



State dream acts and education, health and mental health of Mexican young adults in the U.S



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ABSTRACT

We investigate the education, health and mental health effects of state policies that allowed or explicitly banned tuition subsidy and financial aid to undocumented college students using the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) for 1998–2013. Our analysis suggests that an explicit ban on tuition subsidy or enrollment in public colleges lowered college education of non-citizen Mexican young adults by 5.4–11.6 percentage points. We find some evidence that in-state tuition and access to financial aid improved self-reported health and reduced mental health distress, and ban on in-state-tuition/enrollment increased mental health distress among non-citizen Mexican young adults: estimated effects are generally significant in first-difference models and models that include state-specific cubic trends, and often insignificant in difference-in-difference models.

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1. Introduction

Immigration is a stressful undertaking with negative psychosocial impacts. For families with undocumented members, the negative mental health effects of immigration could be intense. Repeated exposure to prejudice, discrimination, and exploitation on account of immigration status, and concerns about deportation of oneself or a family member increase stress. Previous research documents that immigrant health erodes with time in the host country and stress from migration and acculturation is a major cause of health erosion (Cunningham et al., 2008; Jasso et al., 2004; Kaestner et al., 2009). How immigrant policies influence the negative health and mental health effects of immigration is a critical, yet understudied, area of research.

In this paper, we investigate the education, health and mental health effects of policies that provide tuition subsidy and financial aid to undocumented college students and policies that explicitly ban them from in-state tuition or college enrollment. For convenience, we use the term State Dream Acts to describe these policies. Since the early 2000s, as shown in Table 1, 21 states across

the U.S. have allowed in-state tuition to the undocumented.¹ In 7 of these states, the undocumented are also eligible for financial aid (National Conference of State legislatures, 2014; Russell, 2011). In several other states, the issue of tuition subsidy for the undocumented is quite controversial: five states have explicitly banned in-state tuition to undocumented students and three ban their enrollment in public post-secondary educational institutions.² A number of states, as we describe in detail below, have gone back and forth on college tuition subsidy to the undocumented, with pending legislations.

Extant research documents that tuition subsidy has improved college enrollment and education of undocumented young adults (Kaushal, 2008; Flores, 2010; Guzmán and Jara, 2012; Amuedo-Dorantes and Sparber, 2014). There is little scientific research on how these policies affect the health and mental health of undocumented young adults. Further, there is no study on how an explicit ban on in-state tuition subsidy or college enrollment affects educational attainment. Thus, legislative debates on in-state tuition policies for the undocumented are largely conducted without adequate scientific data on their various impacts.

Using the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) for 1998–

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¹ Currently, Hawaii, Michigan, Rhode Island, and Oklahoma provide in-state tuition for undocumented students through Broad of Regents' decisions, and the rest of the states provide in-state tuition through state legislations.

² These states are: Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina.

Table 1
State-wise in-state tuition policies for undocumented immigrants by year.

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
States	NY	NY TX NC	NY TX NC CA UT	NY TX NC CA UT WA IL OK	NY TX NC CA UT WA IL OK KS	NY TX NC CA UT WA IL OK KS NM	NY TX TX CA UT WA IL OK KS NM NE AZ	NY TX TX CA UT WA IL OK KS NM NE AZ	NY TX TX CA UT WA IL OK KS NM GA SC	NY TX TX CA UT WA IL OK KS NM NE AZ GA SC WI AL	NY TX TX CA UT WA IL OK KS NM NE AZ GA SC WI AL	NY TX TX CA UT WA IL OK KS NM NE AZ GA SC WI AL CT MD IN RI	NY TX TX CA UT WA IL OK KS NM NE AZ GA SC WI AL CT MD IN RI CO	NY TX TX CA UT WA IL OK KS NM NE AZ GA SC WI AL CT MD IN RI CO HI MN NJ OR
Tuition	1	2	4	7	8	9	10	10	10	11	11	13	13	18
Financial aid	0	1	1	1	1	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	6
Ban	0	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	4	5	4	6	6	5

Note: States listed in gray (X) box are states that explicitly ban in-state tuition or enrollment of undocumented immigrants in public universities. States in white background (X) provide in-state tuition to the undocumented, and states in white boxes (X) provide in-state tuition and financial aid to the undocumented.

2013, we study the effect of, (a) in-state tuition subsidy and financial aid and (b) an explicit state policy banning in-state tuition subsidy or enrollment in public colleges and universities on education, health and mental health of Mexican non-citizen young adults. Further, in a supplementary analysis we also investigate if these policies affect the inter-state mobility of these young adults to test if our estimates of the policy's effect on education and health are biased by inter-state mobility.

We adopt three strategies to control for time-varying factors correlated with policy. First, we estimate regression models that include a rich set of state-specific time-varying factors to capture changes in policy environment for the undocumented and economic trends correlated with state Dream Acts. Second, we estimate regression models that include state-specific cubic trends, in addition to time-varying factors included in the first strategy, to control for time-varying unobserved factors correlated with state Dream Acts.

The third is a difference-in-difference strategy that involves selecting a treatment group of young adults who are affected by the Dream Act and a comparison group that is similar to the treatment group, but unaffected by the policy. The treatment group of our analysis is: a sample of Mexican-born non-citizen young adults with a high probability of being undocumented. We experiment with two comparison groups: U.S. born Latino young adults and U.S. born non-Hispanic White young adults; both groups are largely unaffected by state Dream Acts. The pre- and post- policy change in the outcomes (e.g. education, health, mental health) of the comparison group captures the effect of other time-varying factors correlated with policy. To arrive at the difference-in-difference estimate, we deduct the pre- to post- policy change in the outcomes for a comparison group from the pre- to post-policy change in the corresponding outcomes for the treatment group. The underlying assumption is that in the absence of in-state tuition policy the effect of unobserved time-varying factors on the education and health outcomes of the

treatment and comparison groups would be similar. We conduct a number of tests to check the validity of this research design.

Our analyses suggest that an explicit ban on tuition subsidy or enrollment in public colleges lowered the college education of non-citizen Mexican young adults by 5.4–11.6 percentage points. We find some evidence that in-state tuition and access to financial aid improved the self-reported health and reduced mental health distress scores, and ban on in-state-tuition/enrollment increased mental health distress among non-citizen Mexican young adults: estimated effects are generally statistically significant in first-difference models and models that include state-specific cubic trends, but often insignificant in difference-in-difference models.

2. Education and health

Parents' disadvantaged socioeconomic standing and immigration status are important determinants of the educational experience of Mexican immigrant young adults in the U.S. (Fry, 2004, 2005; Grogger and Trejo, 2002; Schneider et al., 2006; Wojtkiewicz and Donato, 1995). Undocumented young adults often come from families with limited financial resources to fund college education for their children. These young adults are not eligible for federal financial aid and have limited access to nonfamilial resources (e.g., bank loans) to fund college education.

The focus of our study is non-citizen Mexican young adults, who have a high probability of being undocumented or having undocumented family members (Passel and D'Vera Cohn, 2011).³ Immigration status and financial constraints make college education relatively rare among non-citizen Mexicans. In 2014,

³ Passel and D'Vera Cohn (2011) estimate that a little over half of all Mexicans in the US are undocumented and the proportion is much higher among non-citizen Mexican young adults. Kaushal et al. (2013) find that 75% of Mexicans in the US live in mixed status families.

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