



Predictors of early care and education type among preschool-aged children in immigrant families: The role of region of origin and characteristics of the immigrant experience[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Children of immigrants have lower rates of participation in early care and education (ECE) settings in the year before they enter kindergarten than do children of native parents. There is a dearth of research examining factors associated with the ECE type that immigrant families select for their children. Using data on immigrant families from the ECLS-B ($N \approx 2500$) this study aims to fill gaps in the literature by examining associations between immigrant, family, child, and contextual characteristics and patterns of ECE type at age 4. The results show significant differences in ECE type related to parental region of origin that were reduced when characteristics of families and contexts were taken into account. Findings highlight the importance of considering factors that may be especially salient for immigrant families, including household English proficiency, parental citizenship status, parental preferences, and availability of non-English speaking care providers.

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1. Introduction

Children of immigrant parents represent the most rapidly growing segment of the U.S. population. As of 2008, nearly one in four American children had at least one parent who was an immigrant to the United States (Tienda & Haskins, 2011). These children deserve particular attention in research because they are more likely to face developmental risk factors in comparison to children in native-born families, including lower parental education, higher rates of poverty and economic disadvantage, and, for some, the lack of parental citizenship and English proficiency, though there is significant heterogeneity among immigrant families (Capps, Fix, Ost, Reardon-Anderson, & Passel, 2004; Fortuny, Capps, Simms, & Chaudry, 2009; Hernandez, 2004).

There is growing evidence that, compared to children in native families, children of immigrants begin school, on average, with fewer of the early literacy, numeracy and language skills that undergird future academic success (Crosnoe, 2007; Han, 2008; Hernandez, 1999; Magnuson,

Lahaie, & Waldfogel, 2006; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Given that attendance in formal early childhood education (ECE) programs has been linked to enhanced early academic skills, particularly for at-risk children, both policy makers and researchers have expressed hope that these programs may be effective in narrowing achievement gaps related to economic and demographic risks, kindergarten (Gormley & Gayer, 2005; Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2004; Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005; Votruba-Drzal, Coley, Koury, & Miller, submitted for publication). Accessible, high-quality ECE programs, which have been linked to increases in children of immigrants' reading, math and English language skills, may be an important policy tool to decrease school readiness gaps faced by children of immigrants (Magnuson et al., 2006; Votruba-Drzal et al., submitted for publication).

As such, it is vital to understand patterns of ECE use in immigrant families. While children of immigrants traditionally have lower rates of nonparental care and preschool enrollment than do children of native parents (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011), there may be heterogeneity in the childcare experiences of immigrant children related to factors such as parental region of origin, family economic and social resources, parental preferences, or the availability of care options in immigrant communities (Brandon, 2004; Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2007a; Santhiveeran, 2010). There is limited research exploring the ECE arrangements of children of immigrants from differing regions of origin and the predictors of ECE type among immigrant families. This study aims to fill gaps in the literature by examining the patterns of ECE attendance among children of immigrants in the U.S. using nationally representative data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort (ECLS-B). It attempts to delineate

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factors that relate to the use and type of ECE care in immigrant families. The results provide important new information regarding the patterns and predictors of ECE use among children of immigrants across the country.

2. Conceptual framework

Our research on ECE selection is guided by the work of Pungello and Kurtz-Costes (1999) and Meyers and Jordan (2006). Pungello and Kurtz-Costes (1999) propose a theory of childcare selection, whereby families' selection into ECE is driven by four sets of factors: (1) family demographic and socioeconomic characteristics (e.g., age, race/ethnicity, income, and education); (2) child characteristics (e.g., age, gender, health, temperament, and cognitive ability); (3) contextual factors, including both home contexts (e.g., work schedules, number of children and alternate caregivers in the household) and community contexts (e.g., availability of care in the community); and (4) parental beliefs and preferences regarding their children's childcare experiences. Meyers and Jordan (2006) introduced the notion of "accommodation" to existing selection frameworks by noting that shifting factors influence parents' use of ECE. For instance, parental preferences change, parents' information is often limited and affected by social networks and cultural norms, and options for ECE may be constrained by supply, cost, and access (see also Chaudry, Henly, & Meyers, 2010; Weber, 2011). Thus, ECE decisions are accommodations rather than choices; families accommodate to complicated opportunities and constraints determined by an extensive range of individual, family, and community factors (Chaudry et al., 2010; Meyers & Jordan, 2006; Pungello & Kurtz-Costes, 1999; Weber, 2011).

