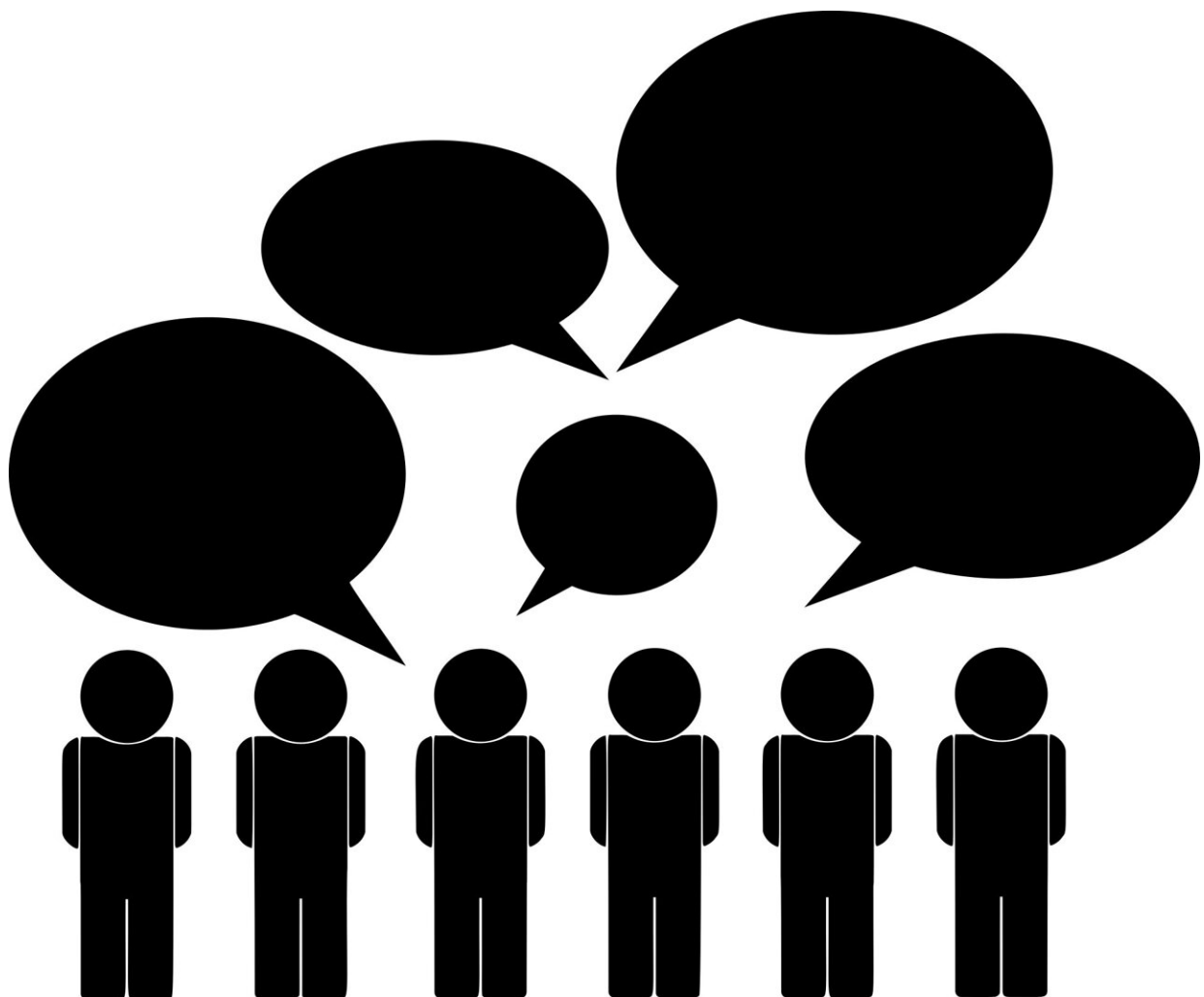


Community-level language resources do not benefit immigrant men and women equally, study finds

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Assistance provided by bilingual adults in a community increases the chances of employment for immigrant men who struggle with English proficiency, but does not play a similar role for women with that same language barrier, according to a new study by a University at Buffalo social work researcher.

[The paper](#), published in the journal *International Migration Review*, looks at [language proficiency](#) and employment outcomes from a wider angle than focusing exclusively on the individual, and introduces the concept of "community-level language resources," or the percentage of bilingual adults in a community among those speaking the same [native language](#).

"This study calls attention to the importance of these community-level resources when developing policies for [immigrant populations](#), like mandated language services and employment programs," says Yunju Nam, Ph.D., an associate professor in the UB School of Social Work and the study's corresponding author. "Investment in these policies can enrich community-level language resources."

Nam's research doesn't explain why the associations between resources and employment outcomes differ by gender, but she does speculate on some possibilities for that disparity.

"If communities have different gender norms and the majority of bilingual individuals in the community consists mainly of men, immigrant women with limited English proficiency may have a harder time getting language assistance," she says. "Community language resources might also lack relevance if immigrant women with limited English proficiency are hired mostly for jobs where that proficiency is not a job requirement."

Future research should consider diverse social networks among immigrant communities, according to Sarah Richards-Desai, a doctoral

candidate in UB's School of Social Work and one of the paper's co-authors.

"The gendered aspect of community language resources also indicates the need for gender-specific supports to promote immigrant women's employment," she says.

Although previous research looks at whether community resources are associated with better [employment outcomes](#) for immigrants, those studies look mainly at ethnic community resources, or the size of a co-ethnic population in a specific geographic area, paying particular attention to community resources related to language.

But ethnic resources are not identical to community language resources.

"Ethnic community boundaries are also not always the same as linguistic community boundaries. Multiple ethnic groups can share one language, like Arabic languages spoken by ethnic groups in both Middle Eastern and North African countries, while some [ethnic groups](#) are composed of subgroups speaking different languages," says Nam. "An ethnic community with many co-ethnic members may provide emotional and material support, but may not have a high level of community language resources if only a few members are bilingual."

The study used data collected from 2012 to 2016 by the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey. The sample consisted of 1,300 immigrants (people born outside the United States whose parents are not U.S. citizens) living in five counties across Western New York.

"By examining these relationships, our study fills gaps in economic integration research," says Nam.

More information: Yunju Nam et al, Individual English Proficiency,

Community Language Resources, and Immigrants' Employment in Western New York: Evidence from the American Community Survey, *International Migration Review* (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/01979183231216079](#)

Provided by University at Buffalo

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