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Education Attainment of Children of Economic and Refugee Immigrants in the United States

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Abstract:

This paper analyzes the educational attainment of second-generation economic and refugee immigrants. Data from the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS) survey are used to estimate two measures of educational outcomes: securing a college degree, and years of schooling completed. Results show that, on average, children of refugees have educational attainment outcomes that are on par with those of the children of economic immigrants. They have similar odds of college degree achievement and are also as likely to acquire similar years of schooling as the children of economic immigrants. Accounting for important controls such as parents' socio-economic status index do not affect the results.

Keywords: Children of immigrants; Education;Immigration class

1. INTRODUCTION

Children of immigrants constitute an integral part of the U.S. labor force, and it is thus important to understand the factors associated with their educational performance.Acquiring higher educational attainment would not only improve the individual's prospects for economic and social mobility but it would also benefit the society. Past work shows that the educational attainment and occupational status of the second-generation immigrants areeither on par or exceed the achievements of the native-born children (Aydemir and Sweetman 2008).

However, little attention has been given to whether and how the differences in the migration motivations of immigrants can affect the educational outcomes of their children, perhaps due to the lack of readily available data. Immigrants admitted through different classes not only differ in human capital and family resources, but also in selection processes and host-country receptivity. For example, those who immigrate for economic reasons tend to arrive with greater human capital skills, whereas those who are forced to leave their home country do not usually have the necessary skills to be successful in the host country, especially in the short run. That is, economic immigrants are positively selected from their national populations—they are highly skilled and are also more ambitious than those whomigrate as refugees.

So, it is unclear whether the offspring of immigrants admitted via the refugee category have integration outcomes that are similar to those of their counterparts of economic immigrant background. Determining potential differences in educational attainment among children of immigrants by parent migration motivations could guide the integration policies aimed at second -generation immigrants in the host country. For example, if second-generation

refugees' educational attainment mimics that of their parents, it may have urgent implication in fine-tuning the refugee integration policies currently in place, especially that refugee immigrants and their children often expect to stay permanently in their destination country (Cortes, 2004).

Therefore, this study contributes to the literature by examining the extent in which the entry motivations of immigrant parents affect the educational outcomes of their children in the U.S. It specifically examines the odds of university completion rates and years of schooling completed by children of immigrants whose parents came to the U.S. either as refugees or economic immigrants. Data from Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS) survey, a dataset designed to study the adaptation process of the second-generation immigrant population in the U.S. is utilized for this purpose.

Results show that the odds of children of refugees securing a college degree as well as years of schooling completed are at least on par with children whose parents were admitted as economic immigrants. Controlling for relevant variables such as gender, marital status, presence of children, citizenship status, race and parental socioeconomic status (SES) index do not affect the coefficients or their statistical significance.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 discusses background and related literature. Section 3 describes the data and the methodology. Section 4 presents the empirical results, and section 5 summarizes the findings.

Background and Related Literature

Second generation immigrants comprise a growing share of the U.S. population and their performance provides a key indicator of the extent in which their parents integrated into the U.S. understanding how the (dis)advantages encountered by different immigrant groups could impact the educational pathways of the second generation is of utmost interest. Majority of the past work focuses on how the children of immigrants' outcomes differ from those of the native-born children. Generally, educational and labor market outcomes of children of immigrants in the U.S. tend to be equal or better than those of the children with native-born parents.Chiswick and DebBurman (2004) find that second generation immigrants acquire about half a year more schooling than their native parentage counterparts. Aydemir and Sweetman (2008), who compare first-, second-and third-generation immigrants' educational attainments and labor market outcomes in U.S. and Canada also find that second generation immigrants have greater educational attainment than the native-born. The literature also documents how the heterogeneity in migrating parents' countries of origin and/or their educational level can differentially affect the educational attainment of the second-generation immigrants. For example, second generation immigrants of Mexican background have lower educational attainment than other similar groups of Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese descent (Pong and Landale 2012).

Unlike first generation immigrant analysis, the literature does not, however, take into consideration the potential differential effects of parents' migration motivations on the educational attainment and labor market outcomes of their children, probably due to the paucity of data on immigration categories. Immigrants admitted through different classes differ in human capital, motivations, pre-migration circumstances and host-country receptivity. From a motive standpoint, immigrants can at least be divided into two distinct groups: economic and refugee immigrants. Economic migrants tend to arrive with greater

education and language skills and are also likely to have high educational expectations and aspirations for their children ex ante. Refugees, on the other hand, are those who were forced to leave their home country, so they do not necessarily have the skills essential for quicker integration into the host country (Cortes2004, Shaeye 2019). But they face favorable reception policies in the host country. They have access to welfare assistance and enjoy other privileges that could foster upward mobility for them and for their children.

