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Income Differences of Mexicans Residing in the U.S.*

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Income Differences of Mexicans* Residing in the U.S.

ABSTRACT

This study examines whether Mexicans who reside in the U.S. earn a higher income if they reside in a large population size area, such as an urban city. I propose that Mexicans will earn a higher income if they reside in a large population size area. I analyze data collected from the 2018 General Social Survey (GSS). Of the 5,200 participants sampled, I created a subset of respondents who ethnically identified as Mexican, which narrows the sample to 163 cases. The results reject my hypothesis that population size area influences income. The findings reveal that education and sex have more of an impact on income than population size area. Education is the most significant predictor of income. This result is consistent with research as education is a predictor of higher income (Farmer and Moon 2009).

*For this paper, I use Mexicans to refer to all participants regardless of generation (e.g., Mexican-Americans) or documentation status (Mexican-immigrants).

Income of Mexicans Based on Population Size

Mexicans are the largest group of immigrants residing in the U.S. and makeup nearly twenty-five percent of the immigrant population. They live in a wide range of places from small sparsely population size areas to the largest most densely populated central cities in the country. Like most immigrants, Mexicans move according to any open opportunity for improvement of lifestyle not only for themselves but also for their future family. For this reason, it is essential to know whether Mexicans earn a higher income if they reside in a large population size area, such as an urban city?

Ranging from large populated central cities to small rural towns, Mexican immigrants reside in several residential areas across the U.S. where they settle in and form families. In some areas such as New York City, there is increasing support for an improvement of overall quality of life which includes more funding into public sectors such as schools.

This study has the potential to reveal different patterns of residence and how they reflect assimilation within the contemporary U.S. This research has the potential to tell us if population size area impacts income, not just for Mexicans, but for other immigrants as well.

Based on the theory of classic assimilation, immigrant groups follow a "straight line" toward social acceptance in their destination. Straight-line assimilation theory is an intergenerational process whereby native-born generations acculturate and achieve a higher status than the previous generation (Gans 1992). Accordingly, over time values and norms such as language and religion will reflect the dominant group. This theory explains that immigrant groups such as Mexicans can settle in a single location and assimilate with the host group. Children of immigrants will later leave their community in search of another community with

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higher income. Conducting this research will allow us to see income patterns as evidence of assimilation among Mexican immigrants. Assimilation applies to immigrant groups moving into a new location in search of opportunities for upward mobility. Seeing high rates of income in urban cities where there is a large population size area can lead to the following statement: higher population size area leads to higher income. I hypothesize the bigger the population size area Mexicans reside in, the higher their income will be.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Classic Assimilation Theory

Assimilation is the process of an immigrant group integrating into the host society. In order for assimilation to happen in the U.S., the immigrant group must accept cultural and social values that are present in the host society. In that way, the immigrant group can gain social mobility through education and income (Alba and Nee 1997; South, Crowder and Chavez 2005). Classic assimilation describes the adaptation of European immigrants in the U.S. during the 19th and 20th centuries. In classic assimilation theory, immigrant groups follow a direct path to their social destination. Once the immigrant group settles in their new destination, the native-born generation acculturates further. Their status elevates in comparison to the previous generation (Gans 1992). Classic assimilation is also known as straight-line assimilation.

Segmented Assimilation Theory

During the 1960s, new waves of immigrants came to the U.S. One of the largest contemporary groups are Mexicans. They tend to live in predominately Mexican ethnic communities when they first arrive and overwhelmingly select friends who are also Latinx immigrants (Portes and Zhou 1993). For the most part, Mexican immigrants tend to retain their

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cultural values. This pattern does not fit the classical theory of assimilation where the immigrant group must let go of their old values in order to gain social status within the new group (Nichols 2012; Tran and Valdez 2017). The sociologists Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou (1993) redesigned a new theory of assimilation that best describes assimilation patterns among Mexican immigrants today. This theory also referred to as segmented assimilation, suggests that immigrant groups will assimilate in the context of their co-ethnic groups and communities (Nichols 2012; Portes and Zhou 1993; Tran and Valdez 2017; Valdez 2006). New immigrants often move to central cities, and they usually live in single ethnic communities in the years after they arrive (Alba and Nee 1997; Farmer and Moon 2009; Gans 1992). A limitation of segmented assimilation theory is that not all immigrants will gain the same level of social acceptance over time. Nonetheless, it fits the Mexican case better than classical assimilation theory.

