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Social experiences, life satisfaction, and social support of immigrant families with young children in a highly urban city

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ABSTRACT

Grounding this study in Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework, the authors used a survey that includes psychometrically sound measures, to investigate the social experiences of 54 immigrant families with young children and the factors that shape their perceptions of life satisfaction and social support in a highly urban city. Results show persistent challenges related to discrimination and access to resources. Despite these challenges, participants' overall satisfaction with life was rated high and positively correlated with their comfort with practicing their culture and with their perceived social support. Implications involve the need to design evidence-based policies and programmes that promote immigrant families' wellbeing.

Introduction

Immigrant children and families recently became a significant interest in research and policy development due to the growth of the United States' immigrant population and consequent reform discussions. The number of immigrants and refugees in this country as well as their dispersion to different states have drastically increased in the past three decades. One in four children in the United States is estimated to be a child of immigrants (Lou, Adams, & Bernstein, 2019). About 5.4 million children under age 5, or 24% of all children under 5, have at least one immigrant parent and 88% of these children are U.S. born (Lou et al., 2019). This rapid growth may be explained by the arrival of an influx of immigrants in recent decades, and by the higher than overall rates for childbirth among immigrant communities. In fact, research indicates that more than half of U.S. school children will have at least one parent/guardian born in another country by 2030, and first and second-generation immigrants may reach 37% of the entire U.S. population by 2050 (Pew Research Center, 2013).

To optimize children's health and well-being, a solid family foundation in the first five years of development is crucial. There is theoretical and empirical support for: (a) assessing diverse families' funds of knowledge, priorities, and resources (e.g. Gregory, 2017; Kang, Kim, & Kim, 2024; Seligman & Darling, 2017; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992), (b) exploring shared accountability among diverse stakeholders (e.g. childcare teachers, therapists, service coordinators, and primary health care

providers) in helping families navigate existing resources and build their capacity (Dunst, Bruder, & Espe-Sherwindt, 2014; Edwards, 2018; Higgins, 2017), and (c) conducting more data-informed family-centered interventions to bolster child and family outcomes (Robinson et al., 2017; Smith & Carroll, 2017).

Background and purpose

In order to support U.S. immigrant families and children, we need an understanding of their unique strengths and challenges as well as their perceived life satisfaction and social support.

Immigrant families' strengths and challenges

Immigrant families' strengths highlighted in the literature include healthy and intact families, strong work ethic and aspirations, and community cohesion. Children born to immigrant mothers are physically healthier than those born to U.S.-born mothers, they are more likely to live with two parents (Shields & Behrman, 2004), and more likely to be supported by a large extended family (Boit et al., 2023; Cun, 2021). Children of immigrants tend to have high educational aspirations and engage less in risky behaviours (Shields & Behrman, 2004). Furthermore, children of immigrants fare as well or better than children of natives on measures of school engagement and socio-emotional strengths, exhibiting fewer externalizing behaviour problems (De Feyter & Winsler, 2009; Takanishi, 2004). Lastly, immigrant families commonly settle in communities with others from the same culture, which eases adjustment to new systems, schools, and job markets (Boit et al., 2023; Choe, Barrett, Kwon, & Bagasrawala, 2024; Shields & Behrman, 2004). This sense of community cohesion within Bronfenbrenner's microsystem which encompasses the immediate environments in which individuals interact serves as a protective factor for immigrant families, providing social support networks, financial support from more established immigrant families (Cun, 2021; Maru, Paris, & Simhi, 2023; Morales et al., 2023), cultural resources, and a sense of belonging that can mitigate the challenges they face in adapting to a new country and support advocacy and help-seeking (Choe et al., 2024). In fact, a longitudinal study indicates that while more recent immigrants report food insecurity and access to financial and technology resources, more established immigrants report to have increased self-efficacy, community support and resources, even though some chronic conditions such as housing insecurity may persist (Duh-Leong et al., 2022).