The above-mentioned differences have implications for the socioeconomic outcomes of these two groups. First generation refugees have different labor market outcomes than their economic immigrant counterparts. Investigating differences in returns to schooling between refugees and nonrefugees, Shaeye (2022) finds that first generation economic immigrants have higher levels of education than refugee immigrants at arrival although the gap diminishes over time. Moreover, non-refugee immigrants also earn higher returns to schooling at arrival and over time. Differences in immigrant motivations could also have implications for the outcomes of their children in the destination country as differences between these immigrant groups could be transmitted to their children. However, it is unclear whether thedescendants of immigrants admitted as economic migrants have greater integration outcomes than the descendants of immigrants admitted as refugees. The extent in which the migration motivations of immigrant parents can be associated with the educational attainment of their children is of particular interest. Educational attainment is a strong determinant of the labor market outcomes of immigrant workers and has long been a key measure of the incorporation of immigrants into the U.S. as well as a potential mechanism for the intergenerational mobility of their children.

Investigating the effects of entry class categories on children of immigrants' educational attainment in Canada, Hou and Bonikowska (2017) find that children whose parents were admitted via employment categories had higher rates of university completion than the children whose parents were admitted via the refugee category. To the best of my knowledge, no previous study has examined how the educational attainment of refugee parents' children fare relative to that of the children of economic immigrants in the U.S. The closest work is the one by Lee (2018) who examines the effect of fathers' entry visa duration (e.g., temporary, or permanent) on their children's educational attainment in the Los Angeles Area. She finds that children whose fathers entered via student or tourist visas had higher rates of college readiness and college completion relative to fathers who entered via legal permanent status (LPRs). This is probably due to the fact that those on student/tourist visas, who are usually on non-immigrant visas, might have been intentionally planning to send their children to school before coming to the U.S.

While the distinction between temporary and permanent individuals can provide a snapshotof the educational attainment of immigrants' children in the short run, it may overlook the long-term effects of parents' initial migration motivations on their offspring's educational status. By investigating how the parents' migration motivations can affect the subsequent school attainment of their children, this study aims to fill in this gap. Knowing whether the (dis)advantages that immigrants face are passed onto their children could inform on how their children can successfully integrate into the receiving society. There are competing theories on which second-generation group will obtain more education. One hypothesis suggests that children of refugee immigrants may acquire more education because, by association, they have access to more resources from the government and also have more legal rights than children of

economic immigrants. But it is also possible that children of economic immigrants acquire more education since their parents are more strongly selected on the basis of observed and unobserved characteristics in the first place. That is, since economic immigrants are favorably self-selected (Chiswick, 1999) and have greater human capital and earnings in the receiving country, they are better positioned to invest in their children's schooling than refugee parents. So, it is an empirical question which hypothesis is more likely to dominate.

Data and Descriptive Statistics

Data

I employ Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS) survey, a dataset designed to study the adaptation process of the second-generation immigrant population in the U.S. CILS is a survey of 5,266 children of immigrants who were originally interviewed during school year 1992–1993 while attending middle school (i.e., 14 or 15 years old). The students were later interviewed again as high school seniors in 1995-1996 (i.e.,17 or 18 years old), and finally as young adults in 2001-2003.

The sample design was based on a selection of schools in each area that represented different socioeconomic levels, ethnic compositions,and geographic locations. The samples were drawn from 49 schools in the metropolitan areas of Miami/Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, and San Diego, California. These cities were selected because they serve as entry points to significantly different groups of migrants who represent contemporary immigration to the U.S. (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001). South Florida is home to large concentrations of mainly immigrants from the Caribbean especially Cubans, Haitians, West Indians as well as those from Central and South America. San Diego, on the other hand, has large concentrations of Mexican and Central American immigrants, but it also receives large numbers of Salvadorans and Guatemalans. Immigrants from Asia including Filipinos, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians and Koreans also call it home. In all, 77 different nationalities are represented in the study.

