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A Review of Selective Mutism in Immigrant Children [Poster]

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A Review of Selective Mutism in Immigrant Children

Lauren Cummings

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Introduction

- Selective mutism is an anxiety disorder that is characterized by a child's lack of verbal communication, despite having the ability to speak.
- Children with selective mutism typically exhibit higher rates of communication, cognitive, and psychiatric disorders later in life if they do not receive intervention.
- The prevalence of selective mutism is between 0.71-2.0% of children in the general population. However, studies have shown that as many as 22% of children who are immigrants have selective mutism.
- As the number of immigrants in the United States increases, it is important to examine why selective mutism rates are much higher in immigrant children than in the general population.

Central Themes

- Effects of immigration trauma on language development.
- Considerations for assessment and treatment for selective mutism in immigrant children.
- Association between anxiety disorders and communication disorders

Etiology of Selective Mutism

- The etiology of selective mutism is unknown because of the conflicting and limited data regarding the disorder.
 - Most researchers agree that selective mutism is likely due to a complex interaction of many factors, including anxious temperament, environmental factors, genetics, and neurodevelopmental disorders.
- Many researchers see social anxiety as the root cause of selective mutism and believe that the mutism behavior is a coping mechanism for the child.
 - A recent study found 69% of children with selective mutism are also diagnosed with a social anxiety disorder.
- Several studies have shown that parents of children with selective mutism have higher levels of anxiety compared to parents in the control groups.
- Other researchers have found an association between neurodevelopmental disorders and selective mutism.
 - A study found 46.3% of children with selective mutism met the criteria for a neurodevelopmental disorder/delay, compared to 0.9% of the children in the control group

