



Navigating a Prejudicial Society while Fostering Resilience in Immigrant Children



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Background

Immigrant youth and children of migrant parents comprise a significant portion of modern society. As such, their successful adaptation and integration into receiving societies is crucial for not only their own wellbeings, but also for their families' and for society's functionings (Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2017). These youth often experience many facets of adversity—ranging socioeconomically to socially, often as a result of discrimination stemming from the biculturalism of immigrant families. Despite this, the experience of adaptation breeds resilience: inferred from the two fundamental judgements that 1) the person must be, or have been, challenged by exposure to significant risk or adversity, and 2) he/she must be “doing ok”—functioning or developing well in spite of exposures to adversity or risk (Masten 2014).

Objectives

- Assess the impact that migration has on child development, particularly in the context of prejudice
- Identify barriers and facilitators of positive growth with an emphasis on resilience
- Develop a proposal to implement developmentally protective policies for migrant children and children of immigrants

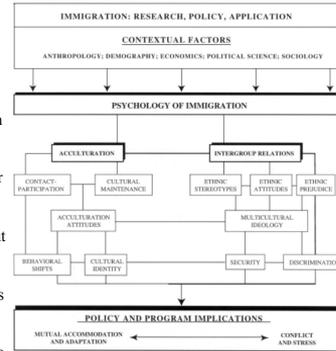
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Discussion

Immigration & Prejudice

The psychological effect of acculturation and intergroup relations continues beyond the initial settlement post-immigration, but rather the migrant experience is a prolonged source of stress ((Coll & Magnuson, 1997). This process of acculturation requires immigrant children to navigate both their parents' cultures and mainstream culture—a biculturalism that is an asset in an interdependent and multicultural world but also a stressor in its acquisition and role in socialization. As such, the dual identity becomes more salient as children approach adolescence, when they develop more stable and clear-cut attitudes towards meaningful social objects—particularly stances toward ingroup vs. outgroup (Crocutti et al., 2021). As minority groups recognize negative stereotypes about their cultural group and unfair treatment themselves, they have found discrimination to be a significant source of stress, impacting self-esteem and the development of coping strategies (Coll & Magnuson, 1997).



Resilience

In response to such stressors, immigrant children are inclined to develop high levels of resilience. Promotive and conditional influences of resilience counteract the potential negative effects of adversity on development, suggesting protective roles against maladaptation (Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2017). Notably, the immigrant paradox is contributed to by family context and values—whether learning behavior is emphasized versus learning results, as the former more consistently predicts greater success (Coll & Magnuson, 1997). Moreover, youth who are equipped with and apply “solid, normative human resources” are better adapted to developmental tasks and to psychological well-being, consistently in resilience research (Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2017).

Policy Recommendations

Although adversity is deemed necessary in order for resilience to occur, the experience of racial prejudice should be eradicated due to its paramount impact on life quality throughout an individual's life.

To address the socialization and perpetuation of institutional racism within incoming youth, we have developed a policy with a trifold approach:

- Implement implicit bias training in schools
- Expand acculturation programs to receiving populations as service learning opportunities
- Promote like-identity social circles for cultural groups in order to establish specific social support

Conclusions & Next Steps

- Immigrant-origin children and youth are highly diverse and face many contextual barriers to successful adaptation. Despite the odds, many thrive beyond expectations and demonstrate resilience in their new homelands.
- Federal, state, and local policymakers should ensure that immigrant families have access to services needed to promote children's healthy development, furthering the immigrant paradox through its fostering of protective factors such as resilience.
- Racial discrimination's presence throughout a lifetime has debilitating effects on not only socioeconomic successes of immigrant children longitudinally, but also on physical health. As such, it is essential to promote anti-racism particularly within the education environment.

Selected References

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