CHAPTER 4. FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH POSITIVE SETTLEMENT OUTCOMES

Previous studies of immigrant settlement experiences have identified a number of factors and migrant characteristics that are related to their settlement outcomes. These include age, sex, length of residence, English language proficiency, educational qualifications, occupational skills and visa category. The objective of the data analyses in this chapter is to identify which of these characteristics are associated with positive settlement outcomes as measured by key indicators of social and economic participation, economic well-being and physical well-being.

The key settlement indicators examined in this chapter are:

- English proficiency
- Citizenship status
- Employment status
- Income
- Home ownership
- Mental health status
- Self assessment of general health

The indicators are examined at three time points during the early years of settlement that coincide with the three waves of LSIA: 6 months, 18 months and 3 ½ years after arrival. Each indicator is examined in relation to the following on-arrival characteristics of the migrants: age, sex, visa category and qualifications. Other factors that are considered include English proficiency, health status, employment status, income and home ownership where relevant. These may be measured at the preceding time point in relation to the indicator being examined. For example, English proficiency at the time of the second wave of LSIA is examined to observe whether it is associated with being employed at the third wave.

Statistical analyses have been conducted using LSIA1 data to identify factors that are significantly related to each settlement indicator at the three time points. These analyses indicate the net effect of each factor on each of the settlement indicators examined after controlling for the other factors in the analysis. All principal applicants aged 15-64 years for which the relevant data are available in each wave are included in the analyses. Detailed results are presented in Appendix C.

English proficiency

Not all migrants can speak good English on arrival. Only immigrants in the skilled categories have their English language skills assessed as part of the application process.

English language ability is not a criterion for those who apply under the Family and Humanitarian categories and therefore some do not speak English well when they arrive in Australia. One of the important settlement services provided by DIMA is access to English language classes for migrants who need assistance with learning English.

English proficiency is examined here as a settlement outcome variable with the objective of identifying the factors that are associated with immigrants' increased competency in English with duration of residence. Migrants who said that they did not speak English well at the first LSIA1 interview are examined on their ability to speak English at the second interview, one year later. Then migrants who still do not speak English well at the second interview are examined on their English proficiency status at the third interview, two years later. This allows for an examination of what factors are associated with improvements in English speaking ability during the early years of settlement.

The results show that female migrants who do not speak good English on arrival are less likely than male migrants to improve their English, after controlling for age, visa category, qualifications, employment status and income (Table C4.1). This difference is not large enough at 18 months of settlement to be statistically significant, but becomes greater and statistically significant by the third interview, an indication that women seem to lag further behind men in picking up English language skills as time passes.

Age makes an important difference, the younger the migrant the greater the likelihood that their English will improve during the early years of settlement. This is not unexpected as younger people generally find it easier or can spend more time learning a language than older people. Younger migrants who are not able to speak English well on arrival are more likely than older migrants to be reporting that they can speak English well one year later. The same pattern of outcomes is observed at the third interview, two years later.

LSIA1 data also indicate that humanitarian entrants who do not speak English well on arrival are more likely than other migrants to improve their English by the second interview. This may be related to their access to English classes provided as part of settlement services. Preferential Family migrants who do not speak English well on arrival are less likely to be speaking English well at the second interview compared with other migrants. By the third interview, visa category makes no significant difference.

Educational qualifications on arrival also make an important difference in migrants' ability to improve their English, according to LSIA1 data. Migrants with qualifications who do not speak good English show greater progress in learning English during the early years of settlement. Those with a degree on arrival are the most likely to improve their English, followed by those with other qualifications. Those without qualifications are the least likely to improve their English.

Migrants who report their health to be very good are also the most likely to report an improvement in their English skills, followed by those who say their health is good. Those who indicate that their health is 'fair' are the least likely to report an improvement

in their English by the second interview. Among migrants who do not speak good English at the second interview, those who say their health is 'good' are also more likely than those whose health is 'fair' to report an improvement in English by the third interview. No association is observed between migrants' mental health status and their ability to improve their English language skill.

