

Newcomer Immigrant Adolescents: A Mixed-Methods Examination of Family Stressors and School Outcomes

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Family stressors predict negative psychological outcomes for immigrant adolescents, yet little is known about how such stressors interact to predict school outcomes. The purpose of this study was to explore the interactive role of family stressors on school outcomes for newcomer adolescent immigrants. Using a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, we used quantitative methods to explore interactions between family separation, acculturative family conflict, and family life events to predict 2 school outcomes, academic achievement (via grade point average [GPA]), and externalizing problems (student- and teacher-reported). The sample included 189 newcomer immigrant public high school students from 34 countries of origin. Quantitative measures included the Multicultural Events Scale for Adolescents, Family Conflicts Scale, and the Achenbach System of Empirically Based Assessment (ASEBA). Qualitative data were collected through a semi-structured interview. Quantitative results found that more family life events were associated with lower GPA, but this association was weaker for participants who had been separated from their parents. More family conflict was associated with more externalizing symptoms (both youth- and teacher-reported). However, the association between family conflict and teacher-reported externalizing symptoms was found only among participants reporting a greater than average number of life events. Qualitative results show that separation from extended family networks was among the most stressful of experiences, and demonstrate the highly complex nature of each family stressor domain. At a time when immigration is rapidly changing our school system, a better understanding of early risk factors for new immigrants can help teachers, administrators, and mental health practitioners to identify students with greatest need to foster behavioral, academic, and emotional well-being.

Keywords: immigrant youth, adolescence, academic achievement, family stressors, risk factors

Newcomer adolescent immigrants are a particularly vulnerable population (American Psychological Association, Presidential Task Force on Immigration [APA], 2012), as they face the simultaneous challenges of rapid developmental changes and acculturation-related stressors and adjustment. Newcomer adolescents are within 5 years postmigration (Shakya, Khanlou, & Gonsalves, 2010; Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009) and may experience acculturative

stressors related to family, including separation from loved ones, economic and employment disparities, and acculturative conflict between parents and children (Bauer, Cobb-Clark, Hildebrand, & Sinning, 2011; Caplan, 2007; Suárez-Orozco, Bang, & Kim, 2011). These stressors put newcomer adolescents at risk for emotional and behavioral problems (Li, 2009; Smokowski, Chapman, & Bacallao, 2007). Indeed, immigrating as a child is linked to higher rates of anxiety and depression in adulthood (Abe-Kim et al., 2007). However, despite these challenges, some research shows immigrant youth with better mental health, lower juvenile delinquency, and better academic performance than their native-born peers—a phenomenon known as the *immigrant paradox* (García Coll & Marks, 2012). For some, but not all immi-

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grant youth, emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes may worsen over time as they become more acculturated (García Coll & Marks, 2012; Hernandez & Charney, 1998). Given these concerning trends, identifying and addressing risk factors for newcomer adolescents is critical to helping prevent the later development of emotional and behavioral problems. In particular, understanding complex risk factors associated with family may provide fertile ground for educational and psychological prevention and intervention.

According to ecological systems theory, stressors within the family directly impact adolescent development and school functioning in terms of behavior, mental health, and academic success (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Chappel, Suldo, & Ogg, 2014). Research shows that experiencing multiple family stressors together can result in worse outcomes (Moylan et al., 2009), however, the interactive nature of multiple family stressors for newcomer adolescent immigrants has yet to be examined. Stress has a documented impact across health outcomes, and people who migrate during middle childhood or adolescence have poorer health (Arévalo, Tucker, & Falcón, 2015). Theory pointing to critical developmental periods conclude that migration before or during adolescence, a time of potentially high-risk behaviors, poses a particular threat to well-being. For example, research shows that those who migrate during childhood and adolescence had more substance abuse problems (Bates & Teitler, 2008; Li & Wen, 2015).

The present study uses quantitative methods to explore the relationship among three family-level stressors found to play a role for immigrant adolescents (family separation, acculturative family conflict, and family life events) as predictors of two school outcomes—academic achievement, and externalizing problems (student- and teacher-reported). We use qualitative methods to illustrate and deepen our understanding of each family stressor domain.

Family Separation

Family separation poses documented risks for all children, including increased stress, internalizing and externalizing symptoms, and school-related problems (Flake, Davis, Johnson, & Middleton, 2009; Fröjd, Marttunen, & Kal-

tiala-Heino, 2012; Kirby, 2002; Theobald, Farrington, & Piquero, 2013). Although family separation has adverse consequences for any family, separation from parents is the most commonly cited stressor for newcomer immigrant youth (Caplan, 2007; Suárez-Orozco & Todorova, 2003) and so is particularly relevant for this population. Research into the prevalence of immigrant family separation is limited, but some studies estimate that as many as 85% of immigrant adolescents have been separated from their parents at some point, the duration of which can be short- or long-term (Dreby, 2015; Suárez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002). Separation may occur during the initial migration because of life circumstances, like financial restrictions, or can come later as a result of complex immigration policies and enforcement practices that shape the nature and degree of contact during separation and reunification (Dreby, 2015; Menjívar, 2012). In 2011, there were over 5,000 children in foster care due to parent deportation or arrest related to their immigration status (Molina & Kohm, 2013). For example, for some immigrant parents, the only way to apply for permanent residence is to return to their home country and apply through the U.S. consulate there. However, once they leave they can be restricted from returning to the U.S. for months or years (Joffe-Block, 2013). In this way, U.S. immigration laws have historically contributed to the problem of immigrant family separation (Dreby, 2015; Molina & Kohm, 2013; Oulahan, 2011). The many challenges associated with immigrant family separation received recent legislative attention. Efforts to reduce the burden of family separation include policies like allowing hardship applications to be submitted from within the U.S. (Joffe-Block, 2013) and an executive order to prevent deportation and streamline the family sponsored immigration process (Clarke, 2014; “Streamlining Legal Immigration,” n.d.). Although new legislation may improve the lives of separated immigrant families, the problem still requires more research and understanding.

