The Effects of Community-Based Organizations on Immigrant Youth Adjustment

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Introduction

Over a decade ago, a report from the Committee on the Health and Adjustment of Immigrant Children and Families (CHAIDF) concluded that we know little about the protective factors that reduce the likelihood of negative outcomes among immigrant youth (Hernandez and Charney 1998). Since this report was released, a number of studies using large data sets have explored the conditions influencing the social, educational, and psychological adaptation of immigrant and second-generation youth (see Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Harker 2001; Harris 1999; Harris, Harker, and Guo 2003). These studies provide us with an understanding of how family background, peers, and the larger society shape the lives of immigrant children, but what is missing is an understanding of how neighborhood or community contexts influence youth in immigrant families.

This paper moves toward filling this gap in the literature by focusing on the effects of community context on immigrant youth. According to Sampson's (1992) *community-level theory of social disorganization*, community structure is important because of its role in facilitating or inhibiting the creation of social capital among families and children. Specifically, youth are protected from negative structural features such as poverty and residential mobility by resources and processes generated within the community. We are particularly interested in how the availability of community-based organizations (CBOs) within neighborhoods shape immigrant youth outcomes. Due to the devolution of the welfare state in the U.S., CBOs are now a key part of the mobility and incorporation process for immigrants in low-income neighborhoods because they provide access to education,

housing, and work (see Marwell 2007; Small 2009), but no studies to date have systematically examined their effects on immigrant youth. CBOs are considered a part of the community social structure that facilitates social relations and social capital, and their presence and proximity to immigrant youth should improve their adaptation outcomes. Using two neighborhood data sets and original data on CBOs, we test these theoretical ideas.

Background and Literature Review

Theories of segmented assimilation (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001) suggest that contexts of reception shape the social and economic adaptation of immigrants and the second generation in the U.S., but surprisingly few studies have used large data sets to model these contextual effects on immigrant youth adaptation. For example, Xie and Greenman (2005) used Add Health data to examine whether assimilation patterns among immigrant adolescents differed under low-and high-SES neighborhood conditions. They found that living in a poor neighborhood with a high concentration of immigrants and co-ethnics provided protective effects for the educational attainment of Hispanic and Asian immigrant youth, but not for other outcomes such as self-esteem, depression, delinquency, and age at first sexual intercourse. Their results also indicated that living in an economically-advantaged neighborhood with a high percentage of immigrants and co-ethnics was not consistently associated with protecting youth from negative outcomes. Using LAFANS, Frank et al. (2007) tested the relationship between neighborhood context and immigrant adjustment measured as delinquency and substance use. Their results revealed that Latino concentration increased the odds of risk behaviors for second- and third-generation Latinos, but this effect disappeared when neighborhood poverty was entered into the model,

suggesting that SES included in the model. They also found that neighborhood collective efficacy had a protective effect for all ethnic/racial groups.

These studies inform our understanding of how coethnic concentration and neighborhood income affect immigrant youth outcomes, but very little research has examined other characteristics of neighborhoods. While income and immigrant concentration are important indicators of access (or lack of access) to material resources, there may be variation in how neighborhoods and communities are structured, regardless of income level, which is likely to influence youth outcomes (Yoshikawa and Seidman 2000). In addition, elements specific to poor urban neighborhoods, such as community-based organizations, may play an integral role in the lives of youth since these organizations often provide access to social and material support not available elsewhere. These local institutions are likely to reinforce ethnic networks, creating conditions where individuals may have access to positive resources, information, and opportunities.

A handful of case studies have pointed to the importance of community organizations in the development of children in immigrant families. For example, Zhou and Bankston (1998) highlighted that dense networks created by Vietnamese community organizations represents a form of social control that positively influenced most second-generation youth in their sample despite their residence in a poor, minority neighborhood. In her study of West Indian immigrants, Waters (1999) suggested that ethnic voluntary organizations provided positive sources of support for West Indian immigrant families, but emphasized the role of the family and the larger society as central to the adaptation process for second-generation youth. While such studies are useful, they are based on particular cases and we do not know whether these results are generalizable across groups or neighborhoods. These studies also

do not extensively explore the effect of community organizations on the development and well-being of youth. In addition, most of this research has not been based on data specifically designed to investigate neighborhood effects.

