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Mixed Findings Emerge on Immigrant Families' Home Environments

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Family Functioning and Early Learning Practices in Immigrant Homes

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Despite often living in poor neighborhoods, immigrant Mexican mothers report few conflicts at home, support from spouses, and strong mental health. At the same time, these moms say they are less likely to read with their young children than native-born White mothers, stemming in part from comparatively low levels of education.

Immigrant Chinese mothers, in contrast, report being more likely than native-born White peers to read with their young children, but more likely to report weaker mental health and greater household conflict.

These are just some of the findings from a nationally representative study that included more than 5,000 immigrant Latino, immigrant Asian, and native-born White mothers and their preschoolers. The study uses data from the federally run Early Childhood Longitudinal Study and was carried out by researchers at the University of Incheon, Korea, University of California, Berkeley, and University of Maryland, Baltimore County. It appears in a special section of the September/October 2012 issue of the journal *Child Development* on children from immigrant families.

The study looked at migration history, cultural practices, and social class in relation to socialemotional and early learning practices in the home. In this way, it sheds light on the ways in which children from immigrant families are especially vulnerable and benefit from cultural strengths, compared with the children of native-born White parents.

“Many scholars have argued that poverty tends to go along with poor parenting,” said Bruce Fuller, professor of education and public policy at the University of California, Berkeley, who codirected the study. “Instead, we discovered that low-income Latino families often display important strengths in their parenting that may buffer the detrimental effects of poverty.”

“Asian groups have also displayed important strengths, but different ones,” noted Sunyoung Jung, assistant professor of psychology at the University of Incheon in Seoul, the study’s lead author. “Chinese mothers in particular read more frequently with their young children than White American mothers.”

The study was supported by the Hewlett Foundation, the National Research Foundation of Korea, and the Institute of Human Development at the University of California, Berkeley. The Spencer Foundation initially funded the Latino Child Development Project, supporting the study’s analysis.

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Summarized from *Child Development*, Volume 83, Issue 5, Family Functioning and Early Learning Practices in Immigrant Homes by Jung, S (University of Incheon, Korea), Fuller, B (University of California, Berkeley), and Galindo, C (University of Maryland, Baltimore County). Copyright 2012 The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc. All rights reserved.