

Immigrant Health Seeking Behavior and Mental Health Outcomes in The U.S.: Exploring Byproducts of Assimilation

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Abstract

This research examines the intricate interplay between healthcare access and the mental health outcomes of immigrants in the United States. Immigrants in the U.S. experience the "Healthy Immigrant Effect," where they initially experience better physical and mental health upon arrival but experience a decline the longer they stay in their new homes. This effect can be explained by examining immigrants' health seeking behaviors. Health seeking behavior is part of the assimilation process for many immigrants, where they experience both enabling factors and barriers that are in part related to their cultural backgrounds as they navigate these new structural systems. In addition to the clear impacts on physical health, this paper argues that these health-seeking behaviors can also be related to the mental health challenges immigrants experience. Specifically, acculturation and internalized stigma emerge as significant factors influencing these behaviors in the healthcare realm. The acculturation process, involving adaptation to a new culture, can lead to identity conflicts and stressors when receiving care. Additionally, internalized prejudice and racism can damage self-esteem and mental health, preventing individuals from seeking care in the first place. By addressing these links, the U.S. can better support the physical and mental well-being of its growing immigrant population, harnessing the diverse talents and contributions that immigrants bring to the country.

Keywords: immigrant health, acculturation, mental health outcomes, health-seeking behavior, internalized stigma, diversity, healthcare access, healthcare systems, "Healthy Immigrant Effect", assimilation