Family separation can result in harm to psychological, social, and academic outcomes. Immigrant youth with family members living in another country report more acculturative stress (Hovey, 2000), and immigrant children separated from parents report more anxiety and de-

pression than those not separated (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2003). More children are separated from their fathers than from their mothers, with duration varying across cultures, but paternal separation is consistently lengthier or permanent (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2005). In a quantitative study of 53 Mexican immigrant parents' reactions to separation and reunification, separation was associated with higher levels of acculturative stress. In addition, negative appraisals of family reunification contributed to depression, acculturative stress, and poor family functioning (Rusch & Reyes, 2013). The majority of these parents immigrated as young adults to the United States, 10 or more years prior. More insight into family separation and reunification can be gained by also examining the experiences of newcomers—those who have recently migrated. Some limited qualitative research has explored the nature of long distance interactions, differing viewpoints on the reasons for separation, and the complex emotional experiences caused by separation and reunification (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2003). In a mixed-methods study of the educational impact of family separation, it was found that children (ages 6 to 22) who had been separated from their families during migration had greater educational gaps (e.g., children significantly older than their peers in their grade level), particularly among older adolescents. They also had higher high school dropout rates than did children who migrated with their parents or were born in the United States (Gindling & Poggio, 2012). Compared with Asian and other immigrants, this pattern was highest among Latin American immigrants, those separated from their mothers, and those whose parents were undocumented prior to receiving a green card (Gindling & Poggio, 2012). Although it is clear that family separation poses great risks to educational and psychological well-being, we know little about how this important stressor interacts with other family-level stressors, specifically for newcomer adolescents.

Acculturative Family Conflict

A second important family stressor for newcomer adolescents is intergenerational family conflict. More intergenerational disagreement and difficulty has been found in

immigrant families than nonimmigrant families (Kwak, 2003). Gaps in acculturation, the change process that occurs with cross-cultural contact (Berry, 1980), often occur in families in terms of identity, behavior, and language (Birman, 2006). One study found intergenerational gaps within each of three generations of Portuguese immigrants in Canada (Morrison & James, 2009). Immigrant children in school experience direct sustained contact with the dominant culture, so they often learn a new language and acculturate faster than do their parents (Sciarra, 1999). Conversely, parents who precede their children in the migration process may be more acculturated, leading to more acculturative stress for the children who follow them to the new country (Sciarra, 1999). Differences in experiences within families can lead to intragroup marginalization, which also is a predictor of familial acculturative stress (Castillo, Zahn, & Cano, 2012). Adolescent immigrants are at greater risk for family conflict than are younger immigrant children (Lane, Levitt, & Levitt, 2005; Levitt, Lane, & Levitt, 2005). This may be because family conflict during adolescence is developmentally normative (Adams & Laursen, 2007; Laursen & Collins, 1994); however, the nature and degree of conflict can change and compound when acculturation differences impact immigrant families (Caplan, 2007; Stuart, Ward, Jose, & Narayanan, 2010). In a longitudinal study with Chinese American adolescents, perceptions of intergenerational discrepancy in American orientation related to unsupportive parenting techniques, a sense of alienation between parents and children, and higher rates of adolescent depression and academic problems (Kim, Chen, Wang, Shen, & Orozco-Lapray, 2013). Research with Southeast Asian immigrants found that intergenerational conflict directly predicted later adolescent depressive symptoms (Ying & Han, 2007). Although the role of acculturative family conflict has been well established across various cultural groups as a risk factor for immigrant families, we know less about its effect on school outcomes like achievement or externalizing behaviors. We also know little about its interaction with other family stressors or the role it plays for newcomer adolescents.

Family Life Events

A third stressor domain includes major changes and life events within a family system. Such life events can occur in all families, and have been found to be a source of distress for adolescents (Mittler, Horesh, Maytal, & Toren, 2014; Rowlison & Felner, 1988). For immigrant families already experiencing many complex psychosocial changes and family-level stressors, major life events may compound immigrant-related problems (Gonzales, Gunnoe, Jackson, & Samaniego, 1995; Holmes & Rahe, 1967). In particular, parents' divorce, death, and illness are associated with increased distress among adolescents (Kiiski, Määttä, & Uusiautti, 2013; Trickey, Siddaway, Meiser-Stedman, Serpell, & Field, 2012). In a study of multiple family risk factors among nonimmigrant families, the cumulative impact of various stressors (parent conflict, poor parenting quality, and economic hardship) were examined for independent, additive effects (Gerard & Buehler, 1999). Poor parenting quality predicted youth externalizing problem behaviors, economic hardship predicted internalizing problems, and youth in two-parent households were most affected by economic hardship (Gerard & Buehler, 1999). This research provides evidence of family life events impacting adolescents within mainstream, nonimmigrant samples.

Immigrant youth may experience premigration life events, including exposure to violence, sexual and physical victimization, and substance use, which may then continue and intensify post migration (Yearwood, Crawford, Kelly, & Moreno, 2007). For example, immigrant youth tend to have less educated parents, earning less money, which places them in a cycle of economic hardship and poverty that shape their lives in their new host countries (Levitt et al., 2005; Yearwood et al., 2007). Moreover, the process of migration is itself a stressful life event, and when it's coupled with other family stressors, it might have greater meaning for immigrant adolescents than nonimmigrants (Yearwood et al., 2007). Family life events must be further examined among newcomer immigrant youth and taken in context with other family stressors unique to the experiences of immigrant families.