Immigrant Growth in Des Moines

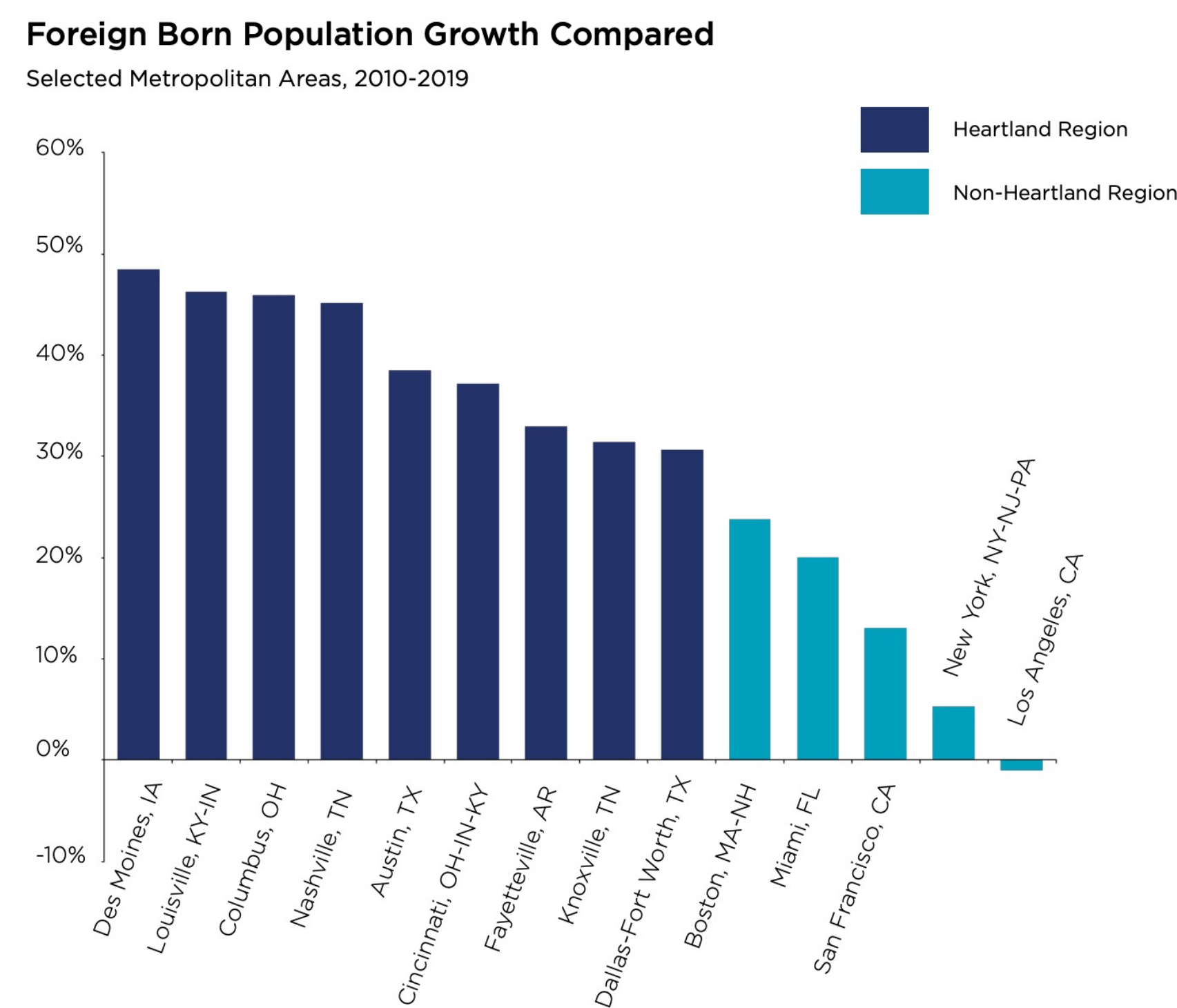


Figure 1: Foreign Born Population Growth Compared

Immigration

- Immigrants and their children make up 28% of the United States, with 18 million children having at least one immigrant parent.
- The number of immigrants who are moving to Des Moines, Iowa have increased significantly over the past decade.
- For many children and families, immigration can be traumatic due to the extreme process of arriving to a new country, the familial struggle of a cultural transition, and a potential loss of a first language.
- Traumatic experiences in early childhood have been associated with language, developmental, and behavioral disorders.
- During the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of immigrant children with selective mutism, special consideration is given due to the traumatic events and their effects.

