



**California Center for Population Research**  
**University of California - Los Angeles**

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**CCPR-2009-012**

**May 2009**  
**Last Revised: May 2009**

***California Center for Population Research***  
***On-Line Working Paper Series***

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Support for this study was provided by a grant from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development awarded to the second author. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Andrew J. Fuligni: [afuligni@ucla.edu](mailto:afuligni@ucla.edu)

Abstract

This investigation examined the assistance that approximately 630 college—bound young adults from Asian, Latin American, and European backgrounds provided to their families and the implications of that assistance for their postsecondary educational progress. Students from Filipino and Latin American backgrounds spent more hours helping their parents and siblings on a daily basis as compared to their peers from East Asian and European backgrounds. Those from Latin American backgrounds provided financial support to their families at a higher rate than those from East Asian and European backgrounds, and males provided more financial support than females. Young adults who provided daily and financial assistance to their families were less likely to pursue or obtain bachelor's degrees and more likely to pursue or obtain an associate's degrees. This association did not vary across subgroups of adolescents and group differences in family assistance did not account for group differences in postsecondary degree persistence.

## Assistance to the Family and the College Achievement of Young Adults

A sense of obligation to support and assist the family is an important source of the academic motivation of students from Asian and Latin American backgrounds. Caplan, Choy, and Witmore (1991) and Zhou and Bankston (1998) observed this among adolescents' from immigrant Vietnamese families, showing how the students' desire to succeed in school derived in part from their sense of obligation to help and repay their parents for the sacrifices made to come to a new country for a better life. Similarly, Suárez—Orozco and Suárez—Orozco (1995) reported how students from Mexico and Central America have high academic aspirations to attend college in order to obtain better jobs that can help them to support their parents and siblings. Finally, Fuligni and colleagues found that a sense of family obligation is an important source of the additional motivation needed by these students to overcome the many challenges they face in order to achieve at levels equal to those of their European American peers (Fuligni, 2001).

At the same time as providing motivation, however, a sense of obligation to the family could result in the need to provide actual assistance to the family that ironically could comprise educational success. Adolescents from Latin American immigrant families reported to Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco about how the need to help with sibling care and work for the family can get in the way of their ability to study (Suárez—Orozco & Suárez—Orozco, 1995). Fuligni, Tseng, and Lam (1999) found that adolescents with the strongest sense of obligation to the family actually had a lower grade point average (GPA) than those with a more moderate sense of obligation, and a recent time use study noted that the GPAs of high school students from Chinese and Mexican backgrounds declined in years that they spent more days helping the family (Telzer & Fuligni, 2009). Collectively, these studies demonstrate the potential double—edged sword of

family obligation for educational progress: although it is a critical source of motivation for students from Asian and Latin American backgrounds, it also can present challenges to the students' ability to successfully meet their family—based educational aspirations.

The potential challenges of family assistance for educational progress are likely to be greatest during the postsecondary years, given the higher work load during college and the possibility that families will ask more from their children when they begin to transition into young adulthood. Indeed, Tseng (2004) observed that students at a four—year private university who spent more time helping the family on a daily basis had lower grades than their peers. Similarly, in an earlier wave from the present study, youth made financial contributions to the family showed lower rates of college attendance and persistence (Fuligni & Witkow, 2004). These patterns were observed despite the fact that a sense of obligation to the family continued to be associated with higher academic motivation after high school.

In the current paper, we present results from additional analyses of a study of the college achievement of students from Asian, Latin American, and European backgrounds. Two aspects of family assistance are assessed when the students are three and five years out college: daily family assistance such as cooking, cleaning, and sibling care, and the provision of financial support to the family. Our earlier analyses did not include daily acts of assistance which although seemingly less significant than providing financial support, can nevertheless be consequential because they present chronic demands on students' lives as they attempt to complete college. Also, the earlier analyses did not include students who were five years out of high school, and a more complete picture of the impact of family assistance on college achievement can be obtained by including those who likely are towards the end of their college careers.

