

# Do immigrant enclaves protect against harmful health behaviors?

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## Abstract

The growing size and changing composition of the foreign born population highlights the importance of examining the health consequences of living in immigrant enclaves. Using data from the Multiethnic Study of Atherosclerosis in four cities, we examined whether Hispanic and Chinese Americans (n=1922) living in immigrant enclaves exhibited better or worse health behaviors (smoking, diet, physical activity) than those in neighborhoods with fewer immigrants. Neighborhood enclaves (census tracts) were defined based on the percent of foreign-born from Latin-America, and separately, from China. After adjustment for age, gender, income, education, nativity, and neighborhood poverty, living in a tract with a higher proportion foreign-born residents was associated with lower consumption of high-fat foods in Hispanics and Chinese (P trend in mean dietary score across quartiles of tract foreign-born <0.001 in Hispanics and 0.01 in Chinese), but with being less physically active among Hispanics (P trend 0.03). No consistent associations were observed for smoking in either group. Compared to residents in neighborhoods with lower proportions of immigrants, residents in immigrant enclaves reported better healthy food availability, but also worse safety, lower social cohesion, and lower probability of joining organizations with neighbors, including ethnic or nationality organizations. We found that although the food environment in immigrant enclaves might be better for supporting healthy diet compared to neighborhoods with fewer immigrants, the social and physical environment appears to be worse quality. Unlike prior literature, we found that living in an immigrant-enclave is not monolithically beneficial and may have different effects on different health behaviors.

249 words