Migrants who are unemployed at the first interview are also less likely to improve their English a year later than those who are not in the labour force. For migrants who do not speak good English at 18 months after arrival, employment status makes no difference in their ability to speak good English two years later. Income also makes no significant difference.

Citizenship status

Since migrants are normally required to live in Australia for two years before being eligible to apply for citizenship, citizenship status at the third interview, 3½ years after arrival, is examined. Chapter 2 shows that 67 per cent of principal applicant migrants in lSIA1 had become citizens or applied for citizenship by that time. The factors that are associated with migrants' propensity to become citizens are examined in this section.

The results show that there is no difference between men and women in their propensity to become citizens by 3½ years after arrival (Table C4.2). There is also no significant difference by age. Educational qualifications on arrival are also not associated with the propensity to become citizens.

Migration category makes a very significant difference. Entrants in the Humanitarian category are the most likely to become Australian citizens in the shortest time, according to LSIA1 data. Migrants in the Family or Skill migration categories are much slower to take up Australian citizenship.

Interestingly, migrants who speak English very well are the least likely to apply for or take up Australian citizenship. This is related to the low rate of citizenship among migrants from countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States of America (DIMA 1999). (New Zealanders, another group with a low proportion who have taken Australian citizenship, are not included in LSIA).

The propensity to become Australian citizens is also less among migrants who reported that their health is 'very good' compared to those who say their health is 'fair'. However, there is no association between mental health status and citizenship status by 3½ years of residence.

Migrants who are employed at the second interview are also less likely than those who are not employed to become citizens. However, neither income (whether income is above or below the average) nor housing status (whether one owns one's home or not) at 18 months after arrival is related to citizenship status two years later.

Not surprisingly, migrants who indicate that they are very satisfied with their life at 18 months after arrival are more likely to become citizens two years later compared to those who are not satisfied. This association is observed even after some migrants who are dissatisfied during the early years of settlement have dropped out of the survey, either because they have returned overseas or do not want to participate in the third interview of the survey.

Employment status

Many studies have examined the factors that are associated with the employment status of migrants in Australia (Wooden 1994; Williams et al 1997; Cobb-Clark 1999; Cobb-Clark and Chapman 1999). These have identified the important factors determining employment status as English proficiency, skills, visa category and length of residence. Analyses of data from the first two waves of LSIA also indicate that residential location and pre-migration experiences, particularly whether the migrant has visited Australia before migration, are related to employment outcomes (Cobb-Clark and Chapman 1999). The findings from the current analyses are similar to those of previous studies.

Employment status soon after arrival is strongly related to visa category and English proficiency, as expected (Table C4.2). Among migrants participating in the labour force, those in the Business or Employer Nomination visa categories are the most likely and those in the Humanitarian visa categories the least likely to be employed at all three waves of LSIA. The Independent skill category ranks second after the Business/Employer Nomination category, the Concessional Family ranks third and the Preferential family category ranks fourth. Differences by visa category are particularly large at 6 months after arrival but lessen with increasing duration of residence. Nonetheless significant differences remain at 3½ years after arrival, with the Business/Employer Nomination migrants having odds of being employed that are 16 times those for humanitarian entrants.

Ability to speak good English is also strongly correlated with becoming employed within 6 months, 18 months or 3½ years of arrival, according to LSIA1 data. Even those who can speak some English are twice as likely to be employed as those who do not speak it at all.

Age is another important factor. Migrants aged less than 45 years on arrival are 2-3 times more likely to gain employment than those aged 45 or more. This relation persists over the first 3½ years of settlement.

LSIA1 data show that having a degree qualification on arrival does not improve one's chances of being employed soon after arrival, after taking into account the migrant's age, sex, visa category and English proficiency. However, migrants with vocational qualifications are more likely to be employed within 6 months after arrival. On-arrival educational qualifications make no significant difference to employment status after 3½ years' residence, after controlling for age, sex, migration category, English proficiency and health status.

