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## **Acculturation, intergenerational relationships and the formation of partners' and family preferences among adolescents in Spain**

### **Introduction and research questions**

The integration of immigrant origin youth has recently become a major political concern and priority for governments of European receiving countries. Across countries, several socio-economic indicators show that the children of immigrants (even the ones born in the country) lag-behind their native counterparts and this compromises the future wellbeing of a significant share of each country population. The topic attracts much public attention and politicised debate, focusing on 'parallel societies' and 'outsider/isolated' position of the children of immigrants, although systematic sociological analysis is still underdeveloped.

The field of research on immigrant adolescents' integration remains theoretically dominated by the US scholarship (see Portes 2007; Zhou 1997; Alba and Nee 1997 for a review) and primarily focused on the analysis of educational and labor market outcomes' differentials. Although European researchers are now beginning to follow an autonomous direction, mostly because of the specificities that the European context represents for the integration of the second generation with respect to the US, lack of data have seriously limited research in the area for a long time.

In this paper, we take a wider approach to integration and aim to ascertain how immigrant origin youth project their life trajectories and self-understandings as compared to those of their parents and the non-immigrant youth. The differentials in outlooks and expectations between immigrant and native families (especially in education) have been emphasized in the research literature to explain socio-economic outcomes (Kao and Tienda 1995, Kao and Thompson 2003, Stanat and Christensen 2004). However, much less is known about how preferences and expectations of immigrant and non-immigrant adolescents differ (or not) in other life domains that are also crucial in the process of transition to adulthood. Family building is definitely one of those. Preferences about the ideal partners and future living arrangements (living alone, with friends, with a partner or a married spouse) are likely to capture crucial aspects of the integration process that remain largely overlooked in the existing literature.

In particular, we will analyze preferences and expectations of adolescents concerning type of family choice (single, married or cohabiting) and the ideal timing for starting it, type of partner (co-ethnic or not; specifically for immigrant origin youth: would they envision marrying partners from their parents' country?) and qualities of the partner (income, educational background, gender roles). Variations by nativity and gender will be examined in detail, and multivariate analyses will be utilized to explore the role of parental socio-economic status, educational performance, social capital and quality of family relationships in shaping those preferences and expectations.

How the immigrant origin youth perceive themselves to fit in host society (and its dominant life-course patterns) and their expectations about the future should shape their long-term life-chances and pattern of behaviour. The gap between preferences and expectations is likely to inform us about different degrees of optimism, self-confidence and potential frustration that are likely to condition the integration process at large. In addition, the degree of agreement or disagreement between parents and children in regard those preferences and expectations also provide valuable information about the process of acculturation in immigrant families.

## DATA

The data utilized in the analyses come from the Chances Survey (2011), carried out among almost 3,000 adolescents in the city of Madrid. This survey randomly sampled 30 schools (15 public and 15 private) in the municipality of Madrid out of the whole universe of private and public schools in the city. The sample of schools was constructed in two stages. In the first stage we selected 24 neighborhoods from four different strata constructed by combinations of three indicators: 1) the total number of immigrant origin children from the 10 largest immigrant groups living in the city in 2011, 2) the percentage of immigrant origin in the neighborhood and, 3) the socio-economic profile of the neighborhood according to the official classification provided by the City Statistical Office. The 24 selected neighborhoods included 120 schools with secondary education from which we randomly selected our 30 schools in the second stage.

In the selected schools, all students were enrolled in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades of secondary education (*Educación Secundaria Obligatoria*–ESO) completed a questionnaire during one of their 55 minutes classes. In addition, one of their parents (the mother or the father, whoever they decided) also completed a parallel questionnaire during the following two weeks<sup>1</sup>. At the end of the fieldwork, which took place between January and June of 2011, we obtained 2,734 completed student questionnaires and 1,239 completed parental questionnaires. Forty-six percent of surveyed students were of immigrant origin. The overall parental response rate was approximately 45 percent; 48.5% among non-immigrant origin children and 37.5% among immigrant origin children.

The questionnaires included a number of indicators of life-course expectations, particularly of educational expectations. Both student and parental questionnaires replicated the wording of a large number of relevant questions, which allows for pairwise comparisons of students and parental answers to similar indicators. For the purpose of this paper, the questions on educational expectations and subjective assessment of the students' school performance provided by both students and their parents, are of main interest.