The average age of the sample was 14 at the time of the first wave, and it was evenly divided by sex and by grade in school. Similarly, about half the respondents were native-born of foreign parentage (corresponding to a strict definition of second generation), and the remainder were members of the 1.5 generation (born abroad but brought at an early age to the U.S.). This fits the broad operational definition of second-generation immigrants, which defines second-generation immigrants as the native-born children of foreign parents or the foreign-born children who were brought to the U.S. at an early age and have resided in the U.S. for at least five years ever since.

Since Iam interested in the highest educational achievement levels, most of the variables I use come from wave three of the data. This wave was conducted in 2002 and 2003 during a time of early adulthood for respondents who were continuing with their higher education or beginning their work careers. The third wave retrieved the information of 3,564 respondents representing 68 percent response rate from the original wave of respondents. The sample has a level of attrition similar or lower than national longitudinal or cross-sectional surveys conducted recently in the U.S. and the frequency distributions of the final sample by gender, age, and nationality are quite similar to those of the preceding two surveys (Portes & Rumbaut, 2005).

The status of children's parents ranged from undocumented laborers to well-educated professionals to political refugees, with sharply contrasting socio-economic origins, migration histories, and contexts of exit and of reception. For the purpose of this study, however, the

sample is restricted to those whose parents (either the mother or the father) migrated to the U.S. for political (i.e., refugee immigrants) or economic (i.e., economic immigrants) reasons, and thus those who arrived through family reunification or other visas are excluded from the analysis . The resulting sample from this restriction is 2,670

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows summary statistics of some relevant variables. I present the mean values of the variables for the whole sample, by parents' admission status. I classify a child as a "refugee" if at least one of the two parents self-identifies as a refugee in the data. Starting with the gender composition, 46 percent of the sample of children of refugees are female, while it is 52 percent for the sample of those with economic immigrant parents. Around 40 percent of the whole sample are married but only 13 percent of the refugee sample have children, where it is close to double for the sample of the economic immigrant background (23 percent).

For education,both children of refugee and economic immigrants have a similar high school graduation rate (0.75 vs 0.73 percent). For college degree attainment, the average individual of refugee background is 33 percent more likely to be a college graduate, where it isjust 24 percent for a person of an economic immigrant background. When I look at the number of years of schooling completed by the two groups, I find that children of refugees are slightly more likely to accumulate more years of schooling (14.58) than children of economic immigrants (14.27). However, the proportion of students currently attending school is slightly higher among children of economic immigrants (0.53 vs 0.51 percent).

Empirical Model and Results

Empirical Model

I utilize the cross-sectional format of the data and run a logistic regression to analyze the differences in educational attainment between second-generation refugees and economic immigrants. I am interested in examining whether there is a difference in the educational attainment profiles of second-generation refugee immigrants when compared to their economic immigrant counterparts in both university degree attainment and number of years of schooling completed. To this end, I estimate the following model.

$Educi = \alpha + \beta Refugee + \theta Xi + \varepsilon i$

Log Educdenotes educational attainment and iis an index for individuals. Refugee is the explanatory variable of interest, a dummy variable that is equal to one if the individual's parents came to the U.S. as refugees and zero if parents came as economic immigrants. The coefficient on the refugee dummy variable, β, gives the relative schooling or the average difference in educational attainment between second generation refugee and economic immigrants. In this context, I consider two outcomes of educational attainment: College graduation rate and number of years of schooling completed. In the first model, I use university completionas an indicator of educational attainment for second-generation immigrants. University completion is defined as having received a college degree where those with less than a college degree serves as the reference category.

Vector Xhas few sets of control variables that include demographic characteristics such a sex, birth year, marital status, and presence of children; set of country-of-origin dummies; and finally, a parental socioeconomic status (SES) index. Set of country-of-origin dummies contain the six largest national origin groups in the study: Mexican, Salvadoran/Guatemalan, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Filipino, and other (reference category). Parental SES, one of the most

powerful predictors of educational attainment, is an index constructed as the unit-weighted sum of scores on five variables: father's and mother's education, coded along a five-point scale of years completed; parental home ownership, coded as a dichotomy; and father's and mother's occupation, coded in Duncan's Socio-economic Index (SEI) prestige scores. The index is standardized to a mean of 0 and a standard deviation (SD) of 1. The remaining part is captured by error term, εic. I enter these control variables in three steps, first controlling for demographic characteristics only (Model 1), then adding parents' country of origin (Model 2), and then adding parental socioeconomic status index (Model 3). To measure the odds of college degree status and the years of schooling completed, I use logistic and Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regressions respectively.

