

**Family Cohesion and Ethnic Communities:
Chinese, Italian and Mexican Households, 1990 and 2000**

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Extended Abstract

A rich body of social science literature has developed over the last several decades seeking to address the complexities of ethnic differences in family patterns. Much of the research has focused on black-white differences, although a substantial set of findings show the continuing distinctive family patterns of Asian and Hispanic Americans. The structural basis of ethnicity reveals the importance of community in reinforcing these distinctive patterns. Ethnic group members exposed to strong assimilatory environments such as greater exposure to white American cultural patterns, higher educational achievements and greater use of English, would also be expected to manifest changes in living arrangements. As structural integration among ethnic groups occurs, there may be fewer cultural supports for retaining family distinctiveness. On the other hand, the establishment of large areas of ethnic residential concentration may lead to integration into the ethnic community and reinforcement of family attachments.

Immigrant families from many backgrounds, Asian, European and Latin American, have often been described as encouraging intergenerational households and maintaining family-oriented co-residences. Some studies show that selected family differences among Hispanics remained distinctive but only among those who retained ethnic community connections through language and/or residence. Outside of areas of high ethnic density however, fewer family differences between Hispanics and other white ethnic populations emerged. The same patterns seemed to characterize Chinese ethnics in the United States, with the native born of Chinese ancestry retaining less distinctive family patterns than earlier foreign born generations. The attainment of higher levels of education and living in areas of lower Chinese ethnic residential

density tended to minimize the distinctive family cohesion of Chinese Americans. Some Euro-American families have also been viewed as family-oriented but this appears to have changed over subsequent generations.

This paper revisits these themes with new and systematic evidence from the 1990 and 2000 U.S. censuses. Using data from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, we focus on patterns of “extended” family residences across ethnic groups often characterized by cohesive family attachments. Specifically, we include three groups in the analysis, Chinese, Mexicans and Italians, and not the broad ethnic categories of Hispanic, Asian-American, or Euro-American. Within each ethnic group, we examine the living arrangements of two subgroups, unmarried individuals over 25 years old and married couples. For the unmarried group, we investigate the residential choices made among those who have the option of “extending” households—younger persons who remain in their parental home after age 25 and older persons who live with relatives, including children 25 years of age and over. For married couples, we assess to what degree they live in “extended” households.

We also incorporate some of the factors that have been identified as determining household structure (e.g. age, education, and income) but we add two critical components: First, we explore the effects of the ethnic composition of the metropolitan area, asking whether the concentration of the respective ethnic community affects the probability of “extended” family residence among the Chinese, Mexicans and Italians. Second, we examine how patterns of living arrangements for the two subgroups, married and unmarried, have changed between 1990 and 2000 for each of the ethnic groups.

The concentration of ethnic communities in metropolitan areas in the U.S. has continued to form through migration networks and economic opportunities. Ethnic communities provide a

range of educational, economic and social supports to young and older persons, married and unmarried. Family cohesion within ethnic communities not only reflects the cultural features of these communities but reinforces ethnic continuities. We hypothesize that larger ethnic communities are more likely than smaller communities to reinforce family attachments manifested as “extended” living arrangements. Moreover, through linking these community-level factors with individual characteristics, we can assess whether those with higher educational levels who live in ethnically dense metropolitan areas have different patterns of family extension than those with lower educational levels in these same areas. And, in turn, we can examine, whether living in ethnically dense areas reinforces family extension, net of educational levels.

A dichotomous family type, alone versus “extended”, constitutes our dependent variable. The first outcome has been defined as living alone (unmarried) or living on their own (married), either with or without children under 25 years old, and the second refers to those with any relative in the household, including children over 25 years of age. These patterns of family extension are examined for three ethnic groups defined by race and ancestry – Chinese, Mexican and Italian.

Our major focus is on community residential density as measured by the ethnic proportion of the national ethnic group population within the metropolitan area using U.S. census data. Essentially, this taps into the size of the ethnic community as larger numbers of ethnic members within an area is reflected in a higher ethnic residential concentration. In the analysis, we estimate the relative odds of living in “extended” households separately for Italians, Chinese and Mexicans with a focus on the impact of the ethnic residential density of metropolitan areas.

Preliminary bivariate results from 1990 suggest:

1. Unmarried individuals over 25 years old were more likely to live in “extended” households as opposed to being on their own when they resided in areas of higher ethnic concentration. While all three ethnic groups followed this trend, Chinese and Mexicans individuals were more likely than Italians to exhibit this pattern.
2. Chinese and Mexican couples were more likely to live in “extended” households than to live on their own when they were in areas of higher ethnic concentration. There appeared to be no significant effect of ethnic concentration on the living arrangements of Italian couples.
3. Among unmarried adults in all three ethnic groups, those over 50 years old were more likely to live with others. This patterns reverses for the younger generation and they were found to be more likely to live on their own.
4. The effect of education was negatively associated with household extension for all three ethnic groups and for both unmarried individuals and married couples. Hence, attaining higher levels of education is associated with lower levels of family residential cohesion.
5. Overall, Chinese and Mexicans were found to be in “extended” living arrangements more often than Italians but for all three groups consistently, being on their own was the most popular choice, especially for couples.

It remains to be seen whether the effect of ethnic concentration continues to be strong when other covariates are controlled and whether this effect characterizes these ethnic communities in 2000. Further analysis using the 2000 IPUMS and multivariate logistic regression will provide some evidence for the study of ethnic communities and their significance for the ethnic family.