Research demonstrates that multiple stressors, or risk factors, can work together to have a unique effect on outcomes (e.g., Kraemer, Stice, Kazdin, Offord, & Kupfer, 2001). For example, a study of Mexican-origin mothers and their children (ages 11 to 15) found that both maternal and adolescent linguistic acculturation were correlated with both family conflict and adolescent conduct problems (Gonzales, Deardorff, Formoso, Barr, & Barrera, 2006). However, the relationship between acculturation and conduct problems significantly weakened when family conflict was present (Gonzales et al., 2006). That is, the relationship between predictor and outcome changed when taking another variable into account. In another study, with newcomer Latino adolescents in the United States fewer than 10 years, family interactions such as familism (a sense of being rooted in the family) and parent-adolescent conflict were both found to be the strong predictors of mental health status, with parent-adolescent conflict identified as a risk factor and familism as a protective factor (Smokowski et al., 2007). Expanding this line of research to include diverse newcomers facing multiple family-level stressors can deepen our understanding of risk for immigrant youth.

The Present Study: A Mixed-Methods Approach

Newcomer immigrant adolescents face the dual challenges of rapid developmental change and acculturation processes (APA, 2012). Research demonstrates that several clear family-level risk factors exist for immigrant adolescents, including family separation, acculturative family conflict, and family life events. However, several important limitations remain in our current understanding of immigrant family stressors: (a) Most research focuses on internalizing symptoms, and so less is known about school outcomes such as academic achievement and behavioral problems; (b) current research relies heavily of self-reported data and so lacks the validity derived from multiple-informant research, such as parents or teachers; (c) most studies define immigrant families broadly in terms of time postmigration, and so less is known about the vulnerable newcomer period of early acculturation; (d) most research focuses on one single ethnic group, rather than studying

diverse immigrant populations in a way that fosters an understanding of the universal aspects of family risk factors among immigrants; and (e) most research relies on quantitative results without including qualitative data to deepen our understanding through the use of participants' voices.

To address these gaps in the literature, the present study used a mixed-methods convergent parallel design with a sample of newcomer immigrant adolescents from around the world. Quantitative analyses examined the interaction between three family-level stressors: parental separation, family conflict, and life events, to predict academic achievement and externalizing problems (as reported by both youth and their teachers). Qualitative analyses explored each family stressor more deeply to determine the nuances within participants' lived experiences.

Method

Sampling

The total sample comprised high school students ($N = 189$) enrolled in two international public high schools in a large northeastern city. Schools within the Internationals Network for Public Schools are public, noncharter high schools that are specifically designed to cater to 100% recently arrived immigrant students. International schools integrate English language learning into every class and aim to provide programs related to language-specific mental health services, health services, immigration legal support, and family integration services that support families making the transition to the United States. From the schools participating in the present study, students were from 64 countries of origin and were all recent immigrants to the United States, arriving within 3 years prior to enrolling in the 9th grade. Students at school 1 ($N = 460$) were 53.5% Latino, 26.5% Asian, 17.6% White, and 2.4% Black, with 71% of the students learning English, and 71% at a low enough socioeconomic level to qualify for free lunch benefits. Within 4 years after enrollment, 58% of the incoming class graduated. The student body at School 2 ($N = 350$), was 26.7% Latino, 42.4% Asian, 14.3% White, and 16.6% Black, with 86% of the students learning English and 87% receiving free

lunch benefits. Within 4 years, 65% of the incoming class graduated.

The study was presented to the two school principals, who invited all teachers and students in their classes to participate. At School 1, three teachers participated, and at School 2, six teachers participated. Researchers visited participating teachers' classrooms, presenting the study as a way to "learn more about how youth make cultural transitions," and participants would receive a \$5 gift card for completing the survey. Informational letters and parental consent forms (translated into primary languages spoken at home) were distributed and students were asked to return the signed consent form in order to participate in the study. School 1 had a 32% participation rate ($N = 58$), and School 2 had a 52% participation rate ($N = 131$). Following survey completion, all students were invited to participate in an in-person qualitative interview. A total of 66 (35%) from the total participant group agreed to be interviewed. Basic English proficiency was a requirement for participation, as all data were collected in English.

Participants

Table 1 presents demographic data of the total study sample. Among participating students ($N = 189$), average length of time in the United States was 3.5 years ($SD = 1.9$), and average age at immigration was 12.9 years old ($SD = 1.9$). Participants were from the following countries: Latin America (Bolivia, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Venezuela), the Caribbean (Haiti, the Bahamas), Europe (France, Georgia, Poland, Spain, Russia, Ukraine), Africa (Guinea, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone), East Asia (China, Korea), South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Thailand, Tibet), and the Middle Eastern or Arab/Muslim countries (Afghanistan, Morocco, United Arab Emirates, Yemen). Table 2 presents the demographic data of the 66 participants who agreed to be interviewed. Interview and noninterview participants did not differ significantly on any of the primary analysis variables, but interview participants were approximately 5 months younger than noninterview participants.

Table 1
Interview Participant Subsample Countries of Origin

Ethnic group	Countries	<i>n</i>	%
Latin American	Bolivia, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Peru,	24	36
Caribbean	Haiti	11	17
European	Poland	2	3
African	Guinea, Sierra Leone, Haiti	6	9
East Asian	China, Korea	11	17
South Asian	Bangladesh, Pakistan, Tibet	6	9
Middle Eastern	Afghanistan, Yemen, Morocco	6	9

Procedure

In keeping with the convergent parallel mixed-methods design, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected in the same school semester, were analyzed simultaneously, and results were merged after analyses were completed. Quantitative self-report data were collected via online questionnaires completed in each school's computer room. Achievement data were collected from official school records in the summer following survey administration. Qualitative data were collected through follow-up interviews with the subsample of participants ($N = 66$) who agreed to this additional level of participation. Interviews were conducted in English by either the first author or one of four trained research assistants. All interviews took place in private rooms on school grounds, were audio-recorded, and later transcribed verbatim. All procedures were approved by the institutional review board of the first

author's university at the time of data collection (i.e., University of California at Berkeley).