Health status appears to have some influence on employment status. Migrants' assessment of their general health does not appear to be correlated with their employment outcome at 6 months after arrival, but migrants reporting very good health at 6 months after arrival are significantly more likely than those with 'fair' health to be employed one year later. Similarly migrants who say that their health is 'very good' at the second interview are significantly more likely than those reporting 'fair' health to be employed two years later. In contrast, better mental health is correlated with being employed at the first interview but there is no association with employment outcomes at the second and third interviews. Having a long-term physical health condition also has no effect on employment outcomes.

Income

The income indicator that is examined is having an income of more than $678.80 a week, that is having an income that is above the average weekly earnings of full time employees in Australia in 1996.

Male migrants are much more likely than female migrants to have above average income, other things being equal. This difference is observed at all three waves of LSIA (Table C4.4).

The effect of age at arrival on income is quite interesting. There is no significant effect on income at 6 months after arrival although migrants who are aged 15-24 are less likely to have above average income than older migrants. At 18 months after arrival, migrants who are aged 25-44 on arrival are significantly more likely to have above average income than those at younger or older ages. At 3½ years after arrival, those who are aged 15-34 on arrival are the most likely to have above average income compared to those aged 35 or more on arrival.

As expected, migrants in the Business and Employer Nomination categories are the most likely to have above average income during the first 3½ years of settlement. Next are those in the Independent skill category. There is no difference between Preferential Family migrants and humanitarian entrants at 6 months after arrival, but a year later, Preferential Family migrants are significantly better off. It is clear that migrants in the skill visa categories are significantly more likely to have above average incomes compared with other migrants.

LSIA1 data show that having a degree qualification is associated with above average income after taking other variables including employment status into account. Having a degree qualification may not increase the likelihood of employment among those in the labour force, as indicated earlier, but it does lead to higher income among those who are employed.

English proficiency is shown to be associated with higher income. Migrants who speak very good English are much more likely to have higher income than those who do not. This relation also appears to strengthen over time.

On the other hand, both health indicators show no association with level of income at all three time points.

Since income is related to employment status, it is included in the analysis to take account of this effect. As expected, migrants who are employed are much more likely to have above average income than those who are not employed. This pattern holds true throughout the first 3½ years of settlement. Migrants who are unemployed at 6 months after arrival are found to be worse off than those who are not in the labour force in terms of their level of income. The same pattern of relationship is also observed at 18 months after arrival but not at the third interview two years later. By then, the unemployed appear to be similar to those not in the labour force in terms of income level.

Home ownership

As expected, home ownership is related to demographic and socioeconomic characteristics (Table C4.5). Female migrants in LSIA1 are more likely than male migrants to live in homes that are owned or being purchased by themselves, their spouses or other immediate family members. Younger migrants are less likely than older migrants to live in their own homes, with migrants aged 35-44 on arrival the most likely to own their homes.

Business and Employer Nomination migrants are the most likely and humanitarian entrants the least likely to be home owners during the first 3½ years of settlement. It is also not surprising that Preferential Family migrants are more likely than other migrants, with the exception of those in the Business and Employer Nomination categories, to live in their own homes within the first 18 months of arrival. This is because they are likely to be living in the home of the sponsor who is likely to be a home- owner already.

There is no clear pattern of association between educational qualifications on arrival and home ownership during the early years of settlement. Those with degree qualifications are less likely to be home owners other things being equal while those with other than degree qualifications seem to have a greater likelihood of owning their homes.

English proficiency shows a clear association with home ownership. Migrants who speak good English are much more likely to own their homes during the initial years of settlement compared to those who do not speak good English, even after taking account of other factors such as migration category, age and sex.

The two health indicators do not appear to be related to home ownership status although migrants who indicate their health to be good at the first interview of LSIA1 are more likely than those who report only 'fair' health to be own their homes.