Data

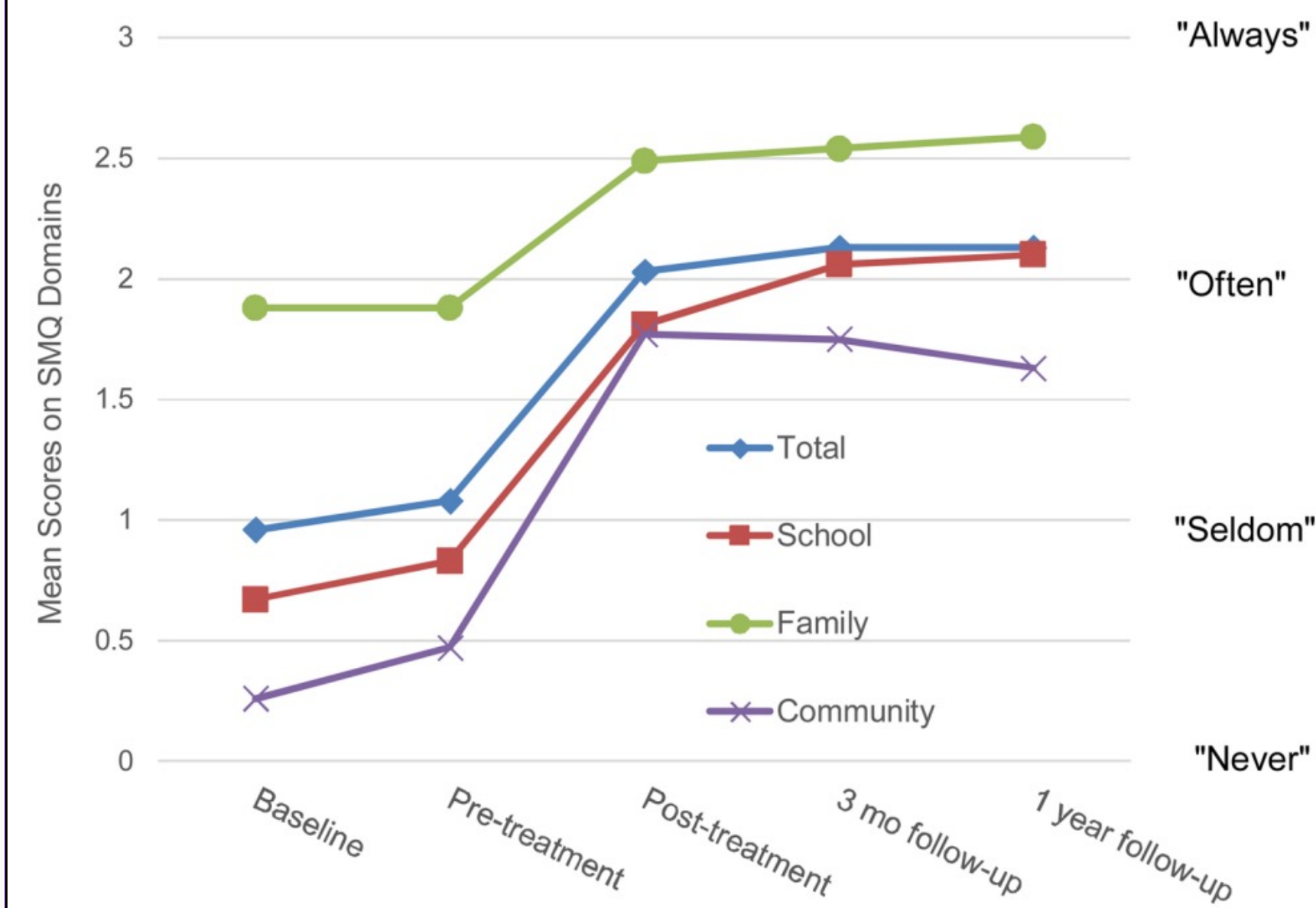


Figure 2: Mean Scores on SMQ Domains

Diagnosis and Assessment

- Diagnosing immigrant and bilingual children with selective mutism is complex because many children experience a nonverbal period when they are acquiring a second language.
- There is a strict criteria for diagnosing children who are learning English with selective mutism due to the difficult second language acquisition process.
- The clinician will collect information about the child's language history, their second language development, and their fluency in all the languages that they speak.

Intervention

- Early intervention is extremely important for the child's overall development and is most effective when the intervention begins close to the time of the diagnosis.
- Treatment has been found to be effective in minimizing selective mutism symptoms, such as increasing verbal communication, and decreasing internalizing behaviors and anxiety.
- When a bilingual and immigrant child is receiving services for selective mutism, there are additional considerations for their intervention.
 - The clinician should determine what language the intervention should be conducted in and how to best communicate with the child's family to provide a support system.
- There are many theories and approaches for intervention for children with selective mutism, but a multimodal approach that focuses on behavior and family systems intervention has been shown to be the most effective.

Conclusion

- Selective mutism is a disorder that requires immediate and comprehensive treatment to minimize the further effects.
- Without the proper intervention, children with selective mutism may struggle in school and later in their occupational field.
- Immigrants who are bilingual are at a much higher risk of being diagnosed with selective mutism.
- Speech-language pathologists, and other professionals on the multidisciplinary team, must be educated on the proper assessment, diagnosis, and treatment procedures for immigrant children with selective mutism.
- Community support is important for encouraging second language acquisition in immigrant children.
- More research is needed to examine why immigrant children are more likely to be diagnosed with selective mutism.

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