Assimilating in the U.S. can lead to a smooth acceptance or a traumatic confrontation (Zhou 1997). This idea confirms the view of being white as the model American. Second generation Mexicans tend to hold on to their parent's language and cultural values, which can put them at risk for downward assimilation (Nichols 2012; Portes and Zhou 1993; Valdez 2006). Downward assimilation occurs when there is a lack of community and or parental support. Thus, the youth encounter racial discrimination, unfair labor/housing markets, and a weak educational system which prevents social mobility. On the contrary, several children of Mexican immigrants learn English and adopt American values faster than their parents. The adoption of American values hinders the process of acculturation in the U.S. It makes Mexicans more vulnerable to prejudice from non-Hispanic blacks and whites which leads to downward assimilation (Tran and Valdez 2017).

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Societal barriers such as racial discrimination impacts educational and employment paths for Mexicans. According to segmented assimilation, holding on to cultural values and residing in an ethnic community can help Mexicans adjust to their environment. If the ethnic community has strong values with a common language, the residents will invest and give back into the community which creates a healthy family support system that helps withstand the hostility and prejudice Mexicans often encounter as racial and ethnic minorities (Nichols 2012). Leading to the creation of protective co-ethnic communities, these communities range in population size areas.

To date, research notes that Mexicans tend to follow either a path of upward mobility or downward mobility (Park, Myers and Jiménez 2014; Roberto 2011; South et al. 2005). This theory recognizes that immigrants are integrating into different segments ranging from affluent middle-class suburbs to impoverished inner-city ghettos, as well as living in a small rural ethnic community (Portes and Zhou 1993). Currently Mexicans are migrating to larger population size areas compared to previous years where their main destination in the U.S. was in small rural farms (Durand, Massey and Zenteno 2001; Jargowsky 2009; Portes and Zhou 1993).

Socio-Economic Assimilation Theory

Another revised version of assimilation theory is socio-economic theory. Often confused with social mobility, socio-economic assimilation states that immigrant groups will experience upward mobility through the attainment of average or above-average socio-economic standing. I indicate socio-economic standing by high levels of education, occupation, income, and wealth (Alba and Nee 1997; South et al. 2005). While previous models of assimilation include language as an indicator of assimilating, socio-economic assimilation does not. Since this study focuses on

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income outcomes of Mexicans, socio-economic assimilation theory best describes patterns of income and education among Mexicans living in the U.S.

In this study, I will use the following theories of assimilation to analyze whether Mexicans earn a higher income if they live in a co-ethnic community. Therefore, I hypothesize that Mexicans who reside in larger population size area will earn a higher income.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Assimilation and Place of Residence

The U.S. is the most desired destination for Mexicans because it is geographically close to Mexico. Also, it has a lot of job opportunities, better employment, and an overall improved quality of life (Farmer and Moon 2009; Rendall and Parker 2014; Sánchez 2018). For the most part, Mexicans who immigrate to the U.S. are from low-income backgrounds. Given this disadvantage, Mexicans tend to settle in high-poverty neighborhoods, in the proportion of their income, where they have access to low-cost housing called *barrios* (Brown 2007; Jargowsky 2009; Portes and Zhou 1993). These segregated barrios are disproportionately African American and Latinx¹, which tend to delay and or modify assimilation patterns (Brown 2007; Portes and Zhou 1993).

Within the Mexican community, there is a presence of intergroup boundaries that sharpens the experience and expectations of ethnic authenticity providing Mexican ethnic enclave to have parallel institutions, vernacular information networks and familiar cultural practices (Jargowsky 2009; Jiménez 2008). Although the presence of a large Mexican population in the ethnic enclave increases the shared experiences such as cultural values, Mexicans

¹ I use the term Latinx to be inclusive of gender identity

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experience social problems such as crime, gangs, drug and alcohol abuse, dilapidated housing and failing schools that plague high-poverty areas. (Jargowsky 2009).

Today, Mexicans live anywhere between rural, small cities and towns and are residing in destinations outside of traditional immigrant gateways (Jargowsky 2009; Rendell and Parker 2014). Overall analyses show that many immigrant groups move from higher- to lower-poverty neighborhoods over time (Jargowsky 2009; Park et al. 2017).