Measures

Demographics. Select demographic questions were drawn from the Immigrant Adolescent Questionnaire (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). Cultural orientation was measured using the two single items of the General Ethnicity Questionnaire—Ethnic (GEQ-E), which measures how immigrants experience and adhere to their culture of origin (Tsai, Ying, & Lee, 2000; Ying, Han, & Wong, 2008). The use of these two items, in lieu of the complete measure, has been shown previously to yield results reflective of the complete measure and is therefore advised when researchers are collecting data from community samples with whom efficiency is paramount. Although originally created for assessment of Asian populations, discussions with the measure's creator yielded

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Major Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Separation from parent	—								
2. Family life events	.22**	—							
3. Family conflict	.06	.10	—						
4. Grade point average	-.13	-.24**	.04	—					
5. Student externalizing	.03	.19*	.39**	-.18*	—				
6. Teacher externalizing	.08	.16*	.15 [†]	-.43**	.34**	—			
7. Age	.05	.04	.19*	-.08	.15*	.15 [†]	—		
8. Gender	.05	.15*	.04	.05	-.15*	.11	.07	—	
9. Time in the United States	-.13 [†]	.03	.08	.07	.07	.00	.29**	.05	—
<i>M</i>	.58	1.61	23.4	3.17	52.45	50.59	16.44	1.53	3.57
<i>SD</i>	.50	1.92	8.19	.64	10.71	7.58	1.31	.50	1.87

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

evidence of its validity with other populations (see Falcone, Espi, Ashai, Butler, & Franco, 2014).

Separation from parents. The first predictor variable was measured by asking participants to respond “yes” or “no” to the question, “Have you ever been (or are now) separated from your parents for a significant amount of time?”

Family life events. The second predictor variable was measured using the Multicultural Events Scale for Adolescents (MESA), a life-events checklist of chronic stressors faced by ethnically diverse adolescents living in low-income, urban environments (Gonzales et al., 1995; Gonzales, Tein, Sandler, & Friedman, 2001; Ramirez-García, Manongdo, & Ozechowski, 2014). Participants were asked to indicate “yes” or “no” for the presence of a given stressor item in the last 3 months. The MESA subscale included in this study was Family Trouble (14 items), for example, “A close family member was seriously ill or injured.”

Acculturative family conflict. The third predictor variable was measured using the Family Conflicts Scale (FCS), adapted from the Asian American FCS (Lee, Choe, Kim, & Ngo, 2000), on a 10-item Likert-type scale used to assess intergenerational conflict between immigrant parents and their children due to different rates of acculturation. Participants rated frequency on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*almost never*) to 5 (*almost always*). For this study, the original version (initially developed for use with Asian families but later used with other immigrant groups; see Piña-Watson, Castillo, Ojeda, & Rodriguez, 2013) was adapted with permission from Dr. Lee, the corresponding author. Sample items include, “Your parents/guardians want you to sacrifice personal interest for the sake of the family, but you feel this is unfair” and “Your parents/guardians tell you that a social life is not important at this age, but you think that it is.” Internal consistency in this sample was adequate ($\alpha = .83$).

Externalizing symptoms. The first outcome variable was measured using both the Youth Self-Report and the Teacher-Report Form from the Achenbach System of Empirically Based Assessment (ASEBA; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001). Adolescents and one of their teachers independently rated adolescents’ symptoms using a 3-point Likert scale ranging

from 1 (*not true*) to 3 (*very true or often true*). A sample item from the Youth Self-Report includes, “I have a hot temper.” A sample item from the Teacher-Report Form includes, “[The pupil is] disobedient in school.” This measure has been well validated across cultures (e.g., Katsiaficas, Suárez-Orozco, Sirin, & Gupta, 2013; Rousseau et al., 2009; Smokowski, Buchanan, & Bacallao, 2009). Internal consistency in this sample was adequate ($\alpha = .98$).

Academic achievement. The second outcome variable was measured using official school records of grade point averages (GPA), collected during the summer following survey and interview phases of data collection.

Experienced family stressors. Semi-structured, qualitative interviews explored participants’ in-depth experiences with family stressors. To determine the prevalence of family stressors among all possible stressors, interviewers first asked participants an open-ended question, “What in your life do you find challenging or stressful?” Possible follow-up questions included, “Can you tell me more about that? How did that make you feel? What did you do in response?” A second general question was asked to focus on the acculturation experience, “What did you find most stressful about moving to this country?” Similar follow-up prompts followed this second interview question.

Quantitative Analyses

A correlation matrix was computed for descriptive analysis and multiple regression was used to determine the unique contribution of each predictor variable. Achievement (GPA), student-reported externalizing symptoms, and teacher-reported externalizing symptoms were subjected to multiple regression analysis, with separation status, family stressors, and life events entered as predictors. The continuous predictor variables (i.e., family stressors, life events) were mean-centered, and all two- and three-way interaction terms were computed and entered as predictors in the initial model. Non-significant interaction terms were removed to improve the power and precision of the first-order coefficients. Finally, a variable was created to identify respondents who experienced separation from their families (separation status), such that participants reporting no separation were coded 0 and those experience one or

more periods of separation were coded +1. For the gender variable, males were coded 1, and females were coded 2.

Qualitative Data Analyses

The qualitative interview data was analyzed through directed content analysis, with the goal to “validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This structured process allowed for coding to begin immediately and later analyzed for subcategories. Therefore, coding began with the theory of certain domains of family stressors but extended beyond existing theory to probe in greater depth the nuances within each stressor domain. The data were analyzed in four stages and included analyst triangulation throughout the analysis process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, an original set of codes was developed on the basis of the interview questions and the survey measure, including a code for each of the three family stressors. Second, using nVivo software, all interview transcripts were read by two independent researchers to code all data related to family, specifically looking for data related to separation from parents and family, acculturative family conflict, and family life events. Third, once these three broad categories of data were determined, all data was reviewed a second time to determine emergent themes and to develop new subthemes, to deepen existing theory on family stressors. Fourth, once all data was coded into subthemes by each independent researcher, coding decisions were compared for interrater agreement. The team discussed all discrepancies, and final coding decisions were made which resulted in ultimately reaching 100% agreement. Totals within

each subtheme were tallied and illustrations provided to deepen the understanding of each stressor domain.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Means and correlations. Sample means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations are presented in Table 3. Of the total, 58% of participants reported separation, and 42% reported no separation history. The three predictor variables (separation status, family life events, family conflict) were weakly correlated with each other (all $r_s \leq 1.221$) and moderately correlated with the three outcome variables (GPA, student-reported externalizing symptoms, teacher-reported externalizing symptoms). Control variables (age, gender, time in the United States) were weakly correlated with both the predictor (all $r_s \leq 1.211$) and outcome variables (all $r_s \leq 1.291$). A wide range of participant ethnicity and country of origin were reported. The modal ethnic categories were comprised of individuals originating from Latin American ($n = 50$, 31%) and Caribbean ($n = 25$, 14%) countries, and a comprehensive list of participant ethnic categories are provided in Table 1.

