant adolescents? (Among first generation immigrant adolescents, there is a positive relationship between migrant acculturation and mental and behavioral health).

What is the effect of migrant acculturation on family functioning among first generation immigrant adolescents? (Among first generation immigrant adolescents, there is a positive relationship between migrant acculturation on family functioning and well-being.)

## METHOD

- CILS followed a sample of 5,200 children of immigrants from early adolescents through early adulthood. CILS authors did not disclose the specific nature of subject recruitment, it is assumed that recruitment for Wave 1 took place at the subjects' school settings. Respondents were contacted to their place of work or residence for Wave 2 and Wave 3, with most surveys being mailed to subjects.
- The initial survey (Wave 1) was conducted with large samples of second-generation immigrant children who were attending 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade public and private schools in the metropolitan areas of Miami/Ft. Lauderdale in Florida and San Diego, California. The total sample size was 5,262 respondents, which reflects the most sizable immigrant nationalities in each area. The purpose of the initial survey was to gather baseline information on immigrant families, demographic characteristics, language use and self-identities. Three years later, the first follow-up survey was conducted and 4,288 respondents from the original sample participated
- The independent variable in this study is positive migrant acculturation measured by English fluency and how much the respondents identifies to the American culture. The dependent variables in this study are mental health, behavioral health, and social well-being, measured by how the respondent feels about themselves and family cohesion.
- All statistical analyses were conducted utilizing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, version 25.0. Descriptive statistical analyses were utilized to describe the study sample. Inferential statistics, including Pearson's correlation and One-Way ANOVA, were conducted to assess relationships between variables.

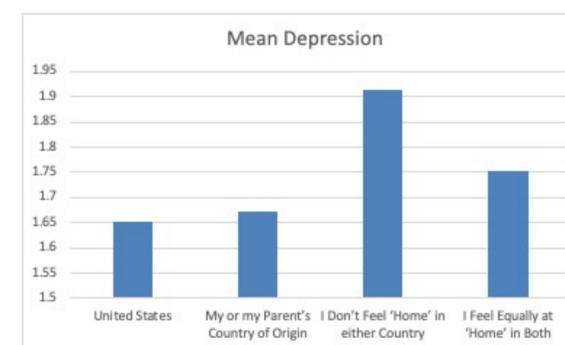
## RESULTS

**Depression.** A one-way ANOVA comparing migrant acculturation and mental health was computed. A statistical significance was found among groups ( $F(3, 2971) = 3.68, p = .012$ ). This analysis revealed the study participants who didn't feel like "home" in either country had significantly higher levels of depression ( $M = 1.91, SD = .78$ ) than study participants who were identified the United States as the country that feels like home ( $M = 1.65, SD = .62$ ). Respondent's who identified the United States as where they feel like home were significantly different than those who don't feel like "home" in either country ( $M = 1.91, SD = .78$ ) and felt equally at "home" in both ( $M = 1.75, SD = .65$ ).

**Physical Well-Being.** A chi-square test was calculated to determine the relationship between migrant acculturation and the respondent's physical well-being. The results indicated that there is statistically significant and positive relationship the relationship between migrant acculturation and the respondent's physical well-being. Respondents that identified that the United States feels like home were significantly more likely to have excellent health (1318) versus those that the didn't feel like "home" in either country (14)

**Family Functioning.** A chi-square test was calculated to determine the relationship between migrant acculturation and how close respondent's felt to their family members. The results indicated that there is statistically significant and positive relationship the relationship between migrant acculturation and how close respondent's felt to their family members. Respondents that identified that the United States feels like home were significantly more likely to report that they always feel close to their family members (745) versus those that the didn't feel like "home" in either country (10).

Figure 1



## DISCUSSION

The current study serves to advocate for consistent and future research on the growing population of first generation immigrant adolescents. Further research on interventions that can provide adolescent with support during their acculturation to lower depression rates, improve physical health and maintain positive family functioning is important. The findings of the current study highlight the importance of providing support during the assimilation process so that adolescents feel a sense of belonging and are less likely to experience negative mental and behavioral health outcomes.

With a growing number of immigrants entering the United States, social workers in any setting have opportunities to interact with first generation immigrant adolescents. This population is very diverse and complex therefore it is important to assess their needs and identify the best plan of care and help break through the stigma they may carry or barriers they may face.

A limitation that presented in this study is the date of depression questionnaire, the data was collected in the years 1995-1996 therefore newer data would have represented current events better. There continue to be waves of immigrants entering the United States and this data does not reflect on what is happening today and after the Trump administration. The study also doesn't conduct a questionnaire to gather information on the adolescent's mental health in the third wave, in order to be able to compare as the adolescents got older. This data also doesn't represent other countries and it doesn't pull data from other countries. It specifically focuses on immigrants that are entering the United States. It may be helpful to also study and look at what the acculturation experience is for immigrants entering other countries.

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