On the other hand, immigrant communities often face challenges such as less-educated parents, jobs with low wages and no benefits, language barriers, discrimination, poverty, exposure to anxiety and uncertainty, and lack of support from government agencies. Language, transportation, and other financial barriers in accessing quality health care (Hall et al., 2024) welfare and educational resources (Cervantes, Ullrich, & Matthews, 2018; Rabin, Vaughn, Trott, & Jacquez, 2024; Shields & Behrman, 2004) including services for children with disabilities and mental health services (Choe et al., 2024; Goldman-Mellor, Plancarte, Perez-Lua, Payán, & De Trinidad Young, 2023; Kerker, Barajas-Gonzalez, Rojas, Norton, & Brotman, 2024) exist and have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Goldman-Mellor et al., 2023; Westbrook, 2024). Children in immigrant families may be more likely to have parents with lower levels of educational attainment, which may negatively affect child healthcare and academic achievement. Language barriers and lack of education and training may contribute to parents' over-representation among workers with lowest wages and no benefits, which may impact children's access to healthcare. Thus, young immigrant children tend to be disadvantaged in three critical areas: family economic security (Morales et al., 2023), access to health care, and access to culturally responsive, high-quality and affordable early education (Rabin et al., 2024; Takanishi, 2004). Furthermore, immigrant families from low-income communities are more likely to face obstacles in accessing supports for optimum development and well-being (Polusny et al., 2008; Yeo, 2017; Zlotnick et al., 2018). Besides the stressors due to immigration status, language barriers and a lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate services may further

limit the access of immigrants to quality care services (Choe et al., 2024; Lessard & Ku, 2003). It is concerning to see emerging evidence linking racial discrimination and harsher parenting practices/negative mental health in immigrant communities (Zong, Cheah, Ren, & Hart, 2023) and linking immigration related post-traumatic stress and early parenting stress (Maru et al., 2023). In addition, discrimination and segregation may result in inferior learning environments and the lack of government support for refugees and undocumented immigrants could lead to inadequate healthcare and education for children of immigrants (Shields & Behrman, 2004; Morales et al., 2023).

Life satisfaction and social support

Wellness and satisfaction with life remain unclear in this population. Due to their unique experiences as immigrants, this population may encounter challenges associated with acculturation and normal developmental issues (Neto, 2001) such as elevated levels of postpartum depression due to immigration stress (Maru et al., 2023; Winter, Due, & Ziersch, 2024). Satisfaction with life is a subjective, cognitive-judgmental aspect, which cannot be easily measured by objective variables (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). Therefore, it is imperative to understand immigrants' satisfaction level as well as the demographic and psychosocial factors that are associated with it (Neto, 2001) and how social supports may reduce challenges young immigrant families experience (Maru et al., 2023)

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1977) provides a framework for understanding the role of social support networks within the ecological contexts of immigrant families. According to Bronfenbrenner, the mesosystem encompasses the interactions between different settings in which individuals participate, such as family, school, and community. Social support networks foster a sense of life stability and a feeling of being valued (Cohen, 1992; Maru et al., 2023), and connections with family, friends, and community benefit immigrants by providing support in difficult times (Choe et al., 2024; Ornelas, Perreira, Beeber, & Maxwell, 2009; Winter et al., 2024). This highlights the importance of considering the broader social contexts in which immigrant families navigate their lives, as these contexts shape their experiences of life satisfaction and well-being.

Life satisfaction involves individuals' perceptions of their own life and subjective well-being and corresponds to their cognitive appraisal of their life based on their own standards (Diener et al., 1985). Satisfaction with life has been associated with mental health status and has protected against depression and substance use (Zullig, Valois, Huebner, Oeltmann, & Drane, 2001). In fact, some studies indicate that immigrants' life satisfaction and life conditions improve after immigration (Diener & Lucas, 1999), and there may be some predictors of immigrants' life satisfaction. Moreno-Jimenez and Hidalgo (2011) found that some predictors of life satisfaction included social support, discrimination, job satisfaction, language, religion, legal status, and ethnicity. In addition, social support may benefit families' physical and mental health and well-being (Guruge, Thomson, George, & Chaze, 2015; Kung, Castaneda, & Lee, 2003) and may act as buffer against immigration related-stress in young immigrant mothers (Maru et al., 2023).