Regression Analysis

Each of the three outcome variables was submitted to a separate regression analysis, and the results of the final models are presented in Table 4. For GPA, the three-way and two of the two-way interactions failed to reach significance, and were dropped from the

Table 3
Total Participant Sample Countries of Origin

Ethnic group	Countries	<i>n</i>	%
Latin American	Bolivia, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Venezuela	50	31
Caribbean	Haiti, The Bahamas	25	14
European	Georgia, France, Poland, Spain, Russia, Ukraine	13	7
African	Guinea, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone	7	4
East Asian	China, Korea	42	23
South Asian	Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Thailand, Tibet	23	12
Middle Eastern	Afghanistan, Morocco, U.A. Emirates, Yemen	12	6

Table 4
Results From Moderated Multiple Regression Analyses

Coefficient	GPA	Student Ext.	Teacher Ext.
Intercept	3.18**	52.75**	49.79**
Separation from parents	-.07 (-.06)	-.65 (-.03)	.93 (.06)
Family conflict	.01 (.09)	.49** (.37)	.23 [†] (.25)
Life events	-.18** (-.55)	.90* (.16)	1.40 [†] (.38)
Separation × Conflict	—	—	-.14 (-.23)
Separation × Events	.13* (.34)	—	-.95 (-.12)
Events × Conflict	—	—	.28* (.61)
Separation × Events × Conflict	—	—	-.24* (-.49)
R ²	.10	.17	.11

Note. Unstandardized coefficients in plain font, standardized beta weights in italics. GPA = grade point average.

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

analysis. Although the first-order effects of separation status and family conflict were not significant, the first-order effect for life events was significant, $b = -.18$, $t(158) = -3.15$, $p < .01$, $\beta = -.55$, along with the Separation × Life Events interaction, $b = .13$, $t(158) = 2.01$, $p < .05$, $\beta = .34$. The presence of a significant interaction suggests that the strength of the life events effect is different for respondents who experienced separation than from those who were not separated from their family. Because a dummy-coding scheme was used for the separation status predictor (i.e., 0 = *never separated*, 1 = *separated*), the coefficient for life events listed in Table 4 is specific to participants who never experienced separation (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). To obtain a coefficient for life

events that was specific to participants with a history of family separation, the coding of the separation predictor was reversed (i.e., 1 = *never separated*, 0 = *separated*), and the model was rerun. Follow-up analysis revealed a notably weaker relationship between life events and GPA among participants with a history of family separation, $b = -.05$, $t(158) = -1.82$, $p < .08$, $\beta = -.16$. Figure 1 provides a simple slope plot (Aiken & West, 1991) to better illustrate the form of the interaction. As expected, higher levels of life events was associated with lower GPA, but this effect was significantly weaker among participants reporting prior separation from family.

Turning to the student-report of externalizing symptoms, all three- and two-way interactions failed to reach significance, and were dropped from subsequent models. Follow-up analyses re-

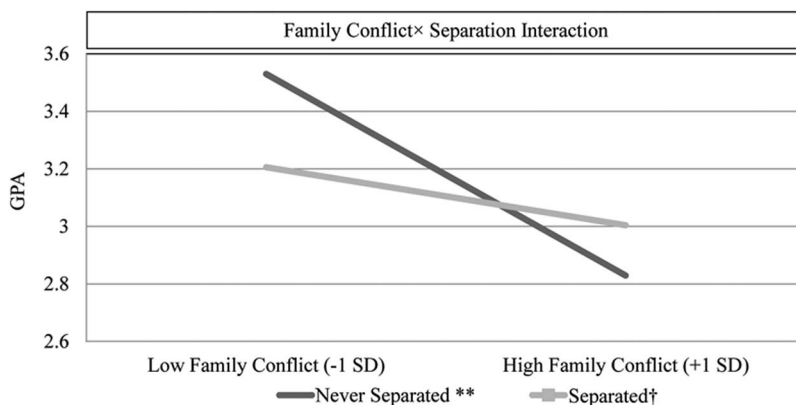


Figure 1. Simple slope plot for Family Conflict × Separation interaction. GPA = grade point average. [†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

vealed no effect for separation status, however, a significant first-order effect emerged for family conflict, $b = .49$, $t(165) = 5.18$, $p < .01$, $\beta = .37$, suggesting that higher levels of conflict were associated with more externalizing symptoms. Moreover, a significant first-order effect was observed for life events, $b = .90$, $t(165) = 2.22$, $p < .03$, $\beta = .16$, such that respondents reporting more life events also reported more externalizing symptoms.

