The Impact of Immigration on Children’s Development
The Impact of Immigration on Children’s Development

Volume Editor

Cynthia Garcia Coll  Providence, R.I.

8 figures and 16 tables, 2012
Contents

VII Introduction: The Global, the Local – Children and Immigration around the World
Garcia Coll, C. (Providence, R.I./Puerto Rico)

1 Quiet in the Eye of the Beholder: Teacher Perceptions of Asian Immigrant Children
Yamamoto, Y.; Li, J. (Providence, R.I.)

17 The Impact of Social Contexts in Schools: Adolescents Who Are New to Canada and Their Sense of Belonging
Gagné, M.H.; Shapka, J.D.; Law, D.M. (Vancouver, B.C.)

35 Are Immigrant Children in Italy Better Adjusted than Mainstream Italian Children?
Dimitrova, R.; Chasiotis, A. (Tilburg)

49 Ethnic Identity, Acculturation Orientations, and Psychological Well-Being among Adolescents of Immigrant Background in Kenya
Abubakar, A. (Tilburg/Utrecht); van de Vijver, F.J.R. (Tilburg/Potchefstroom); Mazrui, L.; Arasa, J.; Murugami, M. (Nairobi)

64 Immigrant Youth Adaptation in Context: The Role of Society of Settlement
Sam, D.L. (Bergen); Horenczyk, G. (Jerusalem)

77 Examining Spiritual Capital and Acculturation across Ecological Systems: Developmental Implications for Children and Adolescents in Diverse Immigrant Families
Oh, S.S.; Yoshikawa, H. (Cambridge, Mass.)

99 Immigrant Youth and Discrimination
Vedder, P.; van Geel, M. (Leiden)

122 Immigrant Family Separations: The Experience of Separated, Unaccompanied, and Reunited Youth and Families

149 Author Index
150 Subject Index
Migration and immigration have been part of human history since ancient times. Individuals, families and groups migrate for a variety of reasons, from escaping war, persecution and famine to enhancement of life prospects. It is a complex phenomenon that depends very much on the individual migrant as well as the contexts of the sending and receiving communities. The growth of migrant populations in recent history has led receiving countries to enact policies ranging from dedicated resources to support immigrants’ adaptation to punitive ones for their arrival.

Currently, immigration is a worldwide phenomenon. Through technological connections, the world economies and cultures are intertwined at a larger and more immediate scale than ever before. This has led to a variety of migration patterns that are characterized as transnational, seasonal, revolving door or lead to permanent settlements. Many countries are affected by either being a source or recipients of migrants or both. At first glance, similarities across countries arise in the factors that affect the immigration process: the economy and political stability of the countries of origin as a major pushing factor; attitudes toward immigrants and perceived opportunities for education and social mobility as actual employment opportunities as pull factors.

The purpose of this book is to give a glance of how this phenomenon impinges on children’s development. Children are either brought along and are part of the migration process itself or are born into the new countries to immigrant families. Regardless of their birth site, these children all have in common the experience of having a family who originated in another country and are now living in another. Potential clashes in patterns of behaviors, beliefs and morality, of how to sustain a family, of childrearing practices and goals are all particular issues that all immigrant parents face in the new lands. Children on the other hand have to learn how to negotiate multiple worlds, how to create continuities when there are none, how to become competent in the outside world with little guidance from their parents and other family members. They might be faced with contradictory messages, even some rather incompatible ones and with racism and discrimination based on their religion, color of their skin or even their accent or culturally defined mannerisms. In sum, issues of adaptation to new contexts are universal to the experience of growing up in an immigrant family.

Yet besides those very general glances at the global aspects of migration, each immigrant story presents a slice of reality quite different from
another. To talk about the immigrant experience in general is to gloss over a lot of particularities that are significant sources of variance in the adaptation of children from immigrant backgrounds. The continuities and discontinuities between the country of origin and the recipient in culture, language, life skills, employment, language, sex roles, religion, racial profile, etc. become major sources of variability for migrants and for their adaptations over time. So do the policies toward incorporation from the receiving country as well as the public perception of immigrants as assets or burdens or both to the society at large. These policies and other historical factors can contribute to segregation and lack of opportunities and access to critical educational, health and employment opportunities. Who migrates, who stays behind and how much contact is maintained with the country of origin varies widely by the context of migration and the relationship between the two countries and the particular migrant group’s history of settlement. Migrants are also many times thought of as a self-selected group that might differ from those who stay behind in important ways. Finally, immigrants also differ in their level of education, social class, trauma, race, age and gender, and many other demographic characteristics that contribute to further variation. Thus not only contextual, cultural, economic, and political forces impinge on the immigrant experience but personality and individual agency is very much part of the impetus for migrating and subsequent adaptation. These sources of variation are important to consider when we examine the impact of migration on children’s development.

