

Older US-born Mexican-Americans more physically limited than Mexican-American immigrants

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New research indicates that Mexican-Americans born in the United States who are aged 55 and over are significantly more likely than Mexican-American immigrants to report that they have substantial limitations in one or more basic physical activities such as walking, climbing stairs, reaching, lifting, or carrying. (30% versus 25%).

The research, published in this week's *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, was a joint study by the University of Toronto and the University of California, Berkeley. A sample of Mexican-American adults aged 55 and over was drawn from the nationally representative 2006 American Community Survey which included more than 13,000 residents born in the U.S. and more than 11,000 immigrants.

"We explored several plausible reasons why Mexican-American immigrants, despite facing the considerable challenges of relocation, have fewer health limitations than Mexican-Americans born in the United States," says lead author Esme Fuller-Thomson, Sandra Rotman Endowed Chair at University of Toronto's Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto.

"It is possible that the type of person who chooses to immigrate is particularly hardy and resilient and these characteristics may provide long-term health benefits. If this is the case, those who migrated as children, where the process of migration can be assumed to be instigated by the parents rather than the child, would report more health problems in old age than those who came as adults. In support of this idea, older Mexican Americans who immigrated before age 16 had 62 per cent higher odds of functional limitations than those who came as adults."

One possible explanation is that the Hispanic lifestyle, perhaps nutrition and/or strong social support networks, promote good [health outcomes](#). If this were the case, as co-author Meredith Minkler, Professor of Public Health at the University of California, Berkeley explains, "It would seem likely that the least acculturated individuals should have the fewest functional limitations. In contrast to our expectations, we found Mexican-American immigrants who spoke English at home had better [functional limitations](#) outcomes in comparison to those who did not speak English at home, even when accounting for income, education, sex and age."

"With one-quarter of older Mexican-American immigrants and 30 percent of Mexican-Americans born in the [United States](#) reporting substantial physical limitations, there is a clear need for providing all Mexican-American older adults with appropriate health care, particularly in light of the rapid growth of this population" says co-author Amani Nuru-Jeter, Associate Professor of [Public Health](#) at the University of California, Berkeley. Additional co-authors include Dawn Richardson and Ferrah Raza. This research was funded by the Retirement Research Foundation.

More information:

www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/10/5/1786/pdf

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