Education

Roughly sixty percent of today's Mexican immigrants have less than a high school diploma, are less fluent in English and have less work experience than previous generations of Mexican immigrants (Farmer and Moon 2009; Nichols 2012). Since Mexicans lack human capital, such as English fluency and work experience, this impacts their socio-economic standing as well as opportunities in the labor market (Farmer and Moon 2009; Nichols 2012). Education attainment is necessary for the improvement of family household income (Farmer and Moon 2009).

There is a rise of second-generation Latinx students, particularly those of Mexican ethnicity, who are attending college at higher rates than before (Nichols 2012). Mexicans who reach high levels of education serve as role models and mentors for the younger generation to obtain the same if not higher educational track (Nichols 2012). Despite the rise of education, there is a considerable percentage of Mexicans who do not complete a college-level degree. Low levels of education hinder their social mobility putting Mexicans at risk of downward mobility (Crosnoe and Gonzalez 2005; Tran and Valdez 2017). Mexicans who are first-generation students find it challenging to navigate college, as it is confusing and intimidating. Mexicans can

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quickly become discouraged as they face seemingly insurmountable odds (Crosnoe and Gonzalez 2005; Nichols 2012).

Income (Socio-Economic-Status)

Population predictions show that the Mexican population in the U.S. will continue to rise. Although Mexicans are arriving to the U.S. in large numbers, the majority of Mexicans who migrate to the U.S. consist of a working-class population and are agricultural, unskilled, and skilled manual laborers (Durand et al. 2001). Given the lack of education and human capital (work experience), this influx of Mexican immigrants come from small towns and rural areas of Mexico, where they experience disadvantages such as poor education and low income (Farmer and Moon 2009).

In the early 20th century, European immigrants worked jobs with adverse conditions and unregulated. Because of these experiences, the U.S. passed several laws that regulated and improved working conditions and wages for immigrants. Today, Mexicans have access to better jobs compared to the jobs worked by earlier European immigrants in the 20th century (Alba and Barbarosa 2016). Despite the improvement of immigrant work experiences in the U.S., recent changes in immigration policy and economic restructuring affect the socio-economic standing of Mexicans which raises the question, are Mexican men and women paid similarly? (Alba and Barbarosa 2016; Valdez 2016).

The children of Mexican immigrants are denied daily participation in most institutions of mainstream life due to their parents' lack of ability to speak English as well as low-paying jobs that lack pensions or Social Security (Brown 2007; Roberto 2011).

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Measures of assimilation include language acquisition, marital status, educational, and residential patterns (Sánchez 2018). Homeownership is one significant indicator of assimilation. When an immigrant family owns a house, this shows that their income is significant enough to afford the house as well as remaining with their family in the U.S. (Ellis, Wright and Parks 2006; Sánchez 2018). Mexican immigrants have higher rates of homeownership than U.S. born Mexicans (Sánchez 2018).

METHODS

Data from this article has been generated by the General Social Survey (GSS). This data was collected from surveys and interviews. Respondents were selected through a probability design that selected individuals across the U.S at random. Individuals that were sampled are 18 years or older who speak English or Spanish and are non-institutionalized. I will only focus on data collected in 2018. The response rate for data collected in 2018 was about 60 percent out of a total of 5200 people sampled (Smith, Davern, Freese and Morgan 2018). For further information on how the data were collected, visit the General Social Survey, data explorer (2018) website, available online at <http://gss.norc.org/>.

For this data set, the unit of analysis is individual people. I used the ethnicity variable to create a subset of Mexican ethnicity, which gave me a sample size of 163 cases. There were a few missing cases, where I choose to exclude these missing cases since it would have not significantly impacted my data.

My dependent variable, size, was coded in the thousands. This variable was collected by interviewers giving an exact number of residents which provides the actual size of the place of the interview. My independent variable, income, was measured by adding the total income of the

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respondent's family. It was recorded in intervals of thousands which made me recode the values into midpoint values. Values such as "\$1,000 to \$2,999" were recoded into "\$1,500."

The variables I decided to control for are ethnicity, age, sex, and the highest year of school completed. I used ethnicity which asks, "From what countries or part of the world did your ancestors come?" Since this article focuses on only Mexicans, I created a subset which excluded all values for the ethnicity variable except for Mexican. The second variable I controlled for is age. This variable was collected by the interviewer asking the date of birth rather than the age of the respondent. There were a few missing cases where I choose to delete the few missing cases. The third control variable is sex. Since sex is a dichotomous variable, I had to dummy sex into the following: 0-Men, 1-Women. This variable has no missing cases.