## Method

### *Sample*

Two cohorts of students, two years apart, each took part in a longitudinal study while they were in the twelfth grade of high school (1996 for the older cohort, 1998 for the younger cohort). These 1,050 students were then recruited to participate in telephone interviews that took place one and three years later during the 1999/2000 and 2001/2002 academic years. The current study analyzes data from the interviews conducted during the 2001/2002 because these interviews included the pertinent questions regarding family assistance.

Nearly 66% ( $N = 662$ ) of the original sample of 1,050 students in the twelfth grade participated in the 2001/2002 interviews which took place when the older cohort of young adults ( $N = 278$ ) was five years out of high school while the younger cohort ( $N = 349$ ) was 3 years out of high school. Given that 98% of participants in this study had enrolled in some form of postsecondary education by the time of the interviews, we chose to exclude participants who had never attended college because the small sample size would not allow for significant comparison. We were left with a final sample of 630 students. Nearly all of the students participating in this study received a high school diploma (94.7%) or a graduate equivalency diploma (2.4%). The sample was relatively balanced by gender (males: 45.9%).

The sample consisted of young adults from four ethnic backgrounds: East Asian (predominantly Chinese) ( $N = 100$ ), Filipino ( $N = 217$ ), Latin American (predominantly Mexican) ( $N = 150$ ), and European ( $N = 163$ ) backgrounds. The majority of young adults from East Asian (70%), Filipino (95%), and Latin American (82%) backgrounds were from the first (born outside of the U.S.) and second (young adults born in the U.S., but at least one parent born

elsewhere) generations. Only 21% of those from European backgrounds were from the first and second generations.

Ethnic group differences were also observed in terms of aspects of the young adults' current living arrangements that would be relevant for family assistance. Those with Filipino backgrounds were most likely to live with two or more siblings (24.9%) In comparison, 22.7% of Latin American, 12.3% of European, and 12% of East Asian participants lived with two more siblings,  $\chi^2(15, N = 630) = 34.38, p < .05$ . Nearly half of participants resided outside of their parents' household. But of those living with their parents, more Latino students (17.3%) lived in single—parent households than their Filipino, European, and East Asian peers (10.6%, 9.2%, and 5.0%, respectively),  $\chi^2(6, N = 630) = 14.14, p < .05$ . We did not observe ethnic differences in parental income,  $F(3, 539) = .10, ns$ .

### *Measures*

#### *Family Assistance*

*Daily assistance.* Young adults reported the average number of hours per week they spent helping the family across a list of eight daily activities that was developed in previous research with these populations (Fuligni, Yip, & Tseng, 2002; Hardway & Fuligni, 2006). The list included: helped clean the apartment or house, took care of siblings, ran an errand for the family, helped siblings with their schoolwork, helped parents with official business (for example translating letters, completing government forms), helped to cook a meal for the family, helped parents at their work, and other. An indicator of the amount of time spent per week on daily assistance was created by averaging the time estimates reported for each task ( $M = 2.39, SD = 2.73$ ).

*Financial contribution.* Young adults indicated whether they provided financial support their parent, brothers, sisters, grandparents, aunts, uncles, regardless of whether the family members lived with them (0 = no, 1 = yes).

#### *College Achievement*

*Grade Point Average (GPA).* Students reported their cumulative GPA for each postsecondary institution they attended since high school, and the GPA for the most recently attended institution was used in the current analyses.

*Degree persistence.* In order to account for the fact that students in the younger cohort were only three years beyond the 12<sup>th</sup> grade at the time of the interview and could still be pursuing their postsecondary degrees, two indicators of degree persistence were created from the young adults' reports of the postsecondary institutions that they attended since high school.

*Two—year degree persistence* was coded as 1 for those who either received or were working towards an associate's degree at the time of the interview, and as 0 for those who neither received nor were currently pursuing a degree. A similar measure of *four—year degree persistence* was created to assess persistence toward a bachelor's degree. These were treated as separate and not redundant indicators of degree persistence because students may continue on toward a four—year degree after completing a two—year degree.