As many studies focus on immigrants as a general group without understanding variations in the communities and circumstances (Barker, 2008; López & Mulnix, 2002), it is important to explore contextual and local understandings related to the immigrant experience. It is imperative to refocus our efforts to support immigrant families with young children and accept our responsibility as educational and research communities in supporting the healthy development of every young child in the context of family and community. To this end, more targeted analysis about immigrant families with young children is needed (Garand, Xu, & Davis, 2017). Efforts to design appropriate, efficient, and effective interventions to support immigrant children will depend upon a comprehensive theoretical and practical understanding of the challenges facing immigrant children, as well as careful analysis of the practices, social policies and supports (McCarthy, 1998). For instance, emerging evidence suggest that direct electronic cash supports and food bank model alleviated some of the food insecurity experienced by young rural immigrant families during COVID-19 pandemic (Payán, Perez-Lua, Goldman-Mellor, & Young, 2022). Taken together, multiple systems in the

ecology surrounding young immigrant families need to be explored deeply to understand these unique dynamics.

Purpose

This paper is a part of an extensive mixed-methods study that focuses on the ecology of immigrant families and their integration in an urban Mid-Atlantic city. We are primarily guided by Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2001), which views family and child development, health, and well-being in the context of a multilayered and complex system of relationships and interactions. Within Bronfebrenner's ecological framework, different levels of systems from the individual family to its larger environment can either hinder or promote families' well-being. By placing immigrant families at the core of the ecological system, this theory frames our understanding of families' social, cultural, and educational experiences taking into consideration the following levels: Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, Macrosystem, and Chronosystem. Our review of the literature suggests various dynamic and interactive family-level strengths and stressors, community, workplace, social, and environmental factors at different ecological levels that may impact their quality of life and well-being.

Other scholars have similarly aligned their studies with Bronfebrrenner's ecological framework to understand the life experiences of immigrants. For example, Ojeda and Piña-Watson (2013) investigated undocumented immigrant day laborers' life satisfaction and highlighted the importance of family, spirituality, work satisfaction, perceived health, and perceived discrimination on life satisfaction. Also, Raffaelli and Wiley (2013) explored the life experiences of Latino immigrants to identify their needs and strengths as well as the resources and assets available to them.

In the current analysis, our goal is to understand the systems and supports surrounding young children (birth-5) from immigrant families in a primarily urban context. More specifically, the purpose of this particular paper is to investigate the following research questions: (1) What are the linguistic, social, and cultural supports as well as the overall life satisfaction of this sample of immigrant families with young children? and (2) What are the factors that correlate with the perceptions of life satisfaction and social support of this sample of immigrant families with young children?

Understanding the ecology of participating immigrant families will inform multiple systems that directly and indirectly influence them. The study insights are also anticipated to inform tailored initiatives that may empower the family unit and consequently improve developmental and educational outcomes of more young children in addition to the family's overall health and wellbeing.

Methods

This paper is a part of a larger mixed-methods study that focuses on the ecology of immigrant families and their integration in an urban Mid-Atlantic city. Following expedited IRB approval, four educational researcher expert reviewers evaluated the devised family survey, and three parents provided feedback as part of pre-testing. They answered content protocol questions (available by the first author upon request), which informed various changes.

For recruitment, our team rotated among a sampling of community settings in the pre-selected mid-Atlantic urban county to disseminate flyers and survey self-identified first and second-generation immigrant families with young children under age five. Currently, the poverty rate in this region is 38.4%, and the percent of Latino or Hispanic residents is 48.1%, with 13.5% of the overall population being born in another country; these figures, coupled with 9.3% of residents under age 5, provides a picture of a growing immigrant population with young children (U.S. Census, 2017). We wanted to explore the context of this fast-growing but under-looked population.

Bilingual student workers reviewed the alternate consent form with interested families before monitoring survey completion. A final question asked those interested in participating in an ethnographic analysis to share contact information (cancelled due to the pandemic). The survey was

completed by 54 parents, 13 in English, and 41 in Spanish. Fifty-one parents completed the surveys using a tablet with the student worker nearby. In contrast, three parents completed it electronically and remotely due to the pandemic, but our student workers were still available to offer support via Zoom.

Our 40-minute long survey aligned with the literature and addressed gaps in understanding immigrant families' experiences (See Table 1 for the Demographic items). Participants then answered open – and closed-ended items on existing and desired systems and supports. They then completed

Table 1. Family Member Characteristics (n = 54).