Discussion of Results

Table 2 presents the results of the odds ratios from the logistic regression analysis predicting college degree status or higher compared with less than a college degree for the two groups in three models. Model 1, which contains demographic controls only,shows clear differences in the likelihood of college attainment by refugee status. The odds ratio for refugee children is 1.30 and significant, suggesting that the likelihood of children's college attainment is higher than 30 percent for those whose parents were admitted as refugees relative to those whose parents were admitted as economic immigrants. Model 2, which adds country of origin controls, shows that the odds ratio of college attainment for refugee immigrants goes up to about 40 percent. Model 3, which adds an index for parental socioeconomic status (SES) shows that the odds ratio for refugee immigrants goes down to about 20 percent (from 1.30 to 1.22), but it is not statistically significant anymore.

Table 3 reports the results of the effect of parents' refugee status on years of schooling completed -an alternative measure for educational attainment. The college degree status measure reflects the stock of the educational attainment, while years of schooling completed represents the flow of the schooling acquisition. I regress the years of schooling on the same set of control variables as in equation (1). Model 1 of Table 2, which accounts just for demographic controls, shows that children of refugee immigrants acquire one sixth of a year of schooling more than children of economic immigrants, on average. Adding country fixed effects as reported in model 3, shows that the difference shrinks to one eighth of a year of schooling for children of refugees. Finally, adding parental SES index as reported in model 3 yields a similar estimate but renders the coefficient statistically insignificant

Controlling for relevant common variables such as gender, marital status, presence of children, citizenship status, race and parental SES index do not affect thecoefficients or their statistical significance even when interacted with refugee status. Looking at the additional relevant covariate variables included in the models separately, I find that there is no difference in degree attainment between the two groups across gender, but female students have quarter a year more schooling than males. Interestingly, having children has a positive effect (21 percent) on earning a college degree, but it has a substantial negative effect on years of schooling (1.10 percent), which could be interpreted as having one less year of schooling, on average.

Refugee immigrants from some countries might be positively self-selected (Borjas, 1987) such as those who are from Cuba, so it is possible that they are driving the results, especially that a large number of refugees in the sample come from Cuba. Given their close geographic

proximity and the nature of the refugee flows, it is possible that Cuban refugees may in fact be making an economic decision rather than fleeing their country. To rule out this possibility, I exclude immigrants from Cuba from the sample, but the results remain similar.

These results are in line with the work of Portes and Rumbaut (2001, 2006) and Zhou and Bankston (1998), who find that children of Vietnamese refugees have higher educational attainment partly because of their parents' refugee status. But they are, in contrast, with the work by Hou et al (2017) who find that "children of refugees had a much lower university completion rate than those of immigrants in the business and skilled-worker classes". The higher educational attainment for children of economic immigrants in Canada is probably due to the differences in immigration policy, immigrants' self-selection, and selection criteria between the two countries (Kaushal and Lu 2015). The economic immigrants in Canada are rigorously selected by a system where many in the U.S. who identify themselves "economic immigrants" might not be as highly selective as those in Canada.

Conclusion

The study examines whether immigrant motivations (i.e., political vs economic reasons) are important in differentiating the educational attainment among children of immigrants.

Economic and refugee immigrants have different motivations for migration, andthis might spill into their children's educational outcomes. Economic migrants tend to arrive with greater human capital skills and are also likely to have high expectations for their children beforehand.

Refugees, on the other hand, are those who were forced to leave their home country and were not necessarily prepared for smoothy integrating in the host country.

This study uses data from the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS) survey to examine whether children of refugees differ in years ofschooling completed and the odds of earning a college degree compared to children of economic immigrants. Given differences in access to resources and parent selectivity, it is not clear priori which group would see higher educational attainment.

The results of the analysis show that years of schooling completed by children of refugees are similar to those attained by children of economic immigrants. Furthermore, there is no difference in the odds of securing a college degree between the two groups. Controlling for relevant variables do not affect these estimates.

The children in the sample are representatives of recent immigrant flows to the US. such as the flows that originate predominantly from Mexico, Central America, South America, East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, so the results highlight the ability of children of refugee immigrants to attain similar education. But, given the important implications of these results, we have to be cautious about generalizing these findings to refugees who come from regions that are not represented in the sample such as those from Africa and the Middle East.

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