Being employed is strongly related to home ownership. Migrants who are employed at 6 months after arrival are more likely to be home owners one year later than those who are not employed. Similarly migrants who are employed at 18 months after arrival are more likely to be home owners two years later than those who are not employed. On the other hand, migrants who are unemployed at 6 months after arrival are less likely than even those not in the labour force to be home owners a year later.

Migrants with above average income are also more likely to own their homes, even after controlling for employment and other characteristics.

Mental health status

Mental health status as measured by the GHQ-12 in the three waves of LSIA is related to sex, age, visa category, qualifications on arrival, English proficiency and employment status (Table C4.6). Female migrants have lower mental health status than male migrants and this is observed in the data from all three waves of the survey.

No difference by age is observed at 6 months after arrival. One and two years later, younger migrants report better mental health than older migrants. Migrants aged 15-24 on arrival have the highest level of mental health.

Migrants in the Family and Skill categories have better mental health than entrants in the Humanitarian category throughout the early years of settlement. Lowest scores, and therefore highest level of mental health, are shown for those in the Business and Employer Nomination category at 6 and 18 months after arrival; at longer periods after arrival, migrants in the Concessional Family category show the lowest scores.

Interestingly, migrants with qualifications have significantly higher scores and therefore lower levels of mental health than migrants without qualifications, other things being equal. This pattern is maintained over the whole 3½ years covered by the survey.

Migrants who speak some English show a higher level of mental health than those who do not speak English at all at 6 months after arrival. At 3½ years after arrival, those who speak good English also report a higher level of mental health than those who do not.

Migrants who are employed report significantly higher levels of mental health than those who are unemployed or not participating in the labour force. This pattern is observed at all three waves of the survey. Migrants who are unemployed at 6 months after arrival show significantly lower mental health status than migrants who are not participating in the work force.

Being a home owner or living in one's own home has no significant effect on mental health status.

General health

The last indicator of settlement outcome examined is the self-assessment of health status. Sex, age, visa category, English proficiency and employment status are all associated with a positive outcome based on this indicator (Table C4.7).

Female migrants in LSIA1 again are more likely to report a lower health status than male migrants. Younger migrants are more likely to report their health as good or very good, with those aged 15-24 on arrival the most likely to assess their health as being good.

In a similar pattern for mental health, migrants in the Family and Skill categories are more likely to report having good health during the first 3½ years of settlement than entrants in the Humanitarian category.

There is no significant difference in self-assessment of health status by educational qualifications, unlike in the case of mental health status. However, migrants who speak good English on arrival are more likely to report good health than those who do not, even after controlling for visa category, age and sex.

Migrants who are unemployed at 6 months after arrival are less likely than those who are either employed or not in the labour force to report good health. This is the same pattern as observed for mental health. One year later, there was no difference between the unemployed and those not in the labour force in terms of their assessment of their health status, but migrants who are employed report better health than those who are unemployed or not in the labour force. The same pattern is observed two years later, with those employed reporting significantly better health. As noted earlier in the discussion on employment status, those reporting good health at the previous interview are significantly more likely to be employed by the next interview, so it is likely that good health is a prerequisite for employment.

Summary

Table 4.1 provides a summary of the factors that are associated with positive outcomes in the seven key settlement indicators examined in this chapter using LSIA1 data. It is clear that age, sex and visa category all have some effect on migrants' capacity for social and economic participation and their economic and physical wellbeing as measured by the set of indicators examined in this chapter. Educational qualifications also contribute to economic wellbeing.

The results show clearly that ability to speak good English is highly correlated with positive outcomes as measured by the indicators of economic participation, economic wellbeing and physical wellbeing. It is an important prerequisite for settlement success as measured across these dimensions. This is not surprising since English is the language of commerce, instruction, political and judicial institutions, social interchange and the mainstream media. Inability to speak good English places restrictions on full participation in Australian society and this appears to impact on one's economic and physical wellbeing.

