Does Segmented Assimilation Help Us Understand Hispanic Immigrant Mortality in the U.S.?

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The classic assimilation perspective proposes that as immigrants spend time in the U.S. they gradually take on the cultural and behavioral patterns of the receiving society.

Regarding immigrant health, two ideas stand out in the assimilation literature:

1. The selection or healthy migrant hypothesis
2. The acculturation hypothesis
Assimilation and Immigrant health

- The selection or healthy migrant hypothesis
  - Individuals of better health in other countries are more likely than their less healthy counterparts to immigrate to the United States
  - Existing evidence shows that selection may be behind (at least partly) favorable health outcomes of foreign-born population

- The acculturation hypothesis
  - Health indicators are less favorable among those immigrants who had been in the U.S. longer compared to their immigrant counterparts who had been in the U.S. for a shorter period of time
  - This relationship is found within mortality, health behaviors indicators (smoking, drinking and drug use) and infant health outcomes
Assimilation and Health of Latinos in the U.S

Positive Selectivity

- Immigrants
- Native-born population

The Degree of Assimilation

Low
High
The Segmented Assimilation theory

- Immigrants may take at least **three divergent paths of assimilation** (Portes & Zhou 1993)

  - New immigrants and their children assimilate more or less seamlessly into the mainstream middle-class

  - Downward assimilation into marginalized working class or “underclass” communities.

  - Middle-class status is eventually achieved through education and child-rearing practices that are reinforced by the values and sense of cohesion of strong co-ethnic communities
The Segmented Assimilation Theory

Positive Selectivity

Hispanic Immigrants

Native-born Population

Native-born Population in Underclass

Native-born Population in Middle Class

The Degree of Assimilation

Low

High

Upward assimilation into middle-class

Downward assimilation into underclass
Hypotheses

- H 1: Foreign-born Hispanics > U.S.-born adults
- H 2: Underclass foreign-born Hispanics <= U.S.-born adults
- H 3: Underclass foreign-born Hispanics < Middle class U.S.-born adults
- H 4: Middle class foreign-born Hispanics => Middle class U.S.-born adults
Data & Method

- 1997-2004 National Health Interview Survey & NHIS Public-use Linked Mortality Files, Adults 19 years or older. \(N=360,895\)

- **Dependent variable**: Hazard of Mortality
  - Died before 2006 (=1), assumed to be alive (=0)

- **Poverty status is used to measure segmented assimilation**
  - Immigrants above the poverty line: Middle class assimilation
  - Immigrants under the poverty line: Underclass assimilation

- **Independent variables**: nativity, gender, age, poverty status, education, occupation, language use on the interview, region of residence and marital status

- Discrete-time logistic regression to estimate the hazard of death. \(N=1,702,868\) person-years
Results: Hypothesis 1

- H 1: Foreign-born Hispanics > U.S.-born adults

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nativity &amp; Duration</th>
<th>Hazard Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ref=U.S.-born adult</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign-born Hispanic &lt; 10 yrs</td>
<td>0.59 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign-born Hispanic 10 yrs +</td>
<td>0.73 **</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NHIS 1997-2004
N=1,330,859 p-y
Model controls for sex, age, occupation, education, marital status and region of residence
*P<.05 **P<.01
## Results: Hypothesis 2

- Underclass foreign-born Hispanics $\leq$ U.S.-born adults

<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ref=U.S.-born adult</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign-born Hispanic &lt; 10 yrs, Underclass</td>
<td>0.69</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreign-born Hispanic &lt; 10 yrs, Middle class</td>
<td>0.58 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign-born Hispanic 10 yrs, Underclass</td>
<td>0.86 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign-born Hispanic 10 yrs, Middle class</td>
<td>0.73 **</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NHIS 1997-2004  
N=1,330,859 p-y  
Model controls for sex, age, occupation, education, marital status and region of residence  
*P < .05  **P < .01
Results: Hypothesis 3

- H 3: Underclass foreign-born Hispanics < Middle class U.S.-born adults

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<th>Hazard Ratio</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ref=U.S.-born adults, Middle class</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreign-born Hispanic &lt; 10 yrs, Underclass</td>
<td>0.74</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreign-born Hispanic &lt; 10 yrs, Middle class</td>
<td>0.60 *</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreign-born Hispanic 10 yrs, Underclass</td>
<td>0.94</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreign-born Hispanic 10 yrs, Middle class</td>
<td>0.78 **</td>
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Source: NHIS 1997-2004
N=1,330,859 p-y
Model controls for sex, age, occupation, education, marital status and region of residence
*P<.05 **P<.01
Results: Hypothesis 4

- H 4: Middle class foreign-born Hispanics => Middle class U.S.-born adults

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<th>Hazard Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ref=U.S.-born adults, Underclass</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign-born Hispanic &lt; 10 yrs, Underclass</td>
<td>0.52</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreign-born Hispanic &lt; 10 yrs, Middle class</td>
<td>0.45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreign-born Hispanic 10 yrs, Underclass</td>
<td>0.63</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreign-born Hispanic 10 yrs, Middle class</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NHIS 1997-2004
N=1,330,859 p-y
Model controls for sex, age, occupation, education, marital status and region of residence
*P<.05 **P<.01
Discussion

- Strong positive selectivity: No Hispanic immigrant group has higher hazard of death compared to U.S.-born adults, regardless of their class

- Some immigrant groups in underclass show no difference in hazard of death compared to U.S.-born adults

- Contributions:
  - Positive selectivity of immigrants operates for also immigrants in underclass
  - A healthy immigrant effect is limited to applicability to only certain groups
  - Applied the theory of segmented assimilation to explain immigrant’s mortality
  - Therefore, future immigrant health research should consider immigrant’s segmented assimilation
Thank you

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