My last control variable is education, which was collected by asking the following questions, "What is the highest grade in elementary school or high school that the respondent finished and got credit for?" The values for education were in numerical value such as 1, 2, 3...etc. into a continuous variable that contains up to 20 different values. These values represent the number of educational years the respondent completed. There were a few missing cases and I choose to remove the missing cases since it was not a significant number.

FINDINGS

Univariate Results

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the independent variable, the respondent's total family income. It shows at least 14 percent of respondents earn about \$67,500. Another 11 percent earn \$45,000 or \$82,500. According to Table 1, the median for the family income of the respondent is \$45,000. The mean for family income is \$54,642.64. Furthermore, the standard deviation for

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family income is \$38,803.97. These numbers mean that approximately two-thirds of the sample earn an income between \$15,838.67 and \$93,446.61. Although Table 1 demonstrates a range of income between \$15,838.67 and \$93,446.61, Figure 1 shows that income is more widespread among Mexicans.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Insert Table 1 about here

Figure 2 shows the distribution of respondents' age. Age is a control variable. It demonstrates that no age group in the sample passes five percent. According to Table 1, the average age of respondents is about 41 years. The median age in this sample is 39 years. The standard deviation is about 14 years of age. The deviation means that approximately two-thirds of the sample age group falls between 27 and 55 years of age. Despite the range for age, Figure 2 also shows a significant percentage of respondents who are above 55 years of age.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Figure 3 shows the distribution of the second control variable, the respondent's highest year of school completed. It shows that nearly 30 percent of respondents completed grade 12, which describes the median. The mean for this sample is also nearly 12 with a deviation of four. The mean shows that in this sample, approximately two-thirds of respondents have completed anywhere between 8 to 16 years of education. Figure 3 does reflect the findings given in Table 1 that there is a concentrated number of respondents who have completed an education level of a high school graduate or higher. Despite this, Figure 3 does show that there is a percentage of Mexicans who are high school dropouts.

Insert Figure 3 about here

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Figure 4 shows the distribution of the third control variable, the respondent's sex. It suggests that 57 percent of respondents are women and 43 percent are Men.

Insert Figure 4 about here

Figure 5 shows the distribution of the dependent variable, size in thousands. It shows there is no population size above five percent. The average size is 551,000. The median for size is 83,000. Furthermore, the median is significantly smaller than the mean which suggests the distribution of size is skewed to the left. The standard deviation is 964,000. The deviation suggests that respondents live in a population size area approximately between zero and 1,515,000. Based on the graph, there is more of a disparity among population size area. There is no categorical value that displays a population size area higher than five percent.

Insert Figure 5 about here

Bivariate Results

Table 2 shows a correlation table between Family Income and all variables. None of the variables show signs of multicollinear results. Four variables demonstrate a statistically significant relationship at the $p < .05$ level. Family income has a statistically significant relationship between sex and education. The significance between family income and sex is a weak and negative correlation. This correlation shows that if the respondent identifies as a woman, then their income will be lower. The significance between family income and education is also weak but a positive correlation, which means that if the respondent has a higher level of education, then their income will also be higher. The significance between size and education is weak and negative. The correlation shows that if size increases, then the level of education will be lower. There is also another weak and negative correlation between age and education. This

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correlation shows that the older the respondent is, the lower their level of education will be. There is no statistical significance between size and age, size and women, age and women, education and women, family income and age, family income and size.

Insert Table 2 about here

Multivariate Results

Table 3 shows the regression of family income on size, age, sex and education. The multivariate regression equation is significant at the $p < .05$ level ($F = 8.617$). The R -squared shows that 18 percent of the variance in family income can be explained by size, age, sex and education. My independent variable is not significant, which means size has no significance on family income. The only significant variables on family income are sex and education. If the respondent is a woman, their family income was \$15,981 less than men's family income. For each year of education the respondent has completed, their family income was \$4,208 more.

The unstandardized coefficient for the sex variable shows that women's families earn a significant \$15,981 less than men's families. Although that is a high number, the standardized beta coefficient indicates that education has a stronger and more significant impact on income than sex.

Insert Table 3 about here

DISCUSSION

This study analyzes income based on the population size area. The bivariate results (table 2) are consistent with the multivariate results (table 3). Both analyses demonstrate that there is no statistical significance between family income and population size area. Based on the findings,

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the original hypothesis is rejected as population size area has little significance to no impact on the income of Mexicans, but rather sex and education. The findings are also consistent with previous literature which indicates Mexican assimilation is not necessarily affected by where they migrate but rather through education (Alba and Nee 1997; Estrada 2013; Jargowsky 2009; South et al. 2005).