Characteristics	No. (%) of Participants
Age of Parent	
21–25 years	10 (18.52)
26–30 years	10 (18.52)
31–35 years	17 (31.48)
36–40 years	8 (14.81)
41–45 years	2 (3.70)
46–50 years	2 (3.70)
50 + years	3. (5.56)
No Response	2 (3.70)
Number of Children	
1 child	9 (16.67)
2 children	11 (20.37)
3 children	18 (33.33)
4 children	9 (16.67)
5 children	4 (7.41)
No Response	3 (5.56)
Age of Youngest or Only Child	
Birth – Age 1	17 (31.48)
2 years	5 (9.26)
3 years	10.(18.52)
4 years	6 (11.11)
5 years	4 (7.41)
No Response	12 (22.22)
Location of Survey Completion	
Web-based from their home	3 (5.56)
Church	1 (1.85)
Childcare	19 (35.19)
Community Store	4 (7.41)
Wellness Centre	13.(24.07)
Hispanic Family Centre	8 (14.81)
Other Organization ('Unity for Progress')	1 (1.85)
No Response	5 (9.26)
Highest Education	
Elementary School	9 (16.67)
Middle School	1 (1.85)
High School	26 (48.15)
Associate's Degree	8 (14.81)
Bachelor's Degree	5 (9.26)
Master's Degree	1 (1.85)
Other Formal Training/ Education	2 (3.70)
Other Informal Training/ Education (construction, plumbing, etc.)	1 (1.85)
No Response	1 (1.85)
Job Employment Status	
Full-time job	18 (33.33)
Part-time job	7 (12.96)
Full-time job with some part-time work	2 (3.70)
Two or more part-time job	1 (1.85)
Not working – actively seeking employment	8 (14.81)
Not working – not currently seeking employment	14 (25.93)
Other	3 (5.56)
No Response	1 (1.85)

Note. Respondents self-identified as first or second-generation immigrants to the United States, living in a mid-Atlantic urban county with a young child (birth-5).

brief, psychometrically sound measures [i.e. General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg, 1972), the Parental Stress Scale (Berry & Jones, 1995), the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988), the Early Childhood Behavior Problem Screening Scale (Epstein & Nelson, 2006), and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985)]. Participants received materials (e.g. picture book) and a parent-friendly packet of relevant resources available in their local community. For this paper, we looked at variables of linguistic, social, and cultural supports as well as the scores of the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) presented below. To further understand this population's experience, we also analysed the correlational relationships between these variables.

Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS)

The SWLS is a five-item scale used to assess global life satisfaction or the cognitive component of well-being (cognitive judgment of the quality of life according to one's criteria). It was developed and validated on the basis of samples of college students and senior citizens (Diener et al., 1985). SWLS has also been used with culturally diverse groups and has been suggested for use in a variety of settings and applications. It is designed to assess a person's conscious judgment of life satisfaction which depends on a comparison of life circumstances to what is thought to be appropriate standards (Pavot & Diener, 1993). The respondents indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each of the 5 statements of the questionnaire using a 7-point scale that ranges from 1 = completely unsatisfied to 7 = completely satisfied. The total scores range from 7 (lowest life satisfaction) to 35 (highest life satisfaction). The SWLS has been proved to have high internal consistency, strong internal reliability, moderate temporal stability, and predictive validity and correlates moderately to highly with other measures of subjective well-being, and predictably with specific personality characteristics (Pavot & Diener, 1993).

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)

Social support has been broadly defined as an individual's perception that she or he is connected to others and obtains emotional and instrumental assistance when needed.

The MSPSS (Zimet et al., 1988) is a self-report measure of social support as it is subjectively experienced. It addresses the subjective assessment of social support adequacy from three major domains of support: Family, Friends, and Significant Other. It is widely used in practice as a tool for a diagnosis of environmental coping resources and was tested on respondents of different ages and cultural groups. The MSPSS contains 12 items on a Likert scale from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree). The mean score on this measure could range from 1 to 7, with a 7 indicating a high level of perceived social support. MSPSS studies confirm its good internal consistency, test-retest reliability, construct validity as well as a stable factor structure. Social support can produce helpful effects directly regardless of the level of stress or act as a buffer for psychological distress protecting people from the harmful effects of stress: depression, emotional stress and other adverse consequences for mental health (Zimet et al., 1988).