The pattern of findings for teacher-reported externalizing symptoms were more complex. Specifically, a significant two-way Conflict \times Events, $b = .28$, $t(134) = 2.53$, $p < .02$, $\beta = .61$ and three-way Separation \times Conflict \times Events interactions, $b = -.24$, $t(134) = -2.03$, $p < .05$, $\beta = -.49$ emerged. Conceptually, the three-way interaction suggests that the underlying Conflict \times Events interaction is conditional on the participant's separation status. To better understand the implications of this complex interaction, simple slopes analysis (Aiken & West, 1991) was conducted by examining the form of Conflict \times Life events two-way interaction for each separation status. To understand each two-way interaction, the simple effect of family conflict was evaluated separately for participants reporting low (-1 SD) and high ($+1$ SD) levels of family life events. The simple slopes for participants with no separation history are provided in the left panel of Figure 2, and the analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between conflict and teacher-reported externalizing symptoms among participants reporting higher levels of life events, $b = .77$, $t(134) = 2.69$, $p < .01$, $\beta = .83$, but no relationship among participants experiencing lower levels of life events, $b = -.30$,

$t(134) = -1.39$, $p = .17$, $\beta = -.32$. In contrast, the Conflict \times Events interaction was nonsignificant for participants reporting a prior family separation, $b = .04$, $t(134) = 0.93$, $p = .35$, $\beta = .13$, as illustrated by the right panel of Figure 2. Analyses revealed a nonsignificant effect of conflict for participants reporting high, $b = .17$, $t(134) = 1.57$, $p = .12$, $\beta = .19$, and low, $b = .02$, $t(134) = 0.15$, $p = .88$, $\beta = .02$, levels of life events.

Qualitative Results

Among the 66 interview participants, 57.6% ($n = 38$) spoke about a stressful experience related to separation from family, 30.3% ($n = 20$) spoke about a stressful experience related to acculturative family conflict and 28.8% ($n = 19$) spoke of stressful experiences related to family life events. Several subthemes emerged within each of these broader family stressor domains (see Table 5).

Family separation. Participants described stressful experiences related to family separation more than either of the other two stressors. This finding was consistent with the available literature on immigrant family stressors. Six subthemes emerged: mother's role, extended family networks, community routines, complex migration patterns, returning home, and reunification. First, the primary significance of separation from one's mother emerged, with 5 (13.6%) participants reporting emotional responses to maternal separation including feelings of isolation and sadness. For example, a 16-year-old girl from Afghanistan stated,

the most challenging thing is that my mom is not here. That's the most important thing I think. She's not here and . . . I feel bad, I want her, because she is my

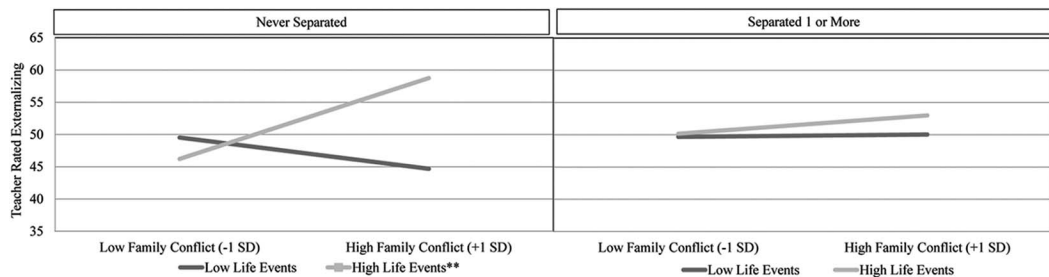


Figure 2. Simple slope plot for Family Life Events \times Separation interaction. $\dagger p < .10$.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 5
Qualitative Results

Variable	Subtheme	<i>n</i>	%
Separation from family		38	57.6
	Mother's role	5	13.6
	Extended family networks	11	28.9
	Community routines	3	7.9
	Complex migrations patterns	9	23.7
	Returning home	4	10.5
	Reunification	6	15.8
Acculturative family conflict		20	30.3
	Cultural openness	2	10
	Gender norms	2	10
	Academic expectations	4	20
	Educational aspirations	3	15
	Social life	9	45
Family life events		19	28.8
	Divorce	5	26.3
	New family system	2	10.5
	Legal troubles	3	15.8
	Substance abuse	2	10.5
	Parental conflict	2	10.5
	Death and illness	5	26.3

shoulders . . . like something that stood behind me always. . . . And I can't be without my shoulders.

Second, for 11 (28.9%) participants, immigration came with a major transition away from extended family structures toward living within a nuclear family structure. Separation from close adult relatives like grandparents, cousins, and aunts had strong emotional consequences, including crying and feelings of sadness. For example, an 18-year-old girl from Haiti stated,

I was letting go a part of me there because my family is there, my cousins and friends that I've known since I was little. I had to let go of all of that. That was really challenging for me . . . I wish I was still with them.

Third, the rupture of important family and community routines emerged, with 3 (7.9%) participants describing their attempts to compensate for this loss, as well as ways that new demands in terms of work and financial responsibilities changed family time together. For example, a 17-year-old girl from Haiti stated,

In Haiti we used to . . . have dinner together and sit and talk about our problems, but here . . . I barely see my parents sometimes. They have to go to work and come

back, sleep then go back to work. It's very different from Haiti.

Fourth, 9 (23.7%) participants discussed the complexity of migration patterns which emerged as a central aspect of separation. Participants described multiple returns to their countries, with parents and relatives coming in stages. A 16-year-old girl from Mexico stated,

It was hard cause my parents didn't have a lot of money to bring [us]. First they had to bring my sister and my mother's sister, and then my brother, and then the last ones to get here were me and my [other] sister.

Fifth, 4 (10.5%) participants described the experience of returning to one's home country as both a positive and negative. In some cases, returning alleviated stress. For others, the return posed real difficulty in reconnecting and understanding among their families. A 15-year-old boy from China stated,

I went back to China in 2005 [and] I found out they all changed. [Now] it's all about money. . . . They say "you went to the US; you have money, why don't you pay the bill . . . you have a good life in the US." But, they never know we are working hard and studying hard.

The sixth and final subtheme that emerged within the family separation domain related to challenges reuniting with parents, which was described by 6 (15.8%) participants. Although some participants expressed happiness with reunification, many expressed feelings of fear and anxiety. For example, a 16-year-old girl from the Dominican Republic stated, "I was in DR for 6 years and I didn't know my father. Then I came here . . . I had to live with them now. . . . I was like 'oh my god I have to live with these people.' I was kind of scared." All participants who described reunification challenges linked these experiences with various internalizing symptoms.