Table 4.1. Factors affecting immigrants' social and economic participation, economic and physical wellbeing during the early years of settlement

Settlement outcome indicator	Factors affecting outcome
English language proficiency	Age, sex, qualifications, health status, employment status
Citizenship	Visa category, English proficiency
Employment	Age, sex, visa category, English proficiency, health status
Income	Age, sex, visa category, qualifications, English proficiency, employment status
Home ownership	Age, sex, visa category, qualifications, English proficiency, employment status, income
Mental health	Age, sex, visa category, qualifications, English proficiency, employment status
Health status	Age, sex, visa category, English proficiency, employment status

Note: Refer to Appendix C for detailed results of the data analysis

Besides the ability to speak good English, participation in employment is also significantly correlated with positive outcomes as measured by the indicators of economic and physical wellbeing. It is therefore an important indicator of settlement success. Although not all migrants arrive with the objective to participate in the labour market, of those who do, participation in employment is an important factor in contributing to positive outcomes in the other dimensions of settlement.

It is also observed that better health is correlated with progress in improving English language skills and gaining employment. Since English proficiency and employment have significant effects on economic wellbeing, as shown in Table 4.1, physical wellbeing also contributes indirectly to economic wellbeing. These results suggest that social and economic participation and economic and physical wellbeing are closely linked with one another and that each is important in contributing to positive outcomes in the others.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS

Indicators of settlement success

The results discussed in Chapter 4 indicate that the four dimensions of immigrant settlement – social participation, economic participation, economic wellbeing and physical wellbeing – are closely related to one another. This is to be expected as each measures an important aspect of human functioning. Although one of the objectives of the study is to determine which indicators are more important as measures of settlement success, the results of the data analysis suggest that the close relationships between the key indicators makes it difficult to differentiate their relative contributions.

Can the different dimensions of wellbeing be combined into a single index or, equivalently, can they be ranked against each other by level of importance? Is one a more fundamental indicator of settlement success than another? There have been strong arguments against the combination of the different dimensions of wellbeing into a single scale or index (Sen 1982; Brownlee 1990). Both Sen and Brownlee maintain that it is fundamentally unsound to attempt to combine, say, income and health status on the one scale or to attempt to argue about which is more important. Money cannot necessarily buy good health and good health does not necessarily create a good income stream. A good health policy would not be to provide people with more income and a good income policy would not be (simply) to provide people with good health. An adequate income and good health are separate and distinct dimensions of wellbeing and each demands its particular policy approach. In this, Sen and Brownlee are supported by the exponents of the series of Scandinavian Levels of Living Surveys (Erikson and Uusitalo 1987). In a study of living standards in Australia, Travers and Richardson (1993: 56) have concluded that:

> Pressure to construct a single index is strong even when to do so requires some straining of the data. …. Though this pressure to compress different types of information is understandable, it can be hazardous. The hazards arise from the difficulty in placing a clear interpretation on what the resulting index measures. …. When there is no natural common dimension to the components, then to aggregate them into a single index forces an unreal homogeneity.

This does not mean that the different dimensions of wellbeing or settlement success do not affect each other. The results of LSIA data analysis show that all of the important dimensions of settlement success appear to be interlinked. Employment is significantly related to English proficiency and good health; improvement in English performance is related to qualifications, employment status and good health; health status is significantly related to English proficiency and employment status, home ownership is related to qualifications, English proficiency, and employment status. The implication is that these dimensions are an interlinked system of success in these terms and therefore policy should be directed at each of them to achieve the best settlement outcomes.

One dimension of settlement success, citizenship was not related to all of the other measures. Indeed, it was negatively related to English proficiency. Thus, citizenship appears to be measuring a different dimension to that of all of the other measures.

Finally, the visa category under which each settler entered Australia was a significant determinant of each measure of settlement success even when all other measures were controlled. This implies that visa category is measuring some determinant of success that is not captured by the other measures of success. Success rates for refugees were lower on all dimensions even when health status, qualifications, English proficiency and employment were taken into account. This finding is worthy of further research.