Findings

The results of the descriptive statistics drew a complex picture of participants' experiences with linguistic, social, and cultural supports as well as overall life satisfaction for immigrant families with young children. In addition, advanced statistics (correlations) were utilized to explore the relationship between social support and life satisfaction, previously discussed characteristics and ecology. We also use participants' responses to the survey's open ended questions to support the statistical results.

Descriptives

Families have varied and rich cultural characteristics and strengths (See Table 2). Families reported having good communication with one another (85.2%), helping each other (77.8%), and loving and caring about each other (72.2%).

Table 3 reports immigrant families' comfort level in using native language and practicing culture and beliefs in social contexts. We notice that families feel less comfortable using their native language outside their home (neighbourhood, schools, and work) than at home. As an extension open ended question, when asked about the sources of comfort or happiness, participants shared examples such as: 'spending one on one time with my kids', 'playing in the park or any activity within the community', 'maintaining the Spanish language', 'having authorization to work', 'a good job', 'communication and values', and 'a good child care'.

Table 4 describes the families' ecological characteristics. About 40% of parents reported looking for jobs. They pointed to social organizations, religious centres, and child care services as sources for support. Additionally, parents identified discriminative events experienced because of their

Table 2. Family Cultural Characteristics (n = 54).

Characteristics	No. (%) of Participants
Country of Origin	
Guatemala	3 (5.56)
Mexico	20 (27.04)
Nicaragua	1 (1.85)
Puerto Rico	9 (16.67)
Dominican Republic	6 (11.11)
El Salvador	1 (1.85)
No Response	14 (25.93)
Ethnicity	
Hispanic or Latino	40 (74.07)
Not Hispanic or Latino	6 (11.11)
No Response	8 (14.81)
Language Spoken in the Home	
Spanish	43 (79.63)
English	4 (7.41)
Spanish and English	4 (7.41)
Other	1 (1.85)
No Response	2 (3.70)
Timing when Immigrated to the United States	
Within the past 1–2 years	8 (14.81)
Within the past 5 years	6 (11.11)
Within the past 10 years	9 (16.67)
Within the past 15 years	9 (16.67)
Within the past 15 years	4 (7.41)
Over 20 years ago	7 (12.96)
Younger, returned to home country, & later came back	1 (1.85)
No Response (or 'Other')	10 (18.52)
Family Strengths	
Good communication with one another	46 (85.2)
Helping each other	42 (77.8)
Celebrating each other's accomplishments	31 (57.4)
A good sense of humour	35 (64.8)
A positive attitude or way of looking at things	32 (59.3)
Hard working	26 (48.1)
Loving/caring	39 (72.2)
Strong cultural values	26 (48.1)
Strong belief system / religion	19 (35.2)
Many friends / relatives around	16 (29.6)
Using technology to connect virtually	18 (33.3)
Comfortable reaching out to others, outside our family when needing assistance	24 (44.4)
Good awareness of resources in the city	13 (24.1)
Comfortable asking for and seeking resources in the city	19 (35.2)
Comfortable accessing needed resources in the city	13 (24.1)

Table 3. Level of Comfort about one's culture.

Aspect/Setting	Mean Std. Deviation
Feeling Comfortable Using Native Language	
At home	1.89 .42
In neighbourhood	1.26 .53
At childcare	1.34 .69
At school	1.39 .74
At work	1.41 .67
Feeling Comfortable Practicing Values and Beliefs from Culture of Origin	
At home	1.08 .33
In neighbourhood	1.18 .44
At childcare	1.28 .54
At school	1.27 .50
At work	1.36 .62

Note. 3-point Likert Scale with 1 being not comfortable, 2 being somewhat comfortable, and 3 being very comfortable. Responses such as 'not applicable' or blank were excluded in calculation.

identities, including being denied services and not hired for jobs. When asked about the biggest challenges, sample responses included these statements: 'not enough time to spend with child because of work', 'most school don't have bilingual classes anymore', 'my child is not a citizen, having to think about university needs', 'help speak more in both languages', 'safety in the streets', and 'racism'. When asked about experiences of marginalization or discrimination, sample participant responses included the following: 'I was recently discriminated at my job from a client not wanting me to touch her because of my skin color', 'at work, people discriminate because I do not know how to speak english', 'I have been rejected because I am hispanic. I was denied help', and 'the person works at my job and makes fun of me and looks at me with a bad look. Which makes me believe they are racists'.

