

Team conducts meta-analysis on the relation between acculturation and alcohol use among immigrant youth

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Among the Latinx population in the US, more acculturated immigrant youth are more likely to drink alcohol, concludes a team of New York

University researchers in an analysis of more than 40 previous studies.

The *Journal of Adolescent Health* article, *Meta-Analysis on the Relation Between Acculturation and Alcohol Use Among Immigrant Youth*, considers studies conducted over the past two decades and supports the existence of the "[immigrant paradox](#)"—an inverse relationship in which a higher level of acculturation in the US is associated with lower health outcomes.

"The immigrant paradox is one of the most debated issues in the field of immigrant studies. A quick review of research could easily reveal a number of empirical studies for and against it. In order to provide a clear understanding of this relation, we need meta-analytic reviews," says Selcuk Sirin, a professor of applied psychology at NYU's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development and the paper's lead author. "While we have such work with educational and developmental outcomes, we do not have one on alcohol use. As far as we know, ours is the first systematic review of research that untangles the complex relation between acculturation and alcohol use for immigrant [youth](#)."

Sirin and his co-authors, Elysia Choi and Esther Sin, doctoral students in NYU Steinhardt's developmental psychology program, conducted a meta-analysis of 43 studies published between 1997 and 2018 that yielded a sample size of 61,851 immigrant youth from birth to 25 years of age.

Their study examined the relationship between acculturation in the US and alcohol use in immigrant youth, with a focus on the impact of demographic variables and outcomes regarding alcohol use.

The researchers' analysis focused on US-based articles on Asian and Latinx immigrant youth after eliminating studies that lacked sufficient data regarding race/ethnicity-specific factors. They evaluated

acculturation by measuring generational status (first vs. second generation), years spent in the United States, English fluency, and psychological acculturation. They measured alcohol use by quantity or frequency, intent or risk, binge drinking, and drunkenness.

The team found no significant correlation between acculturation and alcohol use among Asian Americans, but did find a statistically significant relationship among the Latinx population.

According to Sirin, there are several reasons for their findings, including differences in [socioeconomic status](#) and cultural perceptions of alcohol use.

"Cultural norms of drinking for Latinx and Asian immigrant youths in the US show that while these two groups are similar to a degree in their ethnic drinking patterns, variation in socioeconomic status and education may put Latinx immigrants at a higher risk for alcohol use over time than Asian immigrant youths," says Sirin. "At the same time, it is important to understand how Latino and Asian immigrants are perceived in the US. Anti-immigrant sentiment is more apparent for Latinos over the past few decades."

Among their findings, they discovered that the evidence for the immigrant paradox is stronger with older youth, likely because older youth are more likely to use alcohol and have stronger ties with the host country (i.e., the US), the researchers note. Additional findings indicated that length of residence in the US had the strongest correlation to alcohol use, followed by language proficiency, and generational status.

While the researchers noted that more recent studies were less likely to show acculturation effects on alcohol use, they emphasized that the data are too limited to suggest that acculturation is no longer a risk factor for [alcohol](#) use among immigrant youth.

More information: Selcuk R. Sirin et al, Meta-Analysis on the Relation Between Acculturation and Alcohol Use Among Immigrant Youth, *Journal of Adolescent Health* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2021.09.021](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2021.09.021)

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