As the immigrant populations have increased in most developed countries, the most dominant world view is of immigrant populations struggling all over the world and of failing to be successful in adapting to the new cultures and economies. The media has been avid to depict the unrest of young immigrants and their lack of success in conventional terms in the new countries. A rise of anti-immigrant popular sentiments and policies have swept the developed world in response to an immigrant tide that is seeing as eroding national values and quality of life. These views are partly true and reflect the experiences of some immigrant groups and individuals. But the story is more complicated than that.

Recent research including the one included in this book, documents outcomes as varied as the intersections of the many reception and sending variables as well as individual factors mentioned before. We see immigrant children for example finishing at the top of their class in disproportionate numbers in spite of many obstacles. At the same time, we see some included in the unacceptable high numbers of school dropouts. The patterns of adaptation observed range from excelling to complete failure and everything in between. Sociologist have created concepts like segmented assimilation to depict different ways of adaptation that include the adoption of values and behavior patterns that are associated with living in poverty and derailing many immigrant parents’ dreams as well as successful ones. The phenomena of the immigrant paradox, the fact that successive generations or more advanced acculturation within immigrant populations is associated with more negative outcomes has also received attention in the areas of health, education and risky behaviors. The documentation of outcomes is now leading to investigations of why we see the sometimes even extremes of adaptations amongst immigrant groups and their children. In sum, the newspaper headlines miss the nuances of individuals and immigrant groups and the extent of variability observed in developmental outcomes.

One of the main variables that impinge on these outcomes is age at migration; developmental processes interact with migration and adaptation in very profound ways. For example, the new host country might have a very different language than the sending one. Learning the new language will be a different task depending on the age of the migrant: it is much easier the younger the person, but at what cost? Can bilingualism
and biculturalism, outcomes that are seen as positive in some countries (i.e. the United States of America) be maintained with the exposure to the host countries’ culture very early on?

Much of the literature on migration have documented adaptation processes in adults; much less is known about children and adolescents, and most books with younger populations tend to be in one immigrant group or in one country. This book is intended to open the field to include various countries, both experienced and inexperienced with migration. Our purpose is to bring together perspectives from various countries and immigrant groups into the study of adaptations that children from immigrant backgrounds have to do. The presentation of a variety of perspectives is intended to identify both commonalities and differences across contexts: the global and the local. There are common threads across groups and contexts, and then they are unique assets and demands. For example, all children have to adapt to the new culture; only a percentage of them have to deal with being separated from parents at some point in their journey. What we learn immediately when we take the universe of observations is the difficulty of making generalizations across contexts and immigrant groups. A balanced accurate view of these adaptations requires the identification of both universal (global) and community (local)-defined pathways and the strengths and weaknesses of the immigrant him-/herself in the context of reception. These are not individual stories, but neither are they common to all individuals in one group or across groups or nations.

The book also intends to highlight some of the most basic contextual processes that impinge on the development of children and adolescents from immigrant backgrounds. Schools, religion, parental separation, discrimination are all part of the context of immigration and reception, important variables to study as we try to understand the variability observed in developmental outcomes. Understanding contextual factors as well as individual ones is a must in this area. We hope that this book stimulates going beyond documenting developmental outcomes to a systematic analysis of the factors that explain such findings.

As native populations in developed countries slow down their fertility, these countries have looked at immigrant populations as sources of work and future growth. Unfortunately, mutual adaptations have been harder than expected by both sides. Children and adolescent are usually caught in the middle of these battles where adults take decisions that impinge on their lives with very little or no consultation or consideration of the youth’s needs. Policies are enacted by adults and for adults in many respects. But we have the power to change this. We hope that this book will contribute to an awareness of the many unique needs of children from immigrant backgrounds, inclusive not only of their struggles but also of their strengths.