Tables 5 and 6 describe participants' overall satisfaction with life and their perceived social support. Despite the challenges identified, it is interesting that participants' overall satisfaction with life is rated high. This study's mean score is higher than the mean scores reported in Pavot and Diener's (2009) review of SWLS population scores. Among the 39 participants who responded to the SWLS questions, 12 were extremely satisfied (scored between 31 and 35), 14 were satisfied (scored between 26 and 30), 6 were slightly satisfied (scored between 21 and 25); 5 were slightly dissatisfied (scored between 15 and 19), and only 2 were dissatisfied (scored between 10 and 14).

Correlations

We noted that some variables related to internal factors played a role in this participant group. More specifically, feeling comfortable to practice one's culture and beliefs positively correlated with the scores of the Friend subscale in the MSPSS ($r = .35$, $p < .05$). Participants who felt comfortable with speaking their native language seemed more likely to feel comfortable with practicing their culture and beliefs ($r = .68$, $p < .01$). Also, the scores of the SWLS positively correlated with participants' comfort with practicing their own culture and beliefs ($r = .35$, $p < .05$).

Not surprisingly, the number of recognized family strengths positively correlated with the scores of the Family, Friend, Significant Other, and Total Score of the MSPSS ($r = .41$, $p < .05$, $r = .51$, $p < .01$, $r = .50$, $p < .01$, and $r = .51$, $p < .01$, respectively). Lastly, the scores of SWLS positively correlated with the scores of the Friend, Significant Other, and Total Score of MSPSS ($r = .36$, $p < .05$, $r = .38$, $p < .01$, and $r = .37$, $p < .01$, respectively).

We also examined other external factors and discovered that there is no relationship between the number of years in the city, education level, discrimination experience, and traumatic experience, with the scores of SWLS and MSPSS. On the other hand, the participants' satisfaction with current financial, social, and educational resources correlated with the Family, Friend, Significant Other,

Table 4. Family Ecological Characteristics (n = 54).

Characteristics	No. (%) of Participants
Would like to learn more about …	
Finding a job	19 (35.2)
Vocational or job training	15 (27.8)
College education	15 (27.8)
Getting financial assistance	15 (27.8)
Learning English	26 (48.1)
Where to buy food/groceries	13 (24.1)
Where to buy clothing	12 (22.2)
Affordable childcare (birth-5) programmes	15 (27.8)
Affordable housing options	23 (42.6)
Affordable medical/healthcare options	14 (25.9)
How the school system works	14 (25.9)
Resources on children's emotions and behaviour	16 (29.6)
Resources for children with physical disabilities	5 (9.3)
Resources for children with cognitive disabilities	6 (11.1)
Resources on family mental health and managing stress	7 (13.0)
Resources on connecting with other families in the city	9 (16.7)
Resources on how to connect/talk with my child's teachers	8 (14.8)
Resources on how to connect/talk with doctors and other healthcare providers	8 (14.8)
Resources on domestic violence	3 (5.6)
Regular Outside Support	
Early Head Start	15 (27.8)
Head Start	11 (20.4)
Parent Support Group	9 (16.7)
Religious Activities/Services	10 (18.5)
Home-Based Early Intervention	2 (3.7)
Centre-Based Early Intervention	4 (7.4)
Other	4 (7.4)
Perceived Supportive Groups to Immigrant Families	
Churches and other faith-based organizations (e.g. priests)	25 (46.3)
Supportive organizations such as Non-Profits	34 (63.0)
Early Intervention (birth – 3) programmes	17 (31.5)
Early Head Start or Head Start	17 (31.5)
Early Childhood (birth-5) programmes	12 (22.2)
Elementary schools	7 (13.0)
Middle/high schools	7 (13.0)
Doctors and other health care professionals	17 (31.5)
Satisfaction with the availability of financial, educational, social resources in the city (n = 49)	
Very Satisfied (4)	20 (37.0)
Somewhat Satisfied (3)	19 (35.2)
Somewhat Dissatisfied (2)	8 (14.8)
Very Dissatisfied (1)	2 (3.7)
Average	3.16
Traumatic Experiences After Immigrating	
Yes	16 (29.6)
Experienced or Witnessed Discrimination	
Yes	16 (29.6)
Discrimination Events	
Discouraged by a teacher or adviser from seeking higher education	10 (18.5)
Denied a scholarship	3 (5.6)
Not hired for a job	14 (25.9)
Not given a promotion	9 (16.7)
Fired	9 (16.7)
Prevented from renting or buying a home in the neighbourhood you wanted	9 (16.7)
Prevented from remaining in a neighbourhood because neighbours made life so uncomfortable	9 (16.7)
Hassled by stranger(s) on street	11 (20.4)
Hassled by the police	4 (7.4)
Denied a bank loan	6 (11.1)
Denied or provided lower quality medical care	5 (9.3)
Denied service or receiving lower quality service by a plumber,car mechanic, or other service provider	4 (7.4)
Denied a driver license or state ID card	6 (11.1)

