Relative Health Selection of Recent Immigrants in Canada and the United States

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Abstract

Canada and the U.S. are two major immigrant-receiving countries characterized by different immigration policies and health care systems. The present study examines the relative health selection of immigrants in the two countries. We use 10 years of U.S. National Health Interview Survey and Canadian Community Health Survey data to compare a range of health indicators of recent immigrants in the two countries. Results suggest a more positive health selection of immigrants to Canada compared to the U.S., especially with respect to overweight and serious chronic conditions. We conduct a series of analyses to identify plausible explanations and find that much of the difference can be attributed to differences in immigration policies. The greater emphasis on skill-based immigration in Canada has led to a selection pattern of immigrants from different source regions and with higher human capital than in the U.S., both with health implications. This is likely to be coupled with the emphasis in Canada’s immigrant health screening on identifying costly health conditions, which can deter immigrants with such conditions from applying or subject them to rejection in admission.