In this paper, we seek to understand (1) whether the availability of community-based organizations – a particular aspect of the neighborhood context – matters for immigrant and native youth outcomes; (2) whether there are differences across racial-ethnic groups; and (3) what the mechanisms are through which community-based organizations affect youth (i.e. social control, collective efficacy, social capital).

Data and Methods

We analyze two data sets, the Los Angeles Family and Neighborhood Study (LAFANS) and Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN), to examine these effects. Both data sets incorporate neighborhoods into the research design and allow for an examination of variation in individual outcomes within and between neighborhoods. LAFANS is a stratified random sample of 65 neighborhoods (census tracts) in Los Angeles County, with an oversample of poor neighborhoods and households with children, while PHDCN has 80 neighborhood clusters (which are comprised of 2-3 census tracts). These data sets include significant numbers of immigrant youth, most of whom are Latino.

The LAFANS is a longitudinal study of families that focuses on neighborhood, family, and peer effects on youth development (Sastry et al. 2003; Pebley and Sastry 2009). Over 3,000 households completed the survey and one child was chosen at random from each sampled household with children, along with one sibling and the child's primary caregiver. We use the first wave of the study, which was completed in 2002. After dropping children

under age 9, who were not administered the child questionnaire; Native American youth who are too small in numbers to provide reliable estimates; and a small number of children whose parents did not complete the adult survey, the LAFANS analytic sample contains approximately 1,350 children between the ages of 9 and 18.

We also utilize data from the PHDCN Longitudinal Cohort Study, a multi-wave survey following 6,228 randomly selected youth from seven different age cohorts over the course of seven years (see Earls and Vischer 1997). The survey administrators selected a stratified probability sample of 80 neighborhood clusters (NCs) in Chicago from which they randomly selected households with potential respondents. Survey items were administered to the youth directly and to their primary caregiver. We utilize data from the first two waves and focus on the 12 and 15 year old cohorts. The restrictions and individuals lost due to item non-response result in a total analytical sample of 971 respondents in 78 NCs.

Both datasets are linked to census data, which provides demographic characteristics of the neighborhoods including the racial, foreign-born, and language composition, and the extent of concentrated disadvantage and residential stability. Additionally, we are able to include measures of social capital based by aggregating adult responses to questions about the extent to which neighbors know and help each other, and the extent to which adults are willing to intervene to protect children and put a stop to problem behavior.

To deal with the issue of clustered responses within neighborhoods, we used hierarchical linear models (HLM) to analyze the data (Raudenbush and Bryk 200x). This method is appropriate because it relaxes the least squares regression assumption of uncorrelated error terms across individuals, which is likely violated given the sample collection procedures in both datasets. We also use propensity scores as a means of

insulating our results from the fact that neighborhood effects could simply be a function of the self-selection of certain types of individuals into certain types of neighborhoods.[1] We enter these propensities as control variables in our final models, so that we are comparing individuals net of their likelihood to live in neighborhoods with certain features, such as immigrant concentration (see Rubin 1979; Rosenbaum and Rubin 1984; Winship and Morgan 1999).

Independent and dependent variables

Immigrant generation measures whether the respondent is an immigrant (born outside of the U.S.), of the second generation (has a least one parent born outside of the U.S.) or third generation or more (both parents born inside the U.S.). Race is indicated by dummy variables for Hispanic, non-Hispanic black, non-Hispanic white, and Asian or Pacific Islander. Additionally, we control for age, gender, parental education, family income, and language used in the home.