#### *Family Income and Living Arrangements*

*Family Income.* Young adults indicated their parents' total income using the following response scale: 1 = <\$10,000, 2 = between \$10,000 and \$20,000, 3 = between \$20,000 and \$30,000, 4 = between \$30,000 and \$40,000, 5 = between \$40,000 and \$50,000, 6 = between \$50,000 and \$60,000, 7 = between \$60,000 and \$70,000, 8 = between \$70,000 and \$80,000, 9 = between \$80,000 and \$90,000.

*Living with parents and siblings.* Young adults listed the names and relations of all of the other people living in their household. Based on these responses, separate indicators for the number of parents (including stepparents) and the number of students that lived within students' households were created.

## Results

### *Variations in Family Assistance*

*Ethnicity and gender.* Two—way (2 x 4) analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to determine the degree to which students' daily and financial assistance to family varied by ethnicity and gender. As shown in Table 1, Filipino students spent more hours during a typical week helping their family than their peers from East Asian and European backgrounds. Those from Latin American backgrounds reported more daily assistance than those from Asian backgrounds. There were no significant gender differences in the tendency of students to provide weekly assistance to their families and the ethnic differences did not vary according to gender,  $F_s(1 - 3, 558) = .19 - 2.60, ns$ .

Significant gender and ethnicity differences emerged in the likelihood that students provided financial assistance to their families. Students from Latin American backgrounds were more likely to provide financial support than their peers from East Asian and European backgrounds (see Table 1), and male students ( $M = .38, SE = .03$ ) were more likely to provide financial assistance to their family than female college students ( $M = .26, SE = .03$ ),  $F(1,560) = 9.57, p < .05$ . None of the ethnic differences in financial assistance differed according to gender,  $F(1, 560) = .52, ns$ .

*Generation.* Students' generational statuses were dummy—coded and treated as covariates in analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) in order to assess whether the observed ethnic

differences in family assistance were attributable to variations in students' generational statuses. Generational status did not predict either daily or financial assistance to the family,  $F_s(1, 554 - 556) = .20 - 2.37$ , *ns.*, and after controlling for generational status, the aforementioned ethnic differences in family assistance remained significant,  $F_s(3, 554 - 556) = 4.51 - 4.82$ ,  $p_s < .05$ .

*Family income and living arrangements.* Similar ANCOVAs were conducted in order to examine whether ethnic differences family assistance were attributable to variations in family income and living arrangements. Students from families with more siblings within the household reported greater hours of family assistance and were more likely to provide financial assistance than students with fewer siblings,  $F_s(1, 536) = 9.26 - 20.60$ ,  $p_s < .05$ . Also, students from lower income families were more likely than their peers to provide financial assistance,  $F(1, 536) = 9.43$ ,  $p < .05$ . Despite these differences, the number of siblings within students' households and parental income did not eliminate ethnic differences in both measures of family assistance,  $F_s(3, 536) = 5.28 - 5.34$ ,  $p_s < .05$ .

The number of parents living with the students did not significantly predict the degree of daily and financial assistance,  $F_s(1, 536) = .29 - .96$ , *ns.*

### *Associations of Family Assistance with College Achievement*

#### *Bivariate Correlations*

Bivariate correlations between students' family assistance, GPA, and degree persistence are presented in Table 2. Students who provided financial assistance to their families also spent more hours providing weekly assistance than those who do not provide financial assistance. Both types of family assistance were associated higher levels of two—year degree persistence and lower levels of four—year degree persistence. In contrast, neither type of family assistance was associated with students' GPA.

Additional analyses were conducted to investigate whether correlations between family assistance and college achievement differed according to students' ethnic backgrounds.

ANCOVA with tests of equal slopes revealed that the previously reported associations between family assistance, degree persistence, and GPA did not vary by ethnicity,  $F_s(3, 322 - 323) = .02 - .96, ns$ .

