

Bilingual immigrants are healthier, according to new study

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Bilingual immigrants are healthier than immigrants who speak only one language, according to new research from sociologists at Rice University.

The study, which appears in the March issue of the [Journal of Health and Social Behavior](#), found that people with strong English and native language proficiencies report better physical and mental health than unilingual immigrants.

"Our research suggests that [English proficiency](#) gained at the expense of native-language fluency may not be beneficial for overall health status," said Rice alumna and Stanford University graduate student Ariela Schachter, who co-authored the research paper with Rice sociology professors Bridget Gorman and Rachel Tolbert Kimbro. "It's very important for the immigrants to hold on to their native language in addition to learning English."

The study examined associations between English and native-language proficiency and usage and self-rated health for more than 4,649 U.S. immigrants from China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Mexico, Cuba and Puerto Rico.

The research showed that the favorable health reported by bilingual immigrants is not impacted by factors such as socioeconomic status, acculturation, family and social support, stress and discrimination and [health behaviors](#). The researchers theorize that the health benefits may

be the result of a kind of "cultural flexibility" that allows them to easily integrate with their surroundings while maintaining cultural ties.

"Individuals who maintain native-language fluency while also learning English may be better equipped to retain relationships in their countries of origin and form new ones in the U.S.," Gorman said. "We believe this can help explain the positive relationship between [bilingualism](#) and self-rated health."

"There are still big questions about why bilingual immigrants are healthier than their unilingual counterparts," Kimbro said. "We hope our findings will encourage further research of the subject."

More information: Language Proficiency and Health Status: Are Bilingual Immigrants Healthier?:

hsb.sagepub.com/content/53/1/124.full.pdf

Provided by Rice University

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