

**“Gains from Green Cards: Immigrant Parents’ Legal Status and Children’s Scholastic Achievement”**

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**Themes:** Child Wellbeing

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**Abstract:** This paper investigates how unauthorized immigrants' illegal status affects their children's scholastic achievement in the U.S. The answer to this question calls attention to the intergenerational consequence of the U.S. immigration legislation. In order to estimate the intergenerational effect of immigration status, two sources of bias need to be overcome: 1) the omitted variables that determine both parental immigration status and children's scholastic performance; and 2) misreporting in legal status among illegal immigrants. The biggest amnesty program in U.S. history (IRCA 1986) and a two-step semi-parametric method are used to estimate the misreporting rate, as well as to recover the treatment effect of truly having legal status. My empirical analysis using the data of the Los Angeles Family and Neighborhood Survey finds: Had the illegal Latina immigrant women who arrived in the U.S. during 1982-1986 migrated before 1982 and thus been granted legal status by IRCA, their children on average would have improved their math scores by 0.65 of a standard deviation and their reading scores by 0.50 of a standard deviation. The above results account for misreporting. The probability that the potential truly illegal Latina immigrant women misreport their legal status is estimated at around 0.46. This paper also finds that households' economic well-being, residential location, and residential instability are the three main mechanisms through which immigrants' legal status affects their children's scholastic performance.