#### *Group Variations in Degree Persistence*

Given the observed ethnic and gender differences in students' family assistance and the association between family assistance and degree persistence, additional analyses were conducted in order to determine whether the group variations in degree persistence could be explained by differences in family assistance.

First, two—way ANOVAs revealed ethnic and gender differences in students' degree persistence. As shown in Table 3, students from East Asian backgrounds were significantly less likely than those with Filipino, Latin American, and European backgrounds to pursue or obtain a two—year degree. These differences were reversed in terms of four—year degree persistence, with those from East Asian backgrounds being more likely than other students to pursue or receive a four—year degree. In terms of gender, male students were more likely to pursue or obtain a two—year degree ( $M_{\text{male}} = .34, SE = .03; M_{\text{female}} = .21, SE = .03$ ) but less likely to pursue or obtain a four—year degree ( $M_{\text{male}} = .38, SE = .03; M_{\text{female}} = .47, SE = .03$ ) than female students,  $F_s(1, 560) = 4.52 - 11.12, p < .05$ .

Next, the two measures of family assistance were added to the ANOVAs listed above as covariates in order to determine whether they would reduce the ethnic and gender differences to nonsignificance. In addition, family income and the students living arrangements (i.e., number of coresident parents and siblings) were include as covariates to control to the potential effects of

these factors. Family income and living arrangements were not significantly related to either two—year or four—year degree persistence,  $F_s(1, 536) = .05 - 2.99$ , *ns*. Financial assistance was significantly predictive of degree persistence such that those providing financial support to their families were more likely to pursue or obtain a two—year degree but less likely to pursue or obtain a four—year degree,  $F_s(1, 560) = 5.42 - 7.67$ ,  $p < .05$ . Daily assistance was not significantly related to two—year degree persistence,  $F(1, 560) = 1.44$ , *ns*, but it was a significantly negative predictor of four—year degree persistence,  $F(1, 560) = 4.96$ ,  $p < .05$ .

Finally, even after controlling for the two measures of family assistance, significant ethnic and gender differences in college persistence remained,  $F_s(3, 560) = 3.72 - 6.85$ ,  $p < .05$  and  $F_s(1, 562) = 4.39 - 8.28$ ,  $p < .05$ , respectively.

### Discussion

A number of group differences emerged among young adults in this study with regard patterns of day—to—day and financial assistance to the family. Students from Asian and Latin backgrounds tend to spend more hours helping their families with household, caretaking, and instrumental tasks than students from European backgrounds. This finding is consistent with literature on the cultural traditions of Asian and Latino families which largely focus on family interdependence and emphasize children's duties to assist the family (Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002; Ho, 1996; Triandis, 2001). It further draws attention to the expectation within cultures emphasizing family interdependence that children provide support to the family throughout the life course. Gender differences were also found, such that male college students were more likely than female college students to provide financial support to their families.

Socioeconomic and family circumstances also influence the ways in which study participants assisted their families. Not surprisingly, students with more siblings and in lower

household incomes provide more day—to—day and financial support than students from smaller, more affluent families. The restricted financial resources and social networks of the low—income families represented in this study may have required some young adults to assume greater childcare, domestic, and employment responsibilities than their peers with greater resources (Burton, 2007).

Findings further indicate that postsecondary degree decisions of young adults are somewhat influenced by their family responsibilities. In general, young adults who provide day—to—day and financial assistance to their families are less likely to pursue or obtain bachelor's degrees, but more likely to pursue or obtain an associate's degrees than those providing no assistance. There are several reasons why this pattern could have occurred. Firstly, the financial obligations of some young adults to their families could have promoted their decisions to attend a two—year college, given that tuition and fees, the proportion of household income required to pay these fees, and costs of living associated with institutions are generally lower than that of four—year colleges (Baum & Ma, 2007). Secondly, students with significant family obligations during high school may have limited their field of college options to postsecondary institutions that allow them to continue fulfilling those obligations as young adults. This pattern was found in previous research among high school seniors from ethnic minority communities who decided to attend less prestigious colleges because of their caretaking duties and need for full—time employment to support the family (Arnold, 1993). Part—time attendance and interruptions in enrollment are more likely to occur and course requirements may be less demanding for students attending two—year colleges than four—year college attendees (Andrews, 2000; Bailey et al., 2004), thereby allowing young adults to allocate more time and resources to family responsibilities.

