

# Addressing the cause of the causes: Why we need to integrate social determinants into acculturation theory

## The problem

Acculturation research investigates how migrants navigate cross-cultural differences and adjust to life in a new country. This area of research largely focuses on individual experiences, challenges and outcomes of this process without considering the socio-economic conditions that shape migrants' ability to live and age well.

## Background

Acculturation research largely considers how migrants negotiate their identities and cope with migration-related stress and discrimination. This focus places the responsibility for successful cross-cultural adaptation on migrants, assuming that if people have the 'right' skills and do the 'right' things, they will achieve positive outcomes. It does not take into account that migrants often have limited access to economic and social resources.

## Central Argument

Considering social determinants of cross-cultural adaptation can be useful for challenging the idea that migrants are solely responsible for how well they adapt. Social determinants refer to the conditions in which people are born, grow, play, learn, live, work and age.



These determinants can include education, employment, household income, housing, access to transportation and neighborhood deprivation.

## What This Means

While many studies show that first generation migrants have better health at an earlier life stage compared to non-migrants, this effect diminishes over time. This change can result from multiple migration-related struggles, such as economic hardship, decrease in socio-economic status and discrimination. Migrants can develop mental resilience and social support to overcome these struggles. However, unequal access to social and economic resources can be very hard to overcome individually and negatively affect migrants' health and wellbeing.

## Why It Matters

By accounting for social determinants, acculturation research can offer practical policy recommendations to improve migrants' access to social and economic resources across their life stages and to promote positive cross-cultural adaptation.