

Extended Abstract

Factors Affecting Child Development in Immigrant Families in the United States: Impact of Linguistic Distance, Cognitive Stimulation and Parental Involvement

Protap Mukherjee * and Lopamudra Ray Saraswati **

Immigration has made the United States the most ethnically and racially diverse nation in the world. One in every five children in America today is an immigrant or has at least one immigrant parent. Between 1990 and 1997, the numbers of children in immigrant families grew by 47 per cent compared with only 7 per cent for children in non-immigrant families (National Research Council, 1999). A child's physiological, psychological, social and intellectual development influences his/her adaptation or integration into the society as well as their active participation and creative contribution to the cultural life of the immigration country (Pepkin, 1989). Researches linking immigration with child development are still in its infancy (Oropesa, 2000) and so social scientists have not learned much about the factors affecting the child development in immigrant families (Guo *et al.* 2000).

The present study is an attempt to address this gap in the literature. In this paper we examine the level of a child's intellectual, behavioural, and social development in immigrant families in the United States by different background variables. We have made an attempt to examine the impact of linguistic distance, cognitive stimulation and parental involvement on child development and try to make a final model to understand the plausible factors determining the child development in immigrant families.

We use a new data source—Round I of New Immigrant Survey-2003. NIS-2003 is a multi-cohort perspective-retrospective panel study of new legal immigrants to the United

States. The baseline survey of NIS-2003 was conducted from June 2003 to June 2004. This round included completed interviews with 8,573 respondents in the adult sample and 810 parents or guardians in the child sample. For the present study, we mainly use three sections of NIS-2003 data files: child section, parent and HOME and children aged 8-12 years have been selected. We choose NIS-2003 data for several reasons. First, it contains many variables that describe children's three different developmental aspects— intellectual, behavioural and social. The NIS-2003-I data permits combining the child related information with other data on parents, demographic, home, social, income status, state of residence, nativity status. The extensiveness of the child data once merged with other data offers an excellent opportunity to study the child development in immigrant families.

We have made three composite variables for measuring three different developments— intellectual, behavioural and social. We have constructed six factors— nativity status, linguistic distance, cognitive stimulation, childhood health, parental involvement and fatherhood. Composite variables have also been prepared for the last five factors. Bivariate and multivariate analyses have been carried out in the present study.

Our preliminary results suggest that there is a significant relationship between child development and nativity status. Proficiency in English language has a tremendous impact on child development in immigrant families. This finding is particularly true for those migrating from countries where English is not a native language. Children who have always lived with their parents and have more parental involvement, more interactions with fathers show better signs of development. They have also better command of English language (Di kaiou, 1989). The study reveals that children from single parent households are physically and psychologically more vulnerable (Dawson, 1999). The negative effects can be especially seen in which children received less parental involvement and less interactions with fathers. The study shows children living with stepparent or other family members also have a propensity to cause problems at school (Dawson 1991, Jonsson and Gahler 1997). The impacts of absence of parents and their involvement are severe, particularly for more boys than for girls (Krein and Beller,

1998). Children from single parent households have higher risks of developing psychological problems, but the risk is even greater for children living with step families (Astone and McLanahan, 1994).

Our various models specifications indicate that cognitive stimulation in the home is by far the most important predictors for child development. Second important is parental involvement and interactions with fathers. In particular our result suggests that intervening in children's cognitive environments and adults parenting involvement is more effective (Guo *et al.* 2000). This finding has implication for policies designed to link child's overall development with immigration. They indicate the possible effectiveness of targeted interventions in mediating process that affects children's overall development. The development by income status and immigrant status are traceable in economic disadvantaged among groups of children in immigrant families that existed at the time of entry into the United States and also embedded in various classes of admission to legal permanent resident status.

* Assistant Research Officer, ** M.Phil Scholar