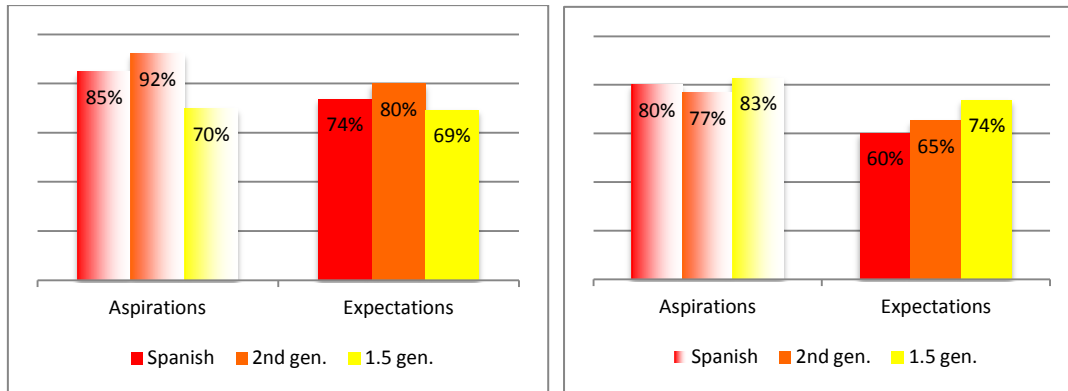
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<sup>1</sup> Parental questionnaires (translated into Chinese, Arabic and Romanian when needed) were handed to the parents by their children. Between one and two weeks later, teachers collected the completed parental questionnaires in the classroom.

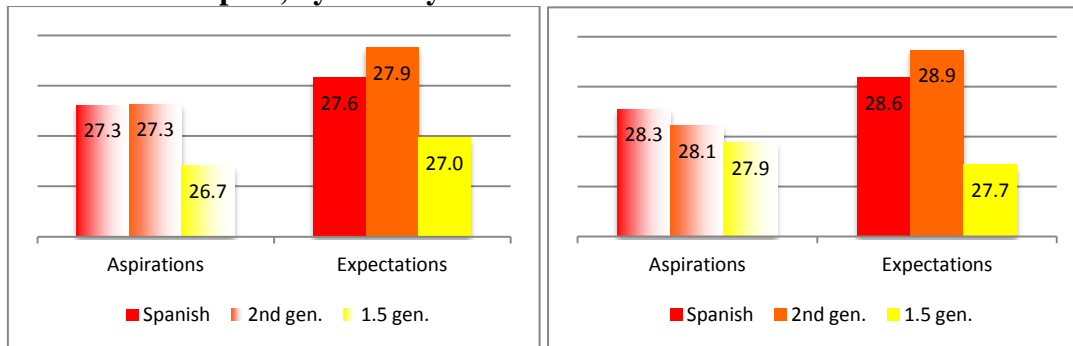
## Preliminary results

Preliminary results show important differences concerning the type of preferred/expected living arrangement and the timing of union formation across both gender and nativity.

**Graph 1. Aspirations and expectations of cohabitation in the next future for female and male adolescents in Spain, by nativity.**



**Graph 2. Preferred and expected age at first marriage by female and male adolescents in Spain, by nativity.**



The study will engage specifically with two literatures:

a) the theory of segmented assimilation (Portes and Zhou 1993), which asserts that integration takes place unevenly within differential domains (linguistic, identificational, spatial, occupational, educational, socio-economic), with respect to multiple reference groups, and stratified by race, ethnicity, religion and class (Rumbaut 1997);

b) the studies on the intergenerational transmission of values in migration contexts, which argue that, in relation to the competing sources of socialization on immigrant-origin youth, increasing acculturation at the aggregate level (i.e. a reduction in the native-immigrant gap with regard to specific attitudes) may coexist with intense intergenerational transmission at the micro level (Nauck 1995, 1997). Furthermore, intergenerational transmission may vary in intensity and effectiveness across life

domains depending on the importance given by parents to attitudes and values in each of these different domains, but also depending on the functioning of “transmission belts” (Schönpflug 2001, Phalet and Schönpflug 2001).

In order to explain the adolescents’ preferences and expectations regarding their future partners and family life, we will consider intergenerational processes in conjunction with the role played by formal education and cross-cultural peer contact in the emulation of dominant life-course models in the host society.