It is further possible that students who decide to attend two—year colleges (which are predominately commuter campuses) have more opportunities to provide support to their families than their peers at four—year colleges because they are more likely to live at home. On the whole, two—year colleges may have been more attractive options for young adults who sought to pursue postsecondary education while simultaneously fulfilling family responsibilities.

East Asian students in this study are more likely to pursue or obtain bachelor's degrees and less likely to pursue or obtain associate's degrees than Filipino, Latino, and European students. This trend is consistent with prior research demonstrating that Filipino students of all income levels are most likely to choose a college because of low tuition and that the majority of all Hispanic students attending degree granting institutions attend two—year institutions (Teranishi, Ceja, Antonio, Allen, & McDonough, 2004; U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Latino and European young adults in this study pursued associates and bachelors degrees at the same rate, unlike the national college—going population where bachelor's degree attainment for European Americans surpasses that of Latin Americans (U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

Even after controlling for weekly and financial assistance, East Asian young adults have higher rates of bachelor's degree persistence than their Filipino, Latin American, and European American counterparts. Previous analyses conducted with these data suggest that the higher grades received by East Asian students during high school is an important correlated of their higher postsecondary attainment (Fuligni & Witkow, 2004), and this high school achievement in turn can be linked to high levels of both parental education and academic motivation on the part of the East Asian students. Importantly, the results of the analyses presented in the current paper show that although family assistance is an important source of variation in college achievement within different ethnic groups, it does not explain why some ethnic groups have less

postsecondary success than others. This is likely because family assistance is part of a greater sense of obligation to the family which can mitigate the negative impact of family assistance through its support of the students' motivation to succeed. Nevertheless, despite this motivation, high levels of family assistance can present challenges to students' ability to succeed in college and is a significant aspects of their lives that should be taken into account in efforts to promote the postsecondary progress of students.

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Table 1

*Variations in Family Assistance by Ethnic Background*

	Ethnic Background				<i>F</i>	Bonferonni Contrasts
	East Asian	Filipino	Latin American	European		
Family Assistance	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>		
Daily	1.75 (.28)	3.00 (.20)	2.70 (.23)	1.64 (.22)	9.43**	F > EA, E; L > E
Financial	.23 (.05)	.35 (.03)	.47 (.04)	.23 (.04)	7.91***	L > EA, E

*Note.* *N*s = 566 - 568. Estimates for daily assistance represent hours per week spent helping the family and estimates for financial assistance represent the proportion of young adults making financial contributions to the family. \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 2

*Correlations between Family Assistance and College Achievement*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Financial assistance	--	.23**	-0.04	.13**	-.14**
2. Mean weekly assistance		--	-0.03	.09*	-.12**
3. GPA			--	-.04	-.05
4. Two—year degree persistence				--	-.38**
5. Four—year degree persistence					--

*Note.* \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Table 3

*Variations in College Persistence by Ethnic Background*

Degree	Ethnic Background				<i>F</i>	Bonferonni Contrasts
	East Asian	Filipino	Latin American	European		
Two—year	<i>M (SD)</i> .13 (.34)	<i>M (SD)</i> .32 (.47)	<i>M (SD)</i> .31 (.46)	<i>M (SD)</i> .32 (.47)	4.19*	F, L, E > EA
Four—year	<i>M (SD)</i> .61 (.49)	<i>M (SD)</i> .42 (.50)	<i>M (SD)</i> .30 (.46)	<i>M (SD)</i> .37 (.48)	7.60*	EA > F, L, E

*Note.* *N* = 568. Estimates for degree persistence represent the proportion of students either having received or currently pursuing the degree. \**p* < .05.