Note. Respondents self-identified as first or second-generation immigrant to the United States, living in a mid-Atlantic urban county with a young child (birth-5).

Table 5. Satisfaction with Life (N = 39).

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
In most ways my life is close to my ideal	5.08	1.52
The conditions of my life are excellent	5.11	1.53
I am satisfied with my life.	5.53	1.52
So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.	5.61	1.37
If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.	5.61	1.52
Averaged Score	27.1	

Note. Diener et al., 1985, p. 7-point Likert Scale with 1 being strongly disagree and 7 being strongly agree. Participants who did not complete the whole set were excluded.

Table 6. Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (N = 36).

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
There is a special person who is around when I am in need. [c]	5.44	1.93
There is a special person with whom I can share my joys and sorrows. [c]	5.67	1.80
My family really tries to help me. [a]	5.28	1.91
I get the emotional help and support I need from my family. [a]	5.03	2.14
I have a special person who is a real source of comfort to me. [c]	5.56	1.84
My friends really try to help me. [b]	5.19	1.85
I can count on my friends when things go wrong. [b]	5.03	2.06
I can talk about my problems with my family. [a]	4.97	2.25
I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows. [b]	5.17	2.01
There is a special person in my life who cares about my feelings. [c]	5.53	1.98
My family is willing to help me make decisions. [a]	5.44	1.90
I can talk about my problems with my friends. [b]	4.86	2.26
Average	5.26	

Note. Zimet et al., 1988, p. 7-point Likert Scale with 1 being very strongly disagree and 7 being very strongly agree. Participants who did not complete the whole set were excluded.
[a]These items belong to the *Family* subscale.
[b]These items belong to the *Friend* subscale.
[c]These items belong to the *Significant Other* subscale.

and Total Score of MSPSS ($r = .57$, $p < .01$, $r = .55$, $p < .01$, $r = .65$, $p < .01$, and $r = .59$, $p < .01$, respectively).

As a follow up open-ended question to these dimensions, we asked participants to reflect on what professionals need to understand about possible needs and ways to best support immigrant families. Sample responses included: 'everyone should be treated equal', 'more resources', 'better pay and access to education', 'more communication in Spanish', 'be treated like everyone else', 'with more work and better programs to learn English', 'to be heard and respected', 'programs that are more flexible with hours and capacity', and 'providing us with opportunities despite of where we come from'.

Discussion of results

Immigrant families with young children are a unique and highly diverse group in terms of complex variations supporting healthy developmental and educational outcomes and unique external challenges impeding important developmental potential. While many studies have been conducted to explore immigrant youth's experience in schools, there are very few studies focusing on infants, toddlers and young children growing up in immigrant families. Indeed, despite their many strengths (further elaborated in literature review), immigrant families and youth from low income highly diverse communities tend to face obstacles in accessing resources and supports for optimum child development, health, and well-being (Derose, Escarce, & Lurie, 2007; Earner, 2007; Isik-Ercan, 2012; Zlotnick et al., 2018).

