



Research Summary: Evidence for the Healthy Immigrant Effect in Older Chinese Immigrants

By Brianna Dayer and Katherine Thayer

Background

The healthy immigrant effect refers to the health status of immigrant groups as they come to the U.S and how it changes over time. When immigrants first move the U.S their income is usually lower than that of U.S born whites, but their health is often better. With time, however, the immigrants' health may worsen and eventually be the same as that of native-born residents. Researchers of the Community Assessment of Freeway Exposure and Health (CAFEH) study wanted to find out how the health status of Chinese immigrants compared to that of U.S born whites.

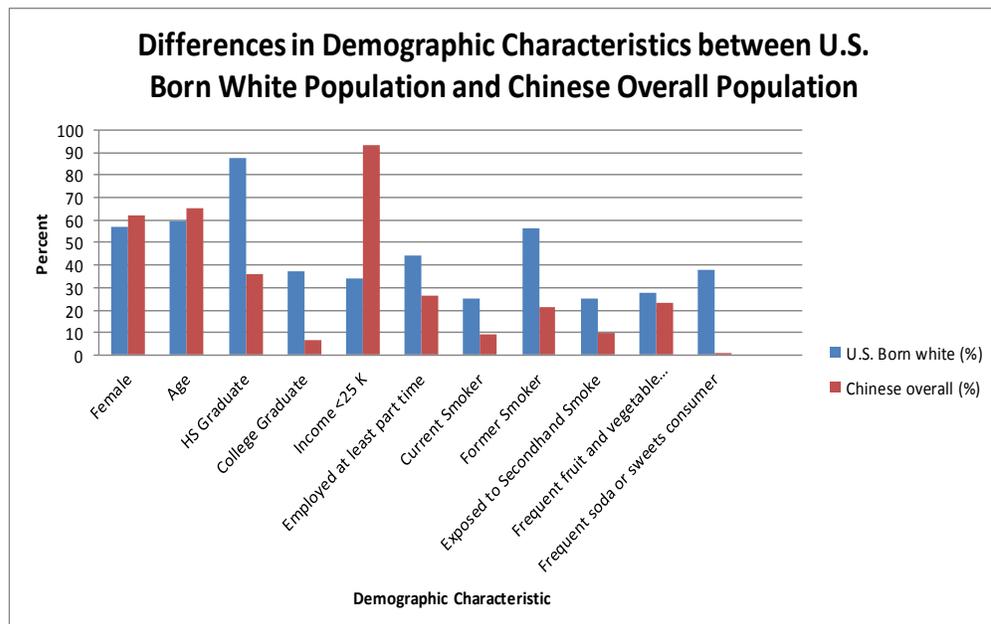


Figure 1: Differences between demographic characteristics in the U.S born white population and the Chinese overall population. The Chinese participants were more likely have lower income but overall had better diet and exercise habits.

How was it done?

Between 2009 and 2012, the research team collected questionnaires, blood samples and information on certain diseases from 167 U.S born white participants and 147 Chinese participants born in China. Participants were questioned about age, gender, ethnicity, health status, physical activity diet and stress levels.

What did they find?

The researchers found that first generation Chinese immigrants had fewer cases of asthma and heart and blood disease than U.S born whites even though the Chinese

immigrants were older on average and had lower income. The immigrants also had lower levels of obesity and better cholesterol levels. A possible reason for these differences is that the Chinese immigrants reported better diets and more physical activity. The study did not find that the health status of Chinese immigrants changed to match the health status of U.S. born whites after living in the U.S. Asthma was most associated with education level, blood pressure, and stress. Heart and blood disease were most associated with age and diabetes. Researchers kept in mind that some factors such as age or weight affect Asians and whites differently. For instance, Asians are considered overweight at lower weights than whites.

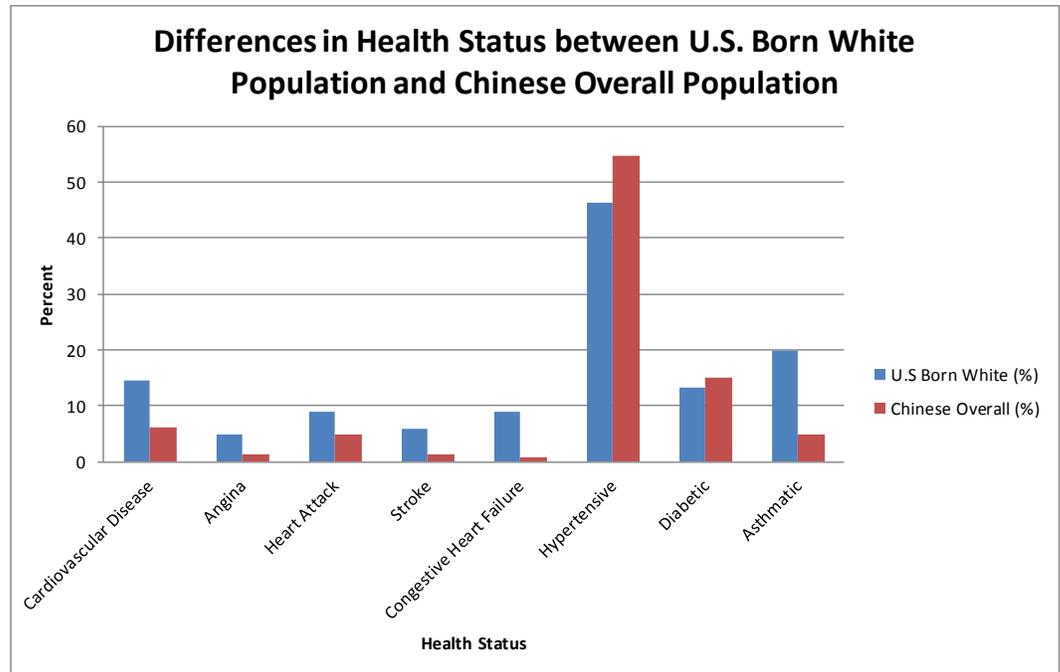


Figure 2: Differences in health status between the U.S born white population and the overall Chinese population. Notice that U.S born whites are more likely to have heart and lung problems.

Asthma was most associated with education level, blood pressure, and stress. Heart and blood disease were most associated with age and diabetes. Researchers kept in mind that some factors such as age or weight affect Asians and whites differently. For instance, Asians are considered overweight at lower weights than whites.

Why is it important?

These findings are important to immigrant health research in general because they agree with the healthy immigrant effect. These findings are also valuable to the CAFEH study in particular because they create a need to focus more on differences in health based on race in our air pollution analyses.

For More Information, Contact:

Laura Corlin
 Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering
 Tufts University School of Engineering
 lauracorlin18@gmail.com

This study was funded by:

- National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences
- Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service
- Tufts Community Research Center

To learn more about this research, please refer to the following source:

Corlin et al.: Evidence for the healthy immigrant effect in older Chinese immigrants: a cross-sectional study. BMC Public Health 2014 14:603. <http://www.biomedcentral.com/content/pdf/1471-2458-14-603.pdf>