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Recommended Citation

Fin, Erin; Morrissey, Savannah; and O'Leary, Jillian, "Hopes and Dreams: Immigrant Parents' Expectations for their Child's Achievements" (2017). Teach-In on Family Diversity and Change 2017. 8.
https://digitalcommons.framingham.edu/fdct2017/8
Hopes and Dreams: Immigrant Parents’ Expectations for their Child’s Achievements

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The purpose of this research is to determine how the role of parents, specifically immigrant parents, impacts future aspirations for their children. Roles of parents are measured by educational attainment, financial stability, experience with discrimination, and involvement in their children’s lives. Using the Children of Immigrant Longitudinal Study 1992-2006 conducted by Alejandro Portes and Ruben G. Rumbaut, it was found that within the relationship between immigrant parents and their children there are a variety of aspects that are influenced by the parents’ role creating a significant impact on the ambitions they have for their child. The research is conducted with classic assimilation theory and selective assimilation theory frameworks in mind. The selective assimilation theory identifies immigrant conformity to societal norms in their host culture while retaining aspects of their native culture, while classic assimilation theory demonstrates the conformity of host culture over time. Parents’ educational attainment, experience with discrimination and volunteering in their child’s school demonstrated significant correlation in relation to their expectations for their child’s education, satisfaction with their child’s education and child raising customs. The higher level of education a parent received the more likely they were to have higher expectations for their child’s education, satisfaction with their child’s education and to raise their child by American customs. If a parent volunteered at their child’s school they will have higher expectations for their child’s education than a parent who does not, but have lower satisfaction in their current schooling. Parents who do not volunteer are most likely to raise their child by their own country’s customs. If a parent has experienced discrimination this affects the expectations they have for their child’s education. The two theories used in the research are Classical Assimilation Theory and Selective Assimilation Theory. Selective Assimilation Theory is defined as where “immigrants adopt some elements of a host culture while retaining certain aspects of their native culture during the acculturation process” (Fernandez Escuer, Ghazarian and Roche, 2012). The research is specifically important to recognize to our current society as racial inequalities are rising and unequal opportunities are given to our immigrant communities. President Trump decided to put an end to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. DACA protected about 800,000 young individuals and their families studying, working, and living in the United States. With the Trump administration’s decision to end the DACA program they are leaving many immigrant families in our country without support and losing opportunities they have worked so hard to receive in the United States. Unequal treatment of immigrants in the United States is a key component in what is a vital factor to our research in relation to our current society. Research previously conducted in 2008 by Claudia Laahaie in “School Readiness of Children of Immigrants: Does Parental Involvement Play a Role?” suggests that parental involvement is critical in school readiness for children of immigrants, recognizing that immigrant families face different obstacles than U.S. born mothers - which provides different experiences for the individuals. Strong familial ties and structure are unequally important to immigrant families and children’s educational success.

Research Design

The Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study 1992-2006 conducted by Alejandro Portes and Ruben G. Rumbaut was used to conduct secondary analysis for the research. The original survey was conducted in 1992 followed by a follow up survey conducted in 2003. The follow up survey was conducted between 2001-2003 retrieving 68.9% of the original sample respondents who were now at the early adulthood stage of their lives averaging at the age of 34. Data was collected through face-to-face interviews, paper and pencil interviews (PAPI), and mailed questionnaires.

Hypotheses

Parental aspirations/expectations for their children are influenced by:
- Educational attainment
- Financial stability
- Experience with discrimination
- Parental involvement

Literature Review

The research used two theories in our research: Classical Assimilation Theory and Selective Assimilation Theory. Selective Assimilation Theory is defined as where “immigrants adopt some elements of a host culture while retaining certain aspects of their native culture during the acculturation process.” (Fernandez Escuer, Ghazarian and Roche, 2012). If a parent is discriminated against they will have a negative impact on their child’s well-being.

Results

Experiences of immigrant parents that impacted future aspirations for their children’s achievements were:
- Parents who volunteer at their child’s school are more likely to be satisfied with their child’s education.
- Parents more willing to go into debt for their child’s educational attainment as well as be more likely to prepare their child for success in American society. This supports our hypothesis that parent’s with a higher level of education are more likely to prepare their child for success in American society. The more often a parent is to volunteer and be involved in their child’s education, the more likely it is that they raise their children by a mixture of American and their own country’s customs and less likely to have high expectations for their child’s educational attainment as well as be less likely to be satisfied with their child’s education.

Discussion/Conclusion

Overall, the research shows that immigrant parents’ experiences have an influence on their aspirations for their children’s future achievements. The higher level of education a parent has the more likely they are to have higher expectations and satisfaction for their child’s education, as well as raise their child by American customs. This supports our hypothesis that parent’s with a higher level of education are more likely to prepare their child for success in American society. The more often a parent is to volunteer and be involved in their child’s education, the more likely it is that they raise their children by a mixture of American and their own country’s customs and less likely to be satisfied with their child’s education. 

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