Moreover, when examining ECE access within immigrant families specifically, sociocultural theories of development are relevant. Sociocultural theories posit that sociodemographic and cultural differences related to parental region of origin may give rise to diversity in the ECE experiences of children of immigrants (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2007b). Accordingly, we suggest additional factors related to the immigrant experience that may play an important role. These home and community factors specific to the immigrant families include characteristics such as English language proficiency, citizenship status, and the availability of non-English speaking care providers. We also argue that certain dimensions of childcare preferences, namely preferences for culturally-matched care settings, i.e. settings with providers that share the families' culture and language, may be particularly salient to immigrant families. Thus, this study uses a comprehensive accommodations framework to assess how child, parent, and family characteristics, contextual factors, parental preferences, ECE availability, and immigrant-specific characteristics relate to the type of ECE (parent, home-based, center, or Head Start) children of immigrants experience during the preschool years.

3. ECE attendance in immigrant households

Limited research has examined patterns of ECE use in immigrant families. One of the earliest studies using nationally representative data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation collected between 1995 and 1998 found that children of immigrants were more likely to be in parental care and less likely to be in center-based care than children with native born parents (relative and home-based care patterns were similar), though this study focused on all children under the age of six and, thus, did not examine preschool arrangements specifically (Brandon, 2004). Studies looking specifically at preschool-aged children show similar results. Using the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K), Magnuson et al. (2006) found that children of immigrants attended center-based preschool at lesser rates, though they were enrolled in Head Start programs and were cared for by parents at higher rates than children of

native-born parents. Data from the 2000 U.S. Census are in accord; children in immigrant families attended preschool at ages 3–4 at much lesser rates than peers in native families (Hernandez et al., 2007a, 2007b). Crosnoe (2007) also used ECLS-K data and examined preschool-aged children's selection into several types of care, though the author limited his analyses to children of Mexican immigrants. Results showed Mexican immigrant families were less likely to access center-based, relative and non-relative care versus parental care when compared to White, African-American and Latino children with native-born parents. When looking at Head Start attendance, however, children of Mexican immigrants were more likely to be in Head Start when compared to the White children, though not as likely to be in Head Start as African-American children. Similarly, data from the National Household Education Survey (NHES) show that preschool-aged children of immigrants experience less nonparental care of any type when compared to children in native families (Kahn & Greenberg, 2010; Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011).

Importantly, comparing preschool selection processes in immigrant versus non-immigrant families obscures heterogeneity among families emigrating from different areas of the world. Though few studies of ECE selection have attempted to disaggregate immigrant families by homeland, limited research has found diversity in the preschool arrangements of children of immigrants according to parental region of origin. For example, using data from the California Health Interview Survey 2005 Child Survey, Santhiveeran (2010) compared patterns of childcare use among Asian, European, and Latino immigrant families. Asian immigrant families used relative care and center-based care at higher rates than the other immigrant families. Latino immigrant families selected home-based care and Head Start/public prekindergarten at higher rates than the other immigrant families. Lastly, European immigrant families used less nonparental care of any type in comparison to Asian and Latino immigrants. Hernandez et al. (2007) observed lower participation rates in formal preschool programs for children of Mexican immigrants when compared to children with parents from Central America, the Dominican Republic or Indochina. This limited research highlights the importance of considering region of origin when studying patterns of ECE selection among children of immigrants and suggests that differences across immigrant groups, perhaps related to cultural norms and preferences regarding nonparental care, economic resources, or other factors, may affect the type of ECE of immigrants children experience.

4. Factors influencing immigrant families' selection into ECE

The observed gaps in the preschool enrollment of children of immigrants in comparison to children with native born parents have been largely explained by socioeconomic factors (Crosnoe, 2007; Kahn & Greenberg, 2010; Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011). For example, two recent studies using NHES found that decreased exposure to nonparental care for preschool-aged children of immigrants could be explained by a handful of sociodemographic factors: namely, higher rates of poverty and marriage and lower levels of parental education and maternal employment in immigrant families as well as the higher percentage of Hispanic families, who may have stronger cultural norms regarding maternal care for children, in the immigrant subsample (Kahn & Greenberg, 2010; Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011). Kahn and Greenberg (2010) further found that some of these socioeconomic characteristics predict patterns of preschool access differently in immigrant families (Kahn & Greenberg, 2010). For instance, number of siblings and maternal education were not as predictive of ECE use for preschool-aged children of immigrants as for children in nonimmigrant families (Kahn & Greenberg, 2010). While these studies elucidated differences in characteristics of immigrant families that may be associated with their children's decreased preschool attendance in comparison to native-born children, they did not examine

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