This study's findings emphasize the importance of considering the full range of life experiences, strengths, challenges, and systems of support that shape immigrant families' well-being and point to

the complex ecology around immigrant families with young children. Despite the challenges these families face including economic (looking for jobs), social (discrimination), and educational (pre-school access), their linguistic and cultural strengths and perceived sources of comfort and support act as a protective factor in enhancing their life satisfaction. Immigrant family wellbeing is impacted by the interplay of risk and resiliency factors (Perreira, Chapman, & Stein, 2006) that influence these families' perceptions of the quality of their life. These families seem to navigate various challenges, including economic hardships and social discrimination, while drawing upon their linguistic and cultural strengths as sources of resilience. By examining immigrant families' experiences through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1977), we gain a deeper understanding of how these families interact with and are influenced by their social contexts. The high level of life satisfaction that emerged from our study could be connected to immigrant families' improved quality of life and financial opportunities compared to their homeland life issues. Campbell (2008) stated that immigrants "found ways to create a high quality of life for themselves and their families despite legal, cultural, and social barriers" (p. 235).

This study's findings also highlight the relationship between families' comfort in practicing their culture and beliefs with friendship support and their life satisfaction confirming the importance of friends and informal networks in the immigrant families' process of adjustment and acculturation (Berry, 1997). Additionally, families' perceptions of their life satisfaction was connected to the perceived social support and resources that are available. One of the main identified resources in our study were community organizations and strong connections and relationships with the community. These families seem well integrated into the system and comfortable finding resources that support their positive experiences. Connections with community organizations and strong ties within the community seem to contribute to these families' sense of belonging and satisfaction with life. These findings resonate with Bronfenbrenner's emphasis on the role of social relationships in shaping individuals' development across different system levels. This connection between life satisfaction and social support has been documented in other studies that indicate that social support from family and native friends was associated with greater sense of community and satisfaction with life (Hombrados-Mendieta et al., 2019) and that the availability of social support was linked to reduced stress and more positive adjustment for both parents and children (Levitt, Lane, & Levitt, 2005). Our study's findings support the need to analyse the different facets of these families' characteristics and perceptions of strengths, challenges, and support systems to better understand their experiences. This approach aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological model that highlights the significance of the development of social relationships through its different system levels.

Implications

Engaging in a comprehensive needs assessment to understand the ecology of immigrant families in a highly urban Mid-Atlantic city informed us of their cultural, social and educational experiences, which will subsequently enhance our ability to devise more culturally appropriate, ecologically valid interventions that can improve outcomes for more young children and families in this community (Lillie-Blanton & Hoffman, 1995). Bronfenbrenner's emphasis on the importance of considering the multiple layers of influence that shape individuals' development within their environments guided the exploration of the cultural, social, and educational experiences of immigrant families. Gaining insights into the various microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems that impact immigrant families in highly urban environments' well-being can support efforts of establishing racial and economic equity. It is important to understand the dynamics of immigrant families with young children to assess strengths and needed supports. This will help strategically guide supports and social services immigrant families would need to aid young children's healthy growth. We recognize that despite our efforts for outreach, our participants were 54 immigrant parents in one city. In order to achieve more nuanced understanding through sample variance, the study should

be replicated with a larger, more diverse sample of immigrant parents. However, there are additional potential policy and practice implications that can be drawn from the current work.

To offset the effect of the challenges that immigrant families face as stated above, evidence-based policies and programs that promote immigrant well-being are crucial for these families' well-being. For example, schools need to address the needs of all students including children of immigrants and ensure their academic success. Different strategies can be undertaken to include young children of immigrants in early childhood programmes: outreach programmes, enrollment assistance, building relationships with parents, building immigrant-friendly preschool programmes, and offering tailored summer prekindergarten and after school kindergarten programmes. Designing policies that help programmes promote parent engagement in linguistically diverse families could benefit a large and growing number of children (Barrueco, Smith, & Stephens, 2016), aligning with Bronfenbrenner's (1977) emphasis on the importance of social relationships in shaping development.

In conclusion, a comprehensive examination of the lives, experiences, and social supports around immigrant families with young children may be highly informative for a number of fields including medicine, education, social services, counselling, and special services in their connection to healthy early childhood development. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as a lens into our understanding of immigrant family dynamics, the results of this study can inform research outcomes and offer recommendations to improve the lives of young children in immigrant families in highly urban areas through policy and practice.

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