Acculturative Family Conflict

Acculturative family conflict was the second most common stressor described by interview participants. Five subthemes emerged: cultural openness, gender norms, academic expectations, educational aspirations, and social life. The first subtheme related to cultural openness was described by 2 (10%) of participants. Participants reported feeling more open to various norms and individuals, and viewed themselves as being less judgmental and more welcoming

of other cultures than their parents. A 15-year-old boy from Peru stated,

With my father, I sometimes argue about religion . . . he's a closed-minded person sometimes. He isn't open to other kinds of beliefs. Both of them are Catholic, and . . . I decided to be agnostic. We argue . . . I consider myself a more open person.

Second, 2 (10%) participants discussed gender roles as a central theme within immigrant family conflict. While gender normative behaviors are characteristic of traditional cultural norms, frustration with those responsibilities and a lack of understanding of the benefits of such responsibilities led to experiences of family conflict. This was often described as adolescents taking on more Americanized views of gender norms, for example girls reporting a desire to pursue academic and career goals over domestic work or family goals. An 18-year-old girl from China said, "If I do anything wrong, my mom might yell at me, because she tells me I need to take on more responsibilities because I am the sister, and I have to do more work."

Third, 4 (20%) participants described parental educational expectations and the pressure they felt from their parents to succeed academically, with academic success often closely tied to a family's reasons for immigrating. When describing parental academic expectations some participants described being in part motivated by a fear of shaming their family. A 15-year-old boy from China stated,

In my family, almost all of them go to college. My cousins they all go to college. If my sister didn't go to college it [brings] shame . . . so I try to keep myself saying, "have a good education and go to college." [I try to] make my parents proud.

A fourth, related subtheme involved 3 (15%) participants' own academic aspirations, and their desire to improve their current socioeconomic situation. These participants saw the immigration experience as expanding their opportunities for the future. A 16-year-old girl from Guinea said,

They want me to get married before I finish school. . . . In my country in Africa, all the parents don't go to school, they don't care about school . . . I just change[d] now because I'm here, I'm going to school, I hope to go college.

The fifth and final subtheme within acculturative family conflict illustrated the misalignment of social goals between parents and adolescents.

Misunderstandings with their parents regarding their desire for a social life was described by 9 (45%) of participants. Participants described their parents as not understanding their interest in romantic relationships, going out with friends, or their general desire for more autonomy. A 17-year-old girl from Haiti stated,

When you want to go out . . . sometimes [parents] don't want you to go out. They usually say that when you go out, you're not going to have any benefit. Why do you want to go out? Just stay in your house, do your work.

Family Life Events

Among family stressors described by participants, life events was the least common. Five subthemes emerged: divorce, new family system, legal trouble, substance abuse, parental conflict, death and illness. These subthemes were mostly reflective of those indicated on the quantitative measure the MESA (Gonzales et al., 1995), in addition to others that were immigrant-specific. One of the most common subthemes was divorce which 5 (26.3%) participants discussed, in which the already unstable newcomer immigrant family unit was further fractured. A 16-year-old girl from the Dominican Republic stated,

My father and mother are divorced. I have to go with my mother, then my father . . . I take 2 years with my father and 2 years with my mother now . . . I love my mom more than I love my father because my father is kind of scary.

The formation of a new family system, through acquiring stepfamilies, posed a challenge to 2 (10.5%) participants and emerged as another subtheme. Parental conflict was described as a stressful experience by 2 (10.5%) of participants. For example, a 16-year-old girl from Mexico discussed her role in mediating family conflict: "When my parents are fighting I'm the only one that gets my father to calm. . . . He does listen to me because I'm actually the only one that is in high school."

Many of the subthemes included common life events, unspecific to immigrant families, however it is possible that these experiences were exacerbated because of the participants being newcomer immigrants. Some examples of these include family members' substance abuse, illness and death, which forced several participants to take on a more mature role within the family. Familial substance abuse was described by 2 (10%) partici-

pants as a stressful experience. For example, a 16-year-old girl from Mexico discussed her need to be in close proximity to her father due to the fear that his drinking will bear negative outcomes:

if my father gets to be drunk I have to be there . . . sometimes I think that something is gonna happen to him so I, I have that need to stay with him the whole time until he I know he's gonna be ok.

The death and illness of family members emerged as stressful for 5 (26.3%) participants. An 18-year-old girl from China discussed the difficulty of navigating a new country without her father stating, "my father passed away. If my father was here it would make it easier . . . he could work and he could help us."

Finally, 3 (15.8%) participants identified legal troubles as a source of stress, such as problems resulting from illegal immigration, or an immigration process made more difficult by other areas of legal trouble. Taken together, qualitative results underscore the complexity of each family stressor, the emotional toll for newcomer youth, and the unique ways that newcomers are effected by nuanced and overlapping family stressors.

Discussion

In a diverse sample of newcomer immigrant adolescents, this mixed-methods study found an interactive relationship between three family-level stressors (family separation, acculturative family conflict and family life events), two school outcomes (academic achievement and externalizing behaviors), and uncovered the complexity and deep emotional consequences of each stressor. Quantitative results show that more family life events were associated with lower GPA, but this association was weaker for participants who had been separated from their parents. In addition, more family conflict was associated with more externalizing symptoms (both youth- and teacher-reported). However, the association between family conflict and teacher-reported externalizing symptoms only was found for participants with high life events. Qualitative results explored the complexities of each family stressor domain to reveal family separation as the most prevalent and nuanced. Taken together, these results suggest that family stressors are highly complex, and pose a risk to school outcomes for newcomer adolescents, but

that the nature of the risk varies depending on the combination of stressors.

