

Study finds link between the migrant experience and birth outcomes in Australia

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A study led by The University of Western Australia has found migrant women who have spent a longer and more culturally immersive time in Australia are likely to experience some better birth outcomes than newer arrivals.

The research, published in *PLOS ONE*, looked at the rates of pre-term births and low birthweight among more than 250,000 babies delivered in

WA between 2005 and 2013.

Both pre-term [birth](#) (before 37 weeks) and low birthweight at term (less than 2,500 grams) are categorized as adverse pregnancy outcomes that result in higher rates of mortality and morbidity.

The research analyzed acculturation status alongside socioeconomic conditions, insurance, marital status and [physical health](#). Acculturation is the cultural, psychological and behavioral changes experienced by migrants as a result of interaction with a host community over time.

The study found that the least acculturated migrant women had a 60% higher chance of delivering a low birthweight full-term baby than non-migrants.

Surprisingly, the same group has a 50% lower chance of giving birth early than Australian-born women, while the most acculturated migrants showed a 30% higher risk of pre-term birth than non-migrants.

Lead author Dr. Maryam Mozooni, from UWA's School of Medicine, said many factors combined to explain the disparities.

"Our finding of a significantly higher chance of full-term low birthweight in migrant babies may indicate that in this population the growth-restricted babies were not well identified during pregnancy or did not receive appropriate interventions as their Australian-born counterparts," Dr. Mozooni said.

"It seems that acculturation has positive effects on the risk of [low birthweight](#) but is associated with a higher risk of spontaneous pre-term birth in [migrant women](#).

"The stress of immigration, unfamiliarity with the Australian healthcare

system and a mandatory waiting period to be entitled to some [public health](#) and welfare services in the short term, as well as acculturative stress in the longer term, may be the reasons for these findings."

Dr. Mozooni said the findings, which could be extrapolated to the wider Australian population, underscore the need for greater understanding of the acculturation process and its health impacts.

"There also needs to be better monitoring of fetal growth during pregnancy for recent migrants and appropriate interventions to improve birthweight in term babies," she said.

More information: Maryam Mozooni et al, The influence of acculturation on the risk of preterm birth and low birthweight in migrant women residing in Western Australia, *PLOS ONE* (2023). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0285568](#)

Provided by University of Western Australia

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