

# The Association Between Generational Status and Well-Being

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## Introduction

- Research shows that the process of assimilation can have a negative effect on immigrant health over time. On average, first-generation immigrants exhibit stronger health indicators upon arrival, but they diminish in the second generation. (Bostean, 2013; Hamilton, 2011; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], 2023)
- While this association has been established in existing scholarship, few studies have integrated multiple wellbeing indicators to compare first- and second-generation immigrants within the same analytic model. Most studies focus on a single dimension of wellbeing – such as income or physical health – rather than a holistic view of how immigrants report and experience life satisfaction, mental health, and financial stability (Rumbaut & Portes, 2014) (consolidate with one above)
- There is limited research using nationally representative data to explore how health, happiness, and financial satisfaction intersect across immigrant generations. Addressing this gap can help clarify whether improvements in socioeconomic outcomes among the second generation are accompanied by gains in subjective and emotional wellbeing, or whether structural and cultural stressors continue to have lasting effects.

## Methods

### Sample

- Respondents (n=556) were drawn from the 2021 General Social Survey (GSS). The GSS is a nationally representative survey of the adult, non-institutionalized U.S. population conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago (2022)

### Measures

- Wellbeing was assessed using variables from the 2021 GSS, which includes questions on demographic, economic, health, and subjective wellbeing characteristics.
- A wellbeing score was created by making a subset of the full GSS data and selecting only columns related to physical, mental, or social health. These include self-reported variables such as level of life satisfaction, level of happiness, and mental health ratings.
- The data was reverse coded and scored from either 1-3 or 1-5 based on responses in the codebook. The scores were then added together to create a composite wellbeing score.
- Those with family income higher than \$100,000 were categorized as “high”, those with family income between \$70-100,000 were categorized as “mid-high”, those with family income between \$30-70,000 were categorized as mid-low, and those with family income between \$0-30,000 were categorized as “low”.
- Respondents were categorized as first-generation – U.S.-born, whose parents were not U.S.-born – or second-generation – U.S.-born whose grandparents were foreign born but parents were U.S.-born.

## Research Questions

- Does generational status (first or second generation) in the United States impact immigrant livelihood and wellbeing?
- To what degree does income affect immigrant livelihood?

## Results

### Univariate

- Second generation immigrants are shown to have a mean wellbeing score of 20.7, and first generation immigrants are shown to have a mean wellbeing score of 19.4 (See Figure 1)

### Bivariate

- An Analysis of Variance Analysis (ANOVA) test showed that there is a significant relationship between generation status and wellbeing ( $P=.003$ ). Second generation immigrants have a wellbeing score of 1.5 points higher than first generation immigrants (coefficient: 1.4999)
- Using ANOVA again, the analysis finds a significant relationship between generation status and income ( $P=0.04$ ), suggesting that second generation people make \$15,110 more on average (Coefficient = 1.511)

### Multivariate

- When accounting for generational status, race, sex, and family income, generational status and family income were statistically significant ( $P=0.031$ ,  $P=0.000$  respectively)
- Sex ( $P=.896$ ) and race ( $P=.352$ ) do not impact the relationship between generation status and wellbeing score after controlling for income

### Multivariate cont.

The study finds that the wellbeing score generally increases with income (See Figure 2)

- According to the line plot, second generation immigrants have higher wellbeing scores within every income category than first generation immigrants