A possible reason why population size area is not significant when analyzed with family income (table 3) is that Mexicans are moving away from low poverty neighborhoods (Jargowsky 2009). The reasoning can imply that either Mexicans are moving to a suburban town where there is an increase in household income and a decrease of population size area or to an urban city where population size area and income are both high.

Across the U.S., Mexicans face significant prejudice from both non-Hispanic blacks and non-Hispanic whites, as they do not fit neatly into the pre-existing binary racial order in rural and small-town America (Gans 1992; Tran and Valdez 2017). Historically the U.S. has discriminated against any groups that have darker skin and who do not fit the typical characteristics of Anglo-Saxons, who are white and Christian. Mexico and the U.S. have always shared disputes over their shared 2,000-mile border and undocumented immigration. The Trump Era and its xenophobic policies exacerbate these issues. Policing and hyper surveillance is a reoccurring issue among minority neighborhoods to which Mexican neighborhoods are no exception.

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to measure if the population area size would increase. I utilized the 2018 General Social Survey (GSS) for my data set. I used the ethnicity variable in the GSS to create a subset of respondents who identify as Mexican which led to a sample size of only 163

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respondents who are 18 years or older, speak English or Spanish and are non-institutionalized.

Results indicate that population size area does not have an impact on income for

Mexicans. Therefore, I must reject my hypothesis which states that the bigger the population size area Mexicans reside in, the higher the income will be. The findings also show that education and sex have a more significant impact on income for Mexicans. The significance of both variables reveals that woman respondents had significantly lower family income. In this case, there is a possibility that women respondents were single-headed households. Furthermore, completing a higher education degree will result in higher income.

Limitations

Although this study focused on the effect of population size area on income for Mexicans, it did not answer my original research question which is the following: will Mexicans earn a higher income if they reside in large populated size area such as an urban city?

The sample used for this study is very small and only included 163 individual respondents. Since my sample size was considerably small, it limited my usage of variables that I was able to use in terms of the degree of freedom.

The variables I used were size, income, ethnicity, education and sex. The size variable measures the number of people living in the area the respondent lived in but did not state if the respondent lived in an urban or suburban residence. Therefore, the findings did not reflect my original comparison of urban vs. suburban.

The income variable asked what the respondent's total family income was, from all sources. The wording of the question indicates the respondents may have included their married partner, siblings, parents, cousins or anyone living under the same household as part of the

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family income. The following also is included within the family income variable: interest or dividends, rent, Social Security, other pensions, alimony or child support, unemployment compensation, public aid (welfare), armed forces, or veteran's allotment. The variable for income does not consider employment as your only source of income.

The ethnicity variable only asked if the respondent identified as Mexican but did not ask about the respondent's legal status which means that the respondent can either be a U.S. citizen or not. The data includes undocumented respondents, U.S. Citizens, first-generation, second or later generation and or mixed race. Due to this, I included literature that took into account various generations as well as documentation status.

Including respondents who are not U.S. citizens can skew the data. Typically, undocumented immigrants tend to obtain low paying jobs such as farming and agriculture which explains why there are respondents who have extremely low income. Future generation Mexicans tend to have higher income due to their educational obtainment which figure 1 demonstrates the disparity of income among Mexicans. Also, the legal grade at which any student in the U.S. can drop out of school is after 10th grade. Since there is a mixture of U.S. born Mexicans and Mexican immigrants, the education variable demonstrates there is a hand full of respondents who have an education of 10th grade or bellow. Obtaining an educational level below the 10th grade can imply that the respondent is an immigrant not born in the U.S.

Median family income is typically higher than the median individual income because of the composition of households. Family households tend to have more people, and more of those members are in their prime earning years. The drawback of using family income measures is that they disregard persons living in nonfamily households, who tend to be disproportionately young

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or old. Also, family income does not take into consideration of whether the respondent's family only includes single-parent mother's or father's or foster families.

Although the variable sex itself did not present any direct limitations, gender roles in the U.S. do have a significant impact on women. In the U.S., women tend to obtain low paying jobs and sometimes when married, they take on the role as the stay at home mom or homemaker. Obtaining these roles impacts the family income for women, as shown in table 3, where it indicates that compared to men's families, women's families make around \$16,000 less than men. On the other hand, women with higher educational occupations can result in finding a spousal partner with higher education as well which allows women to rely on their spouse's income.