Uses and limitations of the indicators and benchmarks

The indicators discussed in this study are useful in tracking the settlement process and adaptation of migrants to their new community. The indicators obtained from LSIA1 follow the settlement experiences of migrants during the first 3½ years after arrival in Australia. Those obtained from the census and ABS surveys indicate outcomes at longer periods of settlement.

In using the indicators to compare different cohorts of immigrants, it is important to take account of demographic characteristics such as age on arrival and sex and category of migration. These factors can advantage as well as impede the settlement process and should be controlled for in assessing the settlement outcomes of each migration cohort.

The indicators when compared over time or against benchmarks based on the Australian-born or total Australian population help to identify migrants who are in need of particular types of services or assistance. This is useful in ensuring that resources are directed to areas where they are most needed and can make the most difference.

The indicators are also useful for evaluating the effectiveness of settlement policies and services. A comparison of settlement outcomes as measured by the indicators before and after the implementation of specific policies or programs can provide an indication of their effectiveness in assisting with the settlement process.

Although useful, the indicators also have several limitations. The set of indicators presented in this study is based on the settlement experiences of previous cohorts of migrants. Future cohorts may be different due to changes in migration policies, selection criteria and source countries. Different cohorts also face different social policy environments and different economic conditions on arrival in Australia that will affect their settlement experiences and outcomes.

The indicators presented in this report do not take account of migrants' origins. However, they can also be examined by migrants' birthplace or other measures of origin to examine the impact of cultural differences in the settlement process.

Being based on quantitative data, the indicators do not provide information on the qualitative aspects of settlement. Aspects of the settlement process that are difficult to measure with quantitative data include those relating to family relationships, social networks, value systems and cultural adjustment.

The indicators are very broad measures of social and economic participation and economic and physical wellbeing. Measures of social participation that are more narrowly focussed such as participation in sporting, cultural and other social activities have not been considered.

Since the indicators are based on data relating to specific time points, it is suggested that they be updated periodically. Those based on the census ideally should be updated every five years, following each Census. Those based on surveys should also be updated following each round of the survey.

Further research

This study is a first attempt at developing a set of indicators that measure immigrants' social and economic participation and wellbeing and are readily available from statistical databases. The study raises several issues for further research.

The first relates to the concepts of settlement success and the roles of social and economic participation and wellbeing in contributing to settlement success. These are complex issues that need to be explored further. Indicators developed in this study are based on implicit assumptions about these concepts. The assumptions need to be examined with empirical data in different contexts.

Some work on measuring wellbeing in Australia is currently being undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and a publication is forthcoming in the next few months. ABS is also undertaking developmental work on the measurement of social capital that may have implications for the measurement of immigrant settlement success. ABS will also conduct a General Social Survey in 2002 that will provide additional data on social participation, economic participation, economic wellbeing and physical wellbeing.

Summary

Despite the limitations of the indicators used in this study, the analysis produces a very clear picture that settlement success of immigrants in Australia is, in the main, a matter of time. On most indicators, most migrants are disadvantaged in the early period of settlement but the disadvantage tends to disappear over a period of about ten years. Analysis of the results by visa category indicates that this general level of success is related to the emphasis upon age, skills, qualifications and English language capacity in the selection processes applied in the Australian migration programme.

The principal exception to this picture of settlement success is those who arrive in Australia under the Humanitarian Program. This group is heavily disadvantaged at the

time of arrival and remains so on all measures after the first 3½ years of settlement, even when other characteristics such as age, qualifications and English proficiency are taken into account. Data on the economic participation of former refugees with more than 10 years residence appear to indicate that disadvantage is a feature of their lives even after a long period of settlement. Given that former refugees are concentrated among those with low qualifications and poor English skills, the disadvantage is multiple and warrants further research.

The study also indicates that the four dimensions of immigrant settlement outcomes – social participation, economic participation, economic wellbeing and physical wellbeing – are highly correlated with one another and form an interlinked system. It is therefore impossible to differentiate between their relative importance as measures of settlement success.

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