

Immigrant children from poor countries academically outperform those from developed countries

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Immigrants who seek a better life in Western countries may not be able to escape the influence of their home country when it comes to their children's academic performance, according to findings from the October issue of the *American Sociological Review*.

Sociologists Mark Levels, Jaap Dronkers and Gerbert Kraaykamp find that large-scale influences such as country of origin, destination country and immigrant community play a role in educational outcomes for immigrant children in their host country.

The research, which looked at the mathematical literacy scores of thousands of 15-year-old immigrants to 13 Western nations from 35 different native countries, indicates that economic development and political conditions in an immigrant's home country impact the child's academic success in his or her destination country. Counter-intuitively, immigrant children from countries with lower levels of economic development have better scholastic performance than comparable children who emigrate from countries with higher levels of economic development.

Children of immigrants from politically unstable countries have poorer scholastic performance compared to other immigrant children. "Adult political immigrants are known to face serious negative consequences that can be related to the political situations in their origin countries,"

said sociologist Mark Levels, junior researcher in the Department of Sociology at Radboud University, Nijmegen, in the Netherlands. "We found that these consequences carry across generations to affect their children's educational chances as well. Our findings therefore have urgent implications in countries that receive a large number of these immigrants."

"Specific educational programs designed to counter the negative effects of political migration may be essential to ensure that the children of politically motivated immigrants achieve their full potential," Levels said.

The study authors also analyzed the impact of policies and political conditions in destination countries. In traditional immigrant-receiving countries such as Australia and New Zealand, they found that immigrant children academically outperformed their counterparts in other Western nations. The authors theorize that this finding is likely the result of restrictive immigration policies that ensure that better qualified adults emigrate (e.g., those with employment and high levels of education), rather than a receptive climate toward immigrants or education policies designed to meet their needs.

The size and socioeconomic characteristics of immigrant communities also played a role in the academic performance of their children. Children from immigrant communities with higher socioeconomic status relative to the native population had higher scholastic performance than those from other immigrant communities. Likewise, children from large immigrant communities were more likely to perform better academically than children from smaller immigrant communities.

Data for this study came from the 2003 wave of the Project for International Student Assessment (PISA) from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the first large cross-

national OECD dataset to contain information on the origin of first- and second-generation migrants. The sample was comprised of 7,403 15-year-old immigrant children from 35 different native countries living in 13 destination/host countries. Scholastic performance was based on PISA measurement of mathematical literacy scores.

Jaap Dronkers, professor of social inequality and stratification at the European University Institute in San Domenico di Fiesole, Italy, and Gerbert Kraaykamp, professor of empirical sociology at Radboud University, Nijmegen, co-authored the report with Mark Levels.

Source: American Sociological Association

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