

Contemporary Assimilation Experience for Mexican Immigrant Children (1.5 Generation)

Previous research has shown that children of immigrants (2nd generation) experience upward assimilation¹ compared to their parents (1st generation migrants). However, what happens to those immigrants who come to the United States as children, also known as the 1.5 generation? It has been claimed that the assimilation process that immigrants undergo is subject and affected by several variables, resulting in a more complex assimilation process. This paper will compare labor force outcomes for immigrant children's (1.5 generation) and their parents as a measure of achieving upward assimilation. In addition to variables such as (a) English language acquisition, (b) time in the U.S., (c) human and financial capital of the immigrant children's parents, (d) social context where they develop, we identify that legal status in the U.S. plays an active role for members of the 1.5 generation's upward assimilation.

English proficiency has been identified as a basic step that enables migrants to participate in the life of the host community (Rumbaut and Portes 2001; Clark 1998; Zhou 1997; Portes and Rumbaut 1996). In fact, it has been suggested that immigrant children who come in their early years attain similar linguistic characteristics as those persons who were born in the U.S. (Allensworth 1997). Yielding that time in the U.S. is an important factor in their assimilation experience. Thus, time in the U.S. allows to measure the length of exposure to the American life and serves as an indicator to study the different developmental stages of children in the U.S.

Parents' human and financial capital contribute for a supportive atmosphere for both 1.5 and 2nd generations' educational and occupational mobility. In particular, human capital is decisive in determining in what segment of society a family will step in. Thus, immigrant who come with high levels of human capital are at a very competitive position, enabling them to

¹ A person is considered to have achieved upward assimilation when he/she is fluent with the English language, has achieved high educational achievement and good occupational status (Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

succeed occupationally and economically in the host country (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). A fourth characteristic embedded in the settlement process is the receiving community to which migrants arrive. The host community offers uneven possibilities to different migratory groups, restricting or facilitating their opportunities to assimilate and integrate (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Clark 1998; Zhou 1997; Portes and Rumbaut 1996). Thus, the receiving community will actively affect the social context where children will grow and develop, influencing their assimilation process.

We identify legal status as a variable that will prevent members of the 1.5 generation from reaching upward assimilation. Young immigrants are compelled to integrate to the host society and during their early years of schooling (until high school completion), they are not restricted from educational services. However, as undocumented children reach their youth, they find themselves restricted from further educational services in the host country due to the lack of legal status. In other words, their lack of legal documents prevents them from achieving higher education; thus, preventing them from achieving social mobility and integration.

The data for this study is taken from the U.S. sample of the Mexican Migration Project. We restricted the dataset only to persons who are members of the interviewed household and who are in their current trip. We study how variables such as time in the U.S., educational achievement, current legal status, English usage at home, and social context, affect labor force outcomes of the 1.5 generation. By running logistic regression, we expect to find that legal status will have the greatest effect in the assimilation process undergone by the 1.5 generation. In addition, we expect to see a great similarity in the assimilation process between the undocumented members of the 1.5 generation and their parents.

Reference:

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