To test whether the presence and proximity of community-based organizations affect immigrant youth outcomes, we collected data on ethnic, immigrant, and youth development community-based organizations in Los Angeles and Chicago and merged these data to the LAFANS and PHDCN data sets. The organizational data were gathered from Guidestar, a comprehensive non-profit database of over 1.5 million nonprofits registered with the IRS. Not all organizations are incorporated as a 501(c)(3) or submit IRS forms each year (those

[1] Following Frank et al. (2007), a set of propensity scores are estimated using logistic regression to predict the likelihood of living in a census tract or neighborhood that is above the county mean on a given characteristic, repeated for each one of a set of characteristics. The independent variables in these equations include parental age, education, and ethnicity; nativity, legal residency status and length of time in the U.S.; household size and structure; family income and home ownership; welfare receipt; language spoken in the home; church attendance; familial problems and quality of the parent-child relationships; and the parent's frequency of residential moves as a child. The predicted probabilities derived from these regressions for each individual are entered as control variables in the final set equations.

with budgets under $25,000 are not required to submit), and although these data provide an undercount, they are a useful proxy for nonprofit activity which could affect immigrant youth.

Ethnic organizations are defined as community nonprofits that provide services or advocacy regarding ethnic/cultural awareness. Examples include the Tierra Blanca Arts Center, Filipino American Heritage Institute, and Persian American Cultural Center in Los Angeles. All of these organizations promote the cultural traditions of particular groups and seek greater intercultural awareness and cooperation. Immigrant organizations provide services and advocacy for immigrants, and operate as a resource for the immigrant population by providing access to information, services, and networks of support. An example includes the Ethiopian Community Association of Chicago which serves the educational, cultural, and economic needs of refugees and immigrants in Chicago and surrounding areas. This organization offers health outreach, employment, financial literacy, and educational programs. Finally, youth development organizations represent programs which seek to assist in the healthy development of youth and include youth alliance/advocacy organizations, youth centers, mentoring programs, scouting, and other youth development programs. Examples include Boys and Girls Clubs and Chicago Youth Centers which provide afterschool programs, sports and recreation, academic tutoring, and arts and leadership skill building.

Our neighborhood-level items include measures of the count of ethnic, immigrant, and youth CBOs within the boundaries of the neighborhood for PHDCN. Because Los Angeles covers a much larger geographic area, we use a measure of the number of organizations within a 10 mile radius of the center of the census tract. Using online

geocoding tools made publicly available by the University of Southern California's GIS Research Lab (http://webgis.usc.edu), we looked up the geographic coordinates (latitude and longitude) for each CBO and used these coordinates to calculate pairwise distances between each CBO and the population-weighted centroid of each census tract (provided by the Census) using the Haversine formula (Sinnott 1984). We then summed the number of organizations that were less than 10 miles from the center of the census tract, for each tract, to arrive at our proximity measure for the Los Angeles CBOs.

Our dependent variables measure health and adjustment outcomes for youth. The analysis of the LAFANS data focuses on two sub-scales of the Behavior Problems Index (BPI) created by Peterson and Zill (1986), designed to measure emotional development. Internalizing behavior is a measure of the extent to which children internalize their problems and exhibit depressive behaviors such as sadness and low self-esteem. Externalizing behaviors are outwardly directed, aggressive behaviors, such as bullying and cheating. The scales are constructed from 28 questions answered by the child's caregiver. The analysis of the PHDCN data focuses on delinquency and aggression. Both variables are scales designed by the survey administrators and are constructed with items measuring various psychological characteristics and behaviors. For these variables, we predict values for the Wave 2 version while controlling for the Wave 1 versions.

Preliminary Results

Our preliminary results show that community-based organizations do matter for immigrant and native youth. In particular, the analysis of PHDCN shows that the number of ethnic and immigrant organizations within one's neighborhood cluster decreases delinquency and aggression for immigrant youth when a host of individual and neighborhood characteristics

are held constant. We also find that these effects are not attenuated when we include variables measuring collective efficacy and social capital which suggests that the effects of community-based organizations on immigrant youth adjustment outcomes are not working through these mechanisms. Because these CBOs could simply be a proxy for the presence of immigrant and ethnic communities instead of local institutions which create conditions where individuals may have access to positive resources, information, and opportunities, we conducted additional analyses. We included percent foreign-born at the neighborhood level instead of our CBO measures, and we find that percent foreign-born has no direct significant effect on youth adjustment outcomes nor does it have an interactive effect with immigrant generation. We are currently in the process of modeling the LAFANS data.

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