Another limitation is the respondent's parent occupation. For future generation Mexicans, their parents may have obtained jobs that had a higher income compared to first-generation Mexicans whose parents most likely worked in a minimum wage or low paying job. Based on parent's occupation, this may have a positive or negative impact on the outcome of their children's education as immigrant parents typically want their children to obtain a high school degree where a parent with a higher occupation may want their child to perform higher and obtain a college or graduate degree. Pointed out in the study conducted by Estrada (2013), Mexican children of immigrant families living in the region of Los Angeles feel pressured to financially support their family which results in the child dropping out of school and start street vending.

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Table 1. Means, Medians, and Standard Deviations for Variables ($N = 163$)

Variable	Mean	Median	Std. Dev
Family Income	54642.64	45000.00	38803.965
Size	551.36	83.00	964.037
Age	40.93	39.00	14.161
Women	0.57	1.00	0.496
Education	11.88	12.00	3.563

Table 2. Correlations (r) between Family Income and Four Variables (listwise deletion, two-tailed test, $N = 163$)

Variable	Size	Age	Women	Education
Family Income	-.099	-.047	-.181*	.367*
Size		.000	.034	-.183*
Age			-.052	-.249*
Women				.066

* $p < .05$

Table 3. Regression of Family Income on All Variables ($N = 163$)

Variable	b	β
Size	-.848	-.021
Age	107.005	.039
Women	-15981.442	-.204*
Education	4208.270	.386*
Constant	9937.733	

$R^2 = .179$; $F(4,158) = 8.617$; $p < .05$

* $p < .05$

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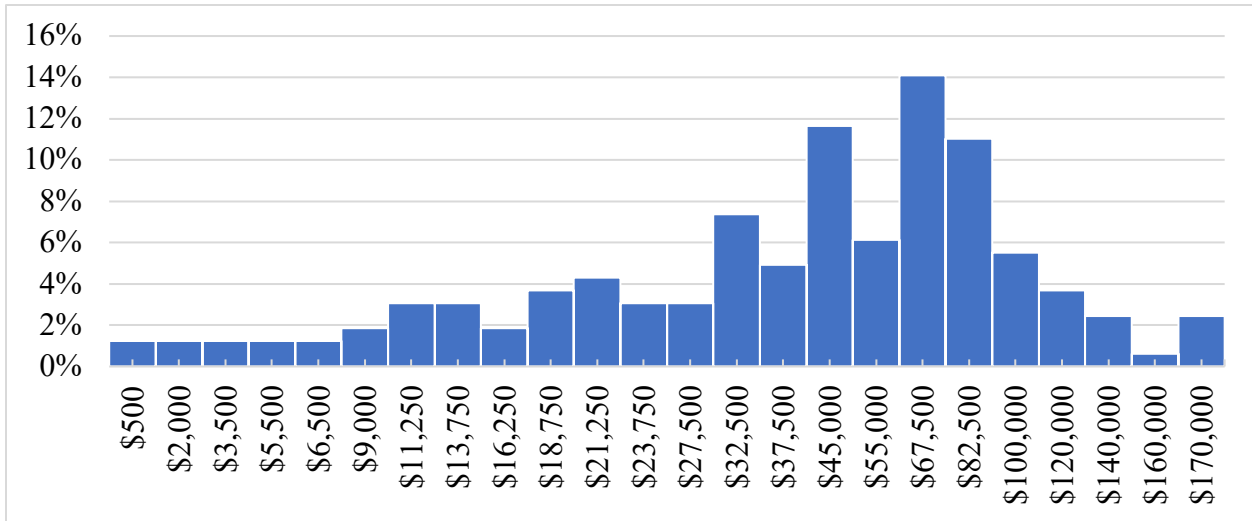