Relationship Between Immigrant Family Stressors

For youth who were never separated from their parents, the interaction of life events and family conflict contributed to teacher-reported externalizing symptoms, such that high life events and family conflict was associated with more externalizing symptoms. For those who had been separated from their parents, experiencing life events and family conflict seemed to have little impact on externalizing symptoms. Parental separation plays a stressful role in the life of immigrant adolescents. However, newcomer immigrant adolescents who were never separated from their parents were more likely to be negatively influenced by life events than those who had experienced separation. More family life events predicted lower GPA, and this relationship was stronger for those who had never been separated from their parents. It may be that newcomers who must rise to the challenge of managing their daily responsibilities without a parent may build resources that help them in school. Or it may be that the family sacrifices made through separation act as motivators of high achievement. Family conflict and life events each independently predicted youth-reported externalizing symptoms.

Resiliency in immigrant youth has been identified as a possible explanation for positive outcomes in light of challenging life experiences (Castro-Olivo, 2014). Consistent with previous research, family separation can be viewed as a protective factor that may promote resilience among immigrant adolescents (Suárez-Orozco, Bang, & Kim, 2011). It appears that, in the face of other risk factors, separation may foster strong coping strategies. Research suggests immigrant youth who experienced family separation demonstrate adaptability and resilience (Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener, 2003). Although resilience was not a predicted outcome of the present study, this theme emerged as a possible explanation for the decreased role of family life events among newcomer immigrant adolescents who had experienced parental separation. Resiliency can be described as "a dynamic process in which psychological, social, environmental and biological factors interact to

make an individual, at any stage of life, develop, maintain or regain their mental health despite exposure to adversity” (PreVAiL, 2011). It may be that the experience of family separation facilitates greater psychological resilience and coping strategies, or that those who experienced family separation appraise family life events as less stressful.

Complexity of Immigrant Family Stressors

Qualitative results added to quantitative findings by illustrating unique experiences through participants’ own voices. Through qualitative analysis, subthemes emerged, which highlighted the particular nuances within each family stressor. Many of the subthemes identified stressors specific to immigrant populations, particularly those within the domains of family separation and acculturative family conflict (e.g., family reunification, cultural openness). However, others were not particularly unique to this population but may be exacerbated by their immigration experiences, for instance those in the life events domain (e.g., illness and death). Qualitative analysis also deepened our understanding of immigration stressors, by elaborating on those initially identified. For example, although initial investigation measured separation from parents, qualitative results underscored the significance of separation from extended family members, friends, and communities. Given the cultural intricacies of a broader social network, it may be that separation from other familial and community connections impact academic, emotional, and psychological well-being of newcomers more, or in different ways, than does separation from parents. Qualitative results generate important information for future theoretical development and empirical study. For example, future studies may examine the impact of different types of family separation on school outcomes or compare the role of life events among youth in the context of immigration and acculturation with nonimmigrant youth. Future research informed by deep qualitative inquiry promises to further the ecological validity of research with newcomer immigrants.

Limitations and Future Directions

Mixed-methods community-based research is particularly complex, and several limitations are

important to consider. First, the international public high schools are designed for newcomer adolescents and so provide a different acculturative context than mainstream schools. It is therefore important to note that participants are schooled in a context that is quite unique and so findings may not be comparable to immigrant students attending general public high schools in the United States. Future research comparing samples across school settings would be able to clarify any contextual influences on study findings. Second, the variable of family separation was coded as a dichotomous variable and so does not capture nuances of family separation including length, current status, and from whom separation occurred. Given qualitative results suggesting the complexity of family separation, future research that quantitatively measures and analyzes these dimensions would help identify which aspects of the separation experience play a greater role in the lives of newcomer youth. Third, some of the measures used, though created for immigrant populations, have not yet been fully validated with heterogeneous immigrant groups. Future research should include developing ecologically valid and psychometrically tested measures for newcomer immigrant populations. Fourth, sample size limitations restrict interpretation of results. Future research with larger sample sizes would allow for cross-cultural comparisons and greater generalizability. Finally, the nature of correlational data does not allow us to infer directionality, whereas a longitudinal design would allow causal interpretation.

Implications for School Psychologists and School Leadership Teams

This mixed-methods study deepens our understanding of the relationship among, and complexity of, family stressors in the lives of newcomer immigrant youth. This study extends our empirical knowledge of interactive risk factors by evaluating the association between family-level stressors and school outcomes among a unique sample of recent, newcomer immigrant adolescents. In an effort to be most efficient and effective in prevention efforts, school psychologists and leaders can target youth with the combinations of risk factors most predictive of harm. Focusing on the period of time soon after immigration is critical in identifying potential

risk factors that lead to the immigration paradox, in which psychosocial outcomes can worsen with time (García Coll & Marks, 2012). The present study strengthens the school psychology literature on immigrant youth by using multiple sources of triangulated data, including measures of self- and teacher-reported externalizing symptoms and official school records of achievement. Through integrating these data points, we have a better sense of where to target possible interventions within school-based programs for behavioral and academic problems with immigrant youth.

This study uses a mixed-methods approach to explore the many complexities within family-level stressors. Quantitative results suggest that those who have experienced family separation may be better equipped to face daily stressors. However, qualitative results identify family separation as particularly stressful for this newcomer immigrant adolescent sample. Future research exploring the risk and protective qualities of various family-level stressors can lead to a better understanding of how, for whom, and why certain immigrant youth develop problems in school while others thrive. Underscoring Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems approach, this study demonstrates that issues within one system (family life) can impact others (school). As noted by Gindling and Poggio (2012), youth who are separated from parents during immigration often perform worse academically after reunification. Whereas school psychologists reported that the separation and reunification interfered with the academic performance of these youth, this was not evident to parents. School psychologists and service providers should investigate the family-level stressors and separation experiences of newcomer immigrant youth so that they may connect them to the appropriate resources. We need even more research that looks at both the interaction of multiple stressors and their impact across systems and domains of life. At a time when immigration is rapidly changing the nature of our school system (Carlson, Paavola, & Talley, 1995), a better understanding of early risk factors for new immigrants can help teachers, administrators, and mental health practitioners to identify students with greatest need in order to foster newcomer immigrant adolescents' behavioral, academic and emotional well-being.

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