

**Family Composition of the Foreign-Born: Do Nativity and Citizenship Status
Matter?**

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U S C E N S U S B U R E A U

Helping You Make Informed Decisions

Family Composition of the Foreign Born: Do Nativity and Citizenship Status Matter?

Cassandra Logan and David Dixon

Short Abstract

Children of immigrants represent the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population under the age of 18 (Hernandez, 1999; Van Hook and Fix, 2000). As this segment of the population continues to grow, it is important to understand the family context in which these children live, as family structure is associated with a host of economic, social, and developmental outcomes for children. This study seeks to examine the current demographic landscape of children of immigrants by analyzing the relationship between parental nativity and citizenship status and family composition. Specifically, the proposed study uses data from the 2005-2007 Multi-year estimate file of the American Community Survey (ACS) to answer the following questions: What are the differences between the family structures of children with immigrant and native parents? How is the attainment of citizenship status by the foreign-born parents associated with differences in family structure? Is the world region/country of birth of the foreign-born parents associated with family structure?

Extended Abstract

Introduction/Background

Children of immigrants are the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population under the age of 18 (Hernandez, 1999; Van Hook and Fix, 2000). As this segment of the population continues to grow, it is important to understand the family context in which these children live. This study seeks to examine the current demographic landscape of children of immigrants by analyzing the relationship between parental nativity and citizenship status and family composition. Specifically, the proposed study seeks to answer the following questions: What are the differences between the family structures of children with immigrant and native parents? How is the attainment of citizenship status by the foreign-born parents associated with differences in family structure? Is the world region/country of birth of the foreign-born parents associated with family structure?

Most research on U.S. immigrant family structure is based on Census 2000 data. One study found that children of immigrants are more likely to live in two-parent families than are children with native parents (Reardon-Anderson, Capps, and Fix, 2002), whereas another study found that the percentage of children of immigrants living in single-parent families increased during the 1970s and in the 1990s (Van Hook, Brown, and Kwenda, 2004). There has been much growth/change in the foreign-born community since 2000, which could have an impact on the family compositions within the immigrant population. Therefore, it is important to examine the family composition of children of immigrants using recent data. Moreover, it is important to study the family composition of children of immigrants because family structure has been found to be associated with a host of child outcomes.

Research has found that children in single-parent families are more likely to have problems than are children from families with two biological parents (Moore, Jekeliek, and Emig, 2002). Specifically, children born to unmarried mothers are more likely to be economically disadvantaged and to grow up in a single-parent family, both of which are associated with lower educational attainment and a higher risk of teen and nonmarital childbearing (Seltzer, 2000). This is particularly salient to children with foreign-born parents because living in a two-parent family alone is not enough to attenuate certain disadvantages, namely poverty, among children of immigrants. Children of immigrants are less likely to live in families with two *working* parents (Capps, Fix, Ost, Reardon-Anderson, and Passel, 2005) due to the relatively low labor force participation of immigrant women (Capps, Fix, Ost, Reardon-Anderson, and Passel, 2004). Consequently, children of immigrants living with two parents are more likely to live below the poverty level or to be low income than their native counterparts (Capps, et al., 2005). If the percentage of children of immigrants being raised in single-parent families continues to grow, this could put them at an increased disadvantage both economically and socially.

Data and Methods

All data used in these analyses will be drawn from the 2005-2007 Multi-year estimate file of the American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS is a nationally representative survey with information on demographic, social, economic, and housing characteristics of a sample of households in the United States. The ACS is ideal for this research because it includes detailed household rosters (a listing of individuals living in

the household based on the information provided by the survey respondent) with information on each household member's nativity and citizenship status, as well as place of birth, marital status, and relationship to the ACS respondent. Using information from the household roster and family interrelationships, we will create a sample consisting of all own children under age 18 living in families with one or two parents present and a subset of children under 18 with at least one foreign-born parent.

Measures

Family Composition: Our dependent variable of interest is the family composition of children in the United States. For our purposes, we define family composition as own children living with one- or two-parent families or sub-families. Own children are defined as biological, adoptive, or step-children.

Citizenship Status: For each household member, the ACS asks if they were born in the United States or Puerto Rico, born abroad to American parents, if they are naturalized citizens, or not a U.S. citizen. We will include a measure that distinguishes children living with citizen parents (native or naturalized) from children with noncitizen parents. For children living with two parents, we will examine those living with one citizen parent and one noncitizen parent. We will also include a measure of the child's citizenship status.

Nativity: The ACS asks respondents about the place of birth of each member of the household. When combined with citizenship, we can distinguish between native and foreign-born individuals. We will include a measure that distinguishes children with native parents, foreign-born parents, and for children living with two parents, one native

parent and one foreign-born parent. For the foreign-born, we will also include a measure of world region of birth (North America, Asia, Latin America, Africa, Europe, or Oceania).

Methods

Our analyses will proceed in two stages. Using data from the 2005-2007 Multi-year estimate file of the ACS, we will first provide descriptive statistics for each of our variables of interest. Second, we will use chi-square analyses to assess bivariate associations between family composition and parental nativity and citizenship status.

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