Figure 1. Histogram of Respondent's Family Income

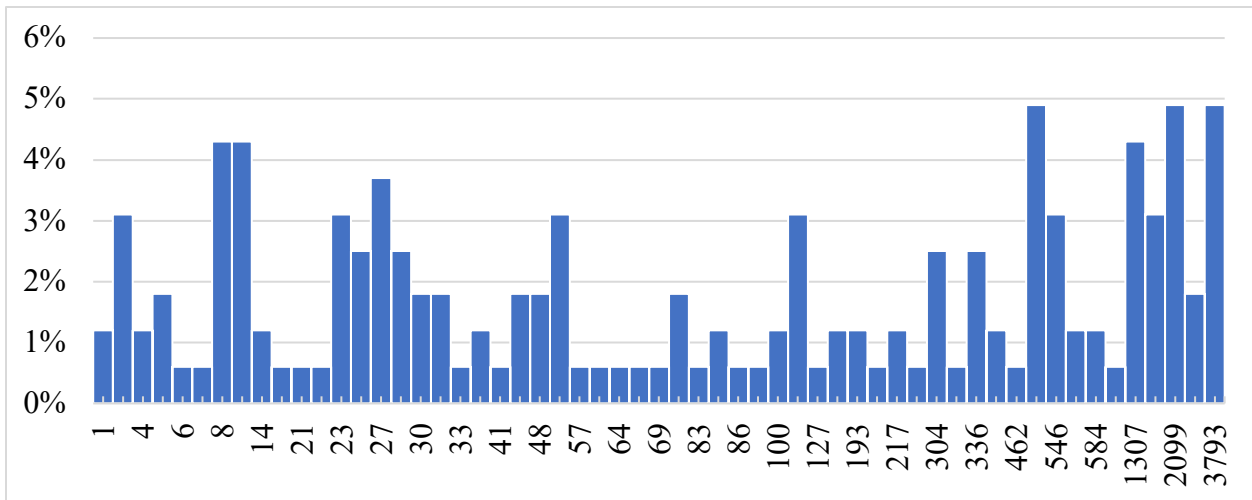


Figure 2. Histogram of Population Size

MEXICAN INCOME

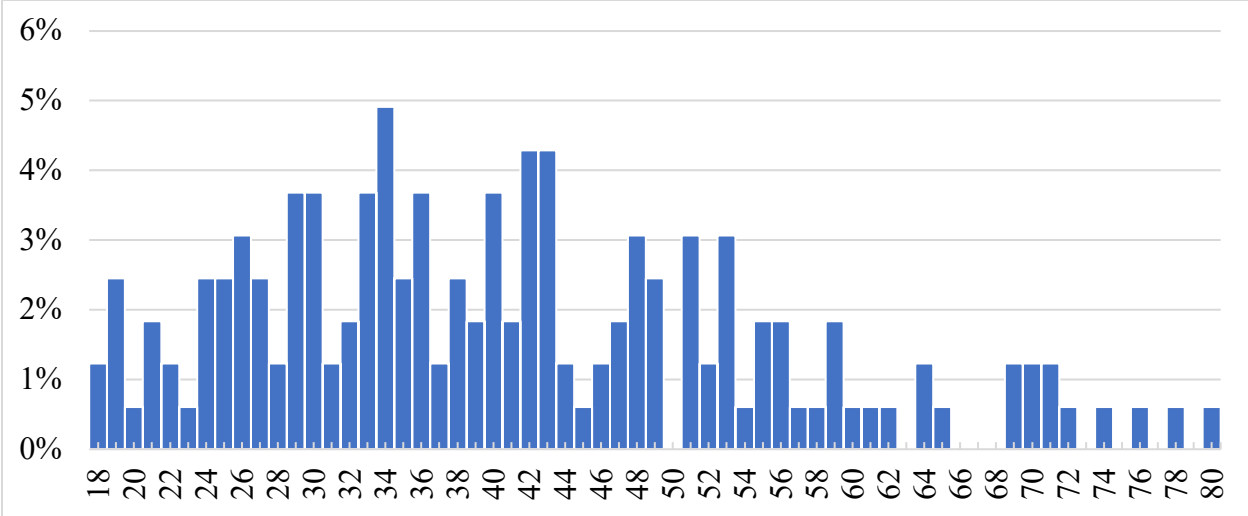


Figure 3. Histogram of Respondent's Age

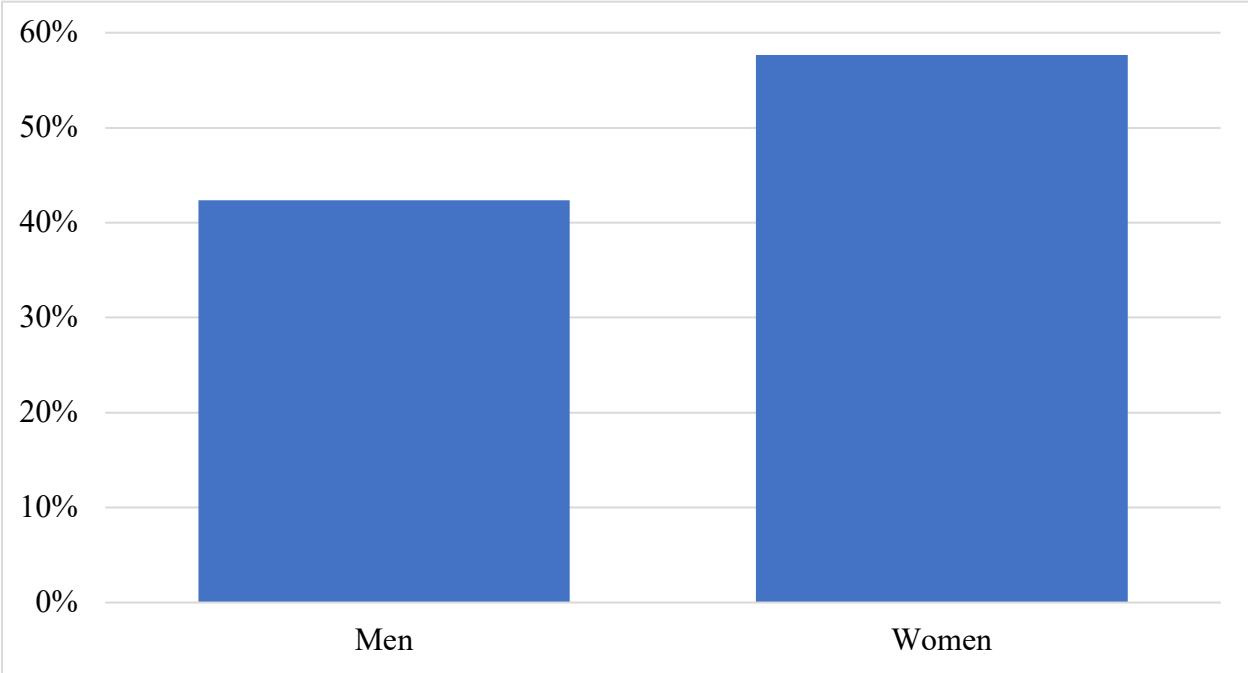


Figure 4. Bar Chart of Respondent's Sex

MEXICAN INCOME

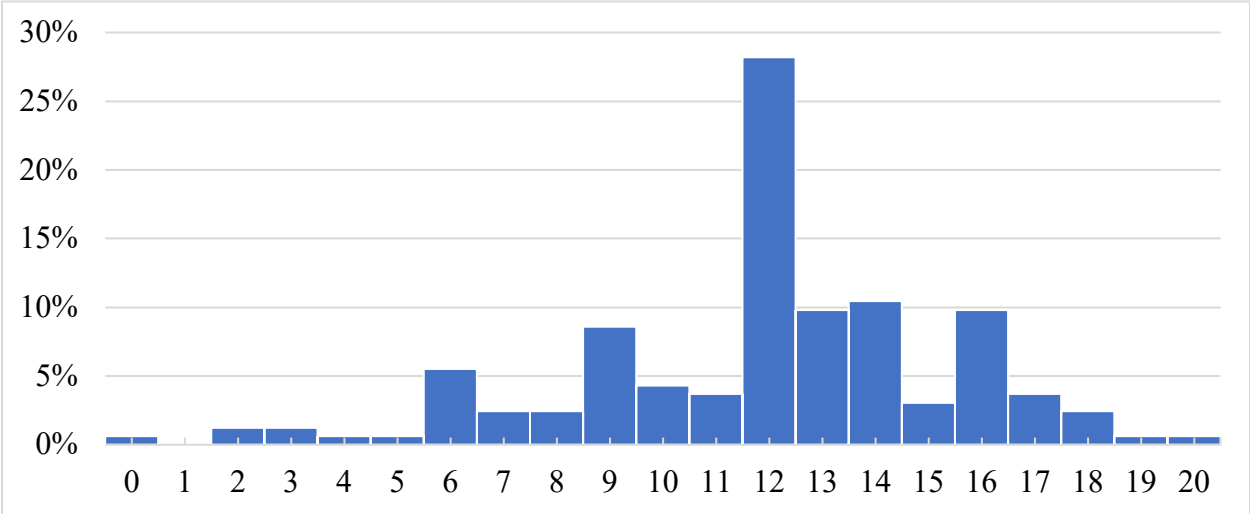


Figure 5. Histogram of Year of Education