



Gender differences in mobility of Hispanic immigrants



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 25 February 2015

Received in revised form

27 July 2016

Accepted 3 August 2016

Available online 2 September 2016

Keywords:

Mobility

Immigrants

Hispanics

Gender

National Household Travel Survey

Driver

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the mobility of an increasingly important demographic group in the U.S., Hispanic immigrants. Using National Household Travel Survey data for 2009, this paper finds that, compared to the mobility of other populations, the mobility of Hispanic female immigrants is much lower, particularly when household income is low. Hispanic female immigrants are substantially less likely to be drivers than their male counterparts, and their probability of being a driver stagnates for decades after immigration, unlike female immigrants of other race/ethnicity groups. Hispanic female immigrants seem to remain non-drivers rather reluctantly. At the household level, Hispanic immigrants do not actively choose less auto-dependent lifestyles, and females clearly depend on others' mobility. Yet once Hispanic female immigrants become drivers, they drive more than females of other race/ethnicity groups. Their high, hidden demand for driving is likely not related to domestic needs because their driving mileage is unassociated with child-caring duties, and is associated with household income level. The association between low-income status and driver status of Hispanic female immigrants has policy implications, especially if the barriers to becoming a driver limit Hispanic female immigrants' access to training or employment and contribute to their low-income status. More detailed analysis is anticipated to detail the mobility challenges Hispanic female immigrants face.

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1. Introduction

The transportation behavior of immigrants warrants research because documented and undocumented immigrants populations are both steadily growing in the U.S.,¹ and these populations have different mobility characteristics compared to U.S. natives (Chatman and Klein, 2009; Tal and Handy, 2010). Among the immigrants, Hispanics are the largest group, accounting for nearly half of the documented immigrant population as well as half of the undocumented immigrant population (American Community Survey 1-year summary 2010; Rivera-Batiz, 2001). Hispanics are particularly known to carpool more than other race/ethnicity groups, sometimes in the form of informal transit services (Cline et al., 2009; Lovejoy and Handy, 2008; Lovejoy and Handy, 2011; Valenzuela et al., 2005).

The transportation modes immigrants use may not be actively chosen given the barriers they face in becoming a driver and in owning and traveling by private cars, compared to U.S. natives.

First, becoming a driver may be more difficult for immigrants, particularly if they lack English language skills and/or are undocumented. Second, owning a private vehicle is financially difficult for immigrants. Third, even after immigrants become a driver and get access to a private car, they may be reluctant to drive. Research finds that certain immigrants do not easily adjust to driving conditions in the U.S. (Chatman and Klein, 2013; Garni and Miller, 2008), and driving is anxiety provoking for both legal and undocumented residents (Garni and Miller, 2008).

Autoless immigrants often get help from their local ethnic community in finding transportation. The mobility limitation is found to be more serious for female immigrants, and so, they carpool more than male immigrants both within their households and with their neighbors (Blumenberg and Smart, 2010, 2014; Bohon et al., 2008; Chatman and Klein, 2013). This limitation in mobility often leads to lower employment rates. Job seekers limit their search radius when auto commuting is not an option, and dependence on rides from others often discourages immigrants from moving out of their ethnic community to reside wherever jobs are. In fact, the unemployment rate of Hispanic females is generally higher than Hispanic males, while the female unemployment rate is generally lower than male unemployment rate for other race/ethnicity groups (the American Community Survey five-year summary, 2010).

In light of these disparities, this paper explores gender differences in mobility, and whether the difference is greater for

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¹ The immigrant population in the U.S. increased from 31.1 million to 40.0 million from 2000 to 2010 (American Community Survey 1-year summary 2010), and the country continuously adds approximately one million permanent residents every year (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2013a). In addition, 11.4 million unauthorized individuals were estimated to live in the U.S. as of January 2012 (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2013b).

Hispanic immigrants. Specifically, driver status and driving mileage of individuals are examined to illustrate mobility of the target populations. The analysis finds that hurdles in becoming a driver may limit the mobility of Hispanic female immigrants. Hispanic female immigrants are much less likely to be drivers than their male counterparts, particularly when they live with other adults and/or in a low-income household. The gender gap in the driver status for Hispanics is also much greater and more persistent than that found for other race/ethnicity groups. The low probability of being a driver does not mean that Hispanic female immigrants actively choose less auto dependent lifestyles. At household level, Hispanic immigrants are overall not less auto dependent because Hispanic immigrant males are highly likely to be drivers and drive as many miles as U.S. native counterparts or non-Hispanic White counterparts. Moreover, Hispanic female immigrants drive more miles than female immigrants of other race/ethnicity groups, and this higher mileage is not associated with whether they have child-caring duties. Rather, driving mileage seems related to household income, suggesting that higher mobility among Hispanic female immigrants is associated with better job opportunities.

2. Difference in travel behavior between immigrants and natives, among race/ethnicity groups, and by gender

Prior research shows that travel behavior may differ between U.S. natives and immigrants, and the difference includes variations based on race/ethnicity background. Compared to U.S. natives, immigrants, particularly recent arrivals, are less likely to own a car, more likely to drive fewer miles, and more likely to carpool or use transit (Blumenberg and Smart, 2010; Blumenberg and Smart, 2014; Casas et al., 2004; Chatman and Klein, 2009; Tal and Handy, 2010; among others).

These differences in travel behavior exist because immigrants have difficulties in becoming drivers, getting vehicles, and getting accustomed to driving on U.S. roads. Becoming a driver is difficult, if not impossible, if they are not proficient in English or undocumented. Vehicle ownership is financially difficult for immigrants because they often send a significant portion of their earnings to family or creditors in their home country, and they face limited opportunities and even discrimination in obtaining automobile loans or credit (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011; Chatman and Klein, 2013; Cohen, 2006). Even after immigrants ensure vehicle availability, they may have technical and emotional difficulties in driving on U.S. roads. The differences in driving conditions, such as congestion, driving rules, and parking style, make driving uncomfortable for many immigrants (Chatman and Klein, 2013). Immigrants, particularly those of color, may also feel intimidated in driving because of conscious or unconscious bias; notably, “police harassment affects everyone with ‘brown skin,’ not just undocumented migrants” (Garni and Miller, 2008, p. 444, lines 15–16). As a result, immigrants may choose residential locations that enable lower auto-dependent lifestyles or provide alternative transportation modes (Blumenberg and Smart, 2010, 2014; Chatman and Klein, 2013; Chatman, 2014).

Autoless immigrants resort to carpooling within the ethnic community, and consequently, may be trapped in the neighborhood. Immigrants in ethnic communities are more likely to share a ride not only with family members but also with friends and neighbors for work and non-work trips than those who live in communities with fewer immigrants (Blumenberg and Smart, 2014). Bohon et al. (2008) find that Hispanic female immigrants in Hispanic immigrant communities in Georgia have limited transportation options, which prevents access to training and employment opportunities. More specifically, their study finds that for

primary workers (typically males) in the Hispanic immigrant households, employers often provide commuter bus services. However, there are few transportation options for other members or their other travel needs. Bohon et al. (2008) also found that the residential locations of Hispanic immigrants often lack public transit service, and those immigrants must rely on very inconvenient carpooling. As a result, the households' non-primary workers, who are more likely to be females, are often isolated in the ethnic community and experience low wages and unemployment.

Gender differences in mobility and travel behaviors are findings not unique to immigrants. Rather, research has found that gender differences in travel behavior are widely observed regardless of immigration status, country, and ethnic origin. Namely, females tend to take more responsibility for household-sustaining tasks than males do and make complex trip chaining to fulfill the role (Rosenbloom and Burns, 1993; Kwan, 1999; McGuckin and Murakami, 1999; Levinson and Kumar, 1995; McGuckin et al., 2005; Assaad and Arntz, 2005; among others). Taking care of household-sustaining errands often leaves females without the time or ability to access urban opportunities (e.g., jobs, education, and personal business), thereby lowering their job participation rate and/or limiting job choice (Kwan, 1999; Assaad and Arntz, 2005).

Although some gendered travel needs are universally observed across communities, travel behavior outcomes may vary widely by socioeconomic and cultural background. Rosenbloom (2006) points out important gender differences in travel behavior by race/ethnicity groups, despite low interest in travel behavior research overall. In the U.S., females, compared to males, drive alone more and, in order to make complex multi-destination trip chaining possible, are less likely to shift to alternative modes (Rosenbloom and Burns, 1993). In Germany, females rely less on auto usage than their male counterparts, although they also make more non-work trips compared to males (Best and Lanzendorf, 2005; Vance and Iovanna, 2007). In less developed countries, females are more likely to depend on public transit or carpooling, travel less frequently, and either take on longer commuting trips or are less likely to participate in the labor market (Assaad and Arntz, 2005; Elias et al., 2008; Elias et al., 2015; Kwan and Kotsev, 2015). These variations in travel behavior imply that gender difference in mobility may differ greatly among U.S. natives and immigrants, and among natives and immigrants of different race/ethnicity groups, because people may follow gender roles and travel behaviors based on their cultural origins. However, most research focuses only on two demographic characteristics and not all three: gender, race/ethnicity group, and immigration status. Among them, immigration status attracts the least attention, possibly because of data availability and/or small sample sizes.

Certain socioeconomic and demographic factors aptly account for travel behavior differences between immigrants and natives, by race/ethnicity groups, or by gender. For example, literature finds that the coefficients of age, educational attainment, driver's license status, vehicle ownership, household size, household income, household lifecycle, employment status, location of workplace, and accessibility of neighborhood are significantly different by demographic group (Best and Lanzendorf, 2005; Boarnet and Sarmiento, 1998; Elias et al., 2015; Kwan, 1999; Hanson and Pratt, 1995; Kwan and Kotsev, 2015, among others).

3. Research design and data

This paper assesses differences by gender and by race/ethnicity group through two-step quantitative analyses: the first one assesses differences in individual driver status, and the second one assesses differences in driving mileage. A two-step analysis of

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