

ACADEMIC OUTCOMES OF YOUTH IN "NON-TRADITIONAL" TWO-PARENT FAMILIES: THE EFFECTS OF IMMIGRANT STATUS



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INTRODUCTION

Despite many social and economic disadvantages, immigrant youth tend to report similar or higher academic outcomes than their native-born peers. Some factors that have been noted for the "protective" nature of immigrant status is that immigrant youth are more likely to: (1) live in 2-parent families; (2) have positive family relationships and high parental expectations; and (3) report high levels of family involvement.

The Importance of Family Structure and Context:

In general, youth in 2-biological parent families tend to report significantly better grades, achievement scores, high school completion rates, school attendance rates, and school-related behavior than youth in stepparent or cohabiting families. Yet, there appear to be racial and ethnic differences in the effects of family structure upon youth well-being. The academic outcomes and behavior of Black and Hispanic youth appear to be less negatively affected than White youth by living in "non-traditional" two-parent families or experiencing family structure change. This research suggests that the impact of family structure on youth outcomes might be conditioned by the cultural and social contexts in which youth live.

Thus, the effects of family structure may not be similar for youth of all backgrounds. No research to date, however, has focused specifically on the ways in which family structure might effect the outcomes of youth from immigrant families.

GOALS OF THE STUDY

- Examine the family structure and family dynamics of 2-parent immigrant families.
- Examine whether the academic outcomes of immigrant youth are affected by family structure in a manner similar to non-immigrant youth.
- Examine whether the family dynamics of immigrant youth differ significantly by family structure (as research has shown that they do for youth in general).

DATA

The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health

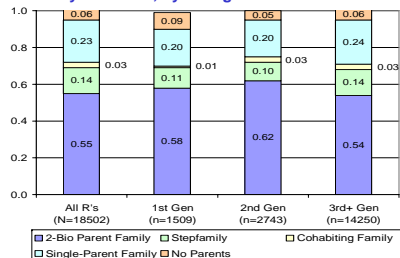
The study is limited to respondents who:

- Are from either a two-biological parent family or a married steppather family
- Completed in-home interviews during Wave I (1994-1995)

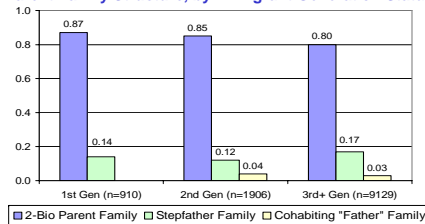
Analytic Sample = 11,945 adolescents in grades 7 through 12

DESCRIPTIVES

Proportion of U.S. Adolescents Living within Each Family Structure, by Immigrant Generation Status



Proportion of U.S. Adolescents Living within Each 2-Parent Family Structure, by Immigrant Generation Status

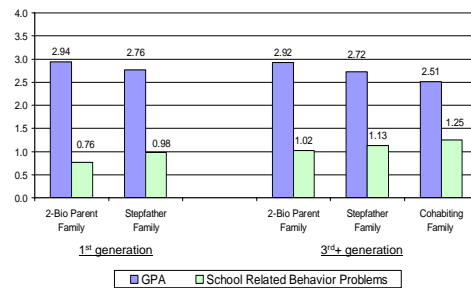


Means and Standard Deviations of Variables, Respondents in Various 2-parent Family Forms, by Immigrant Generation

	1st Generation		2nd Generation		3rd+ Generation		2-Biological Parent Family	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Self-Reported GPA (1-4)	2.91 0.78**	2.96 0.75**	2.71 0.88**	2.26 0.77**	2.91 0.73	2.72 0.79**	2.91 0.88**	2.92 0.75
School-Related Behavior Problems (0-5)	0.98 0.84**	0.76 0.67	1.15 0.74**	1.33 0.74**	0.94 0.67	1.13 0.73**	1.25 0.77**	1.02 0.72
Consider Step-Father a "Father" (0-1)	0.88 0.32	n/a n/a	0.72 0.45	n/a n/a	n/a n/a	0.79 0.41	n/a n/a	n/a n/a
Step-father is Foreign-born (0-1)	0.65 0.48	n/a n/a	0.28 0.45	n/a n/a	n/a n/a	0.03 0.16	n/a n/a	n/a n/a
Parental Supervision (0-4)	3.22 0.84	3.10 0.95	2.92 0.96**	2.42 1.29**	3.05 0.94	2.87 0.92**	2.96 1.01**	3.07 0.89
Parental Control - Parent's Perspective (1-5)	1.98 0.92	1.86 0.88	1.84 0.86*	2.11 0.84*	2.00 0.91	2.10 0.87	2.12 0.88	2.06 0.91
Parent's Religiosity (1-4)	3.65 0.67	3.74 0.57	3.64 0.55	3.62 0.49	3.61 0.63	3.53 0.63**	3.35 0.72**	3.60 0.63
Church Attendance With Parents (0-1)	0.37 0.48	0.40 0.49	0.28 0.45**	0.30 0.46**	0.42 0.49	0.30 0.46**	0.11 0.33**	0.43 0.50
Conflict with Resident Parents (0-1)	0.34 0.48	0.34 0.47	0.42 0.49	0.32 0.50	0.40 0.49	0.43 0.50**	0.42 0.49**	0.39 0.49
Relationship with Bio Parents (1-6)	4.15 0.77	4.16 0.76	4.28 0.75**	3.88 0.84**	4.23 0.67	4.32 0.71**	4.19 0.75**	4.29 0.63
Relationship with Step-Father (1-6)	3.83 0.93	n/a n/a	3.78 1.00	n/a n/a	n/a n/a	3.76 0.99	n/a n/a	n/a n/a
College Expect - Resident Bio Parents (1-6)	4.07 1.25*	4.30 1.04	3.80 1.22**	3.95 1.52**	4.13 1.10	3.94 1.24	3.87 1.25	4.00 1.16
College Expect - Step-Father (1-6)	3.56 1.43	n/a n/a	3.49 1.33	n/a n/a	n/a n/a	3.63 1.34	n/a n/a	n/a n/a
Parental Involvement in School (0-1)	0.23 0.43	0.20 0.40	0.31 0.46	0.20 0.40	0.33 0.47	0.32 0.47**	0.28 0.45**	0.44 0.50
N	110	800	191	52	1603	1637	332	7180

*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001 (Compared with 2-Biological Parent Family Within Immigrant Generation Status Group)

GPA and School Related Behavior Problems by Family Structure and Immigrant Generation Status



MULTIVARIATE FINDINGS

Among 1st Generation Youth:

- Controlling for demographic and SES characteristics, no significant GPA or behavior differences exist between youth in stepfamilies and youth in 2-bio parent families.

- Few of the family dynamics variables have sig. direct effects:
 - GPA – parent-child conflict (-) and church attendance (+)
 - Behavior – parental control (+), parental supervision (-) and relationship with resident bio parent (-)

Among 3rd+ Generation Youth:

- Controlling for demographic and SES characteristics, youth in stepfamilies and cohabiting families report significantly lower GPAs and higher levels of behavior problems than youth in 2-bio parent families.

- Significant family structure effects are fully mediated by family stability measures (% of life spent in current home) and family dynamics measures.

- Significant family dynamics measures:

- GPA - parent-child conflict (-), church attendance (+), parental control (-), parental involvement in school (+), relationship with resident bio parent (+), parental college expectations (+),
- Behavior - parent-child conflict (+), parental control (+), parental supervision (-), relationship with resident bio parent (-), parental college expectations (-).

CONCLUSION

- Among youth in 2-parent families, immigrants are more likely to:
 - Live with both biological parents;
 - Identify steppather as a "father";
 - Report more positive family dynamics regardless of family structure.
- Although there are similar bi-variate relationships between family structure and GPA/ behavior across the generation groups, the mechanisms underlying those relationships appear to differ.
 - 1st generation – selection into stepfamilies (demographic/SES vars.)
 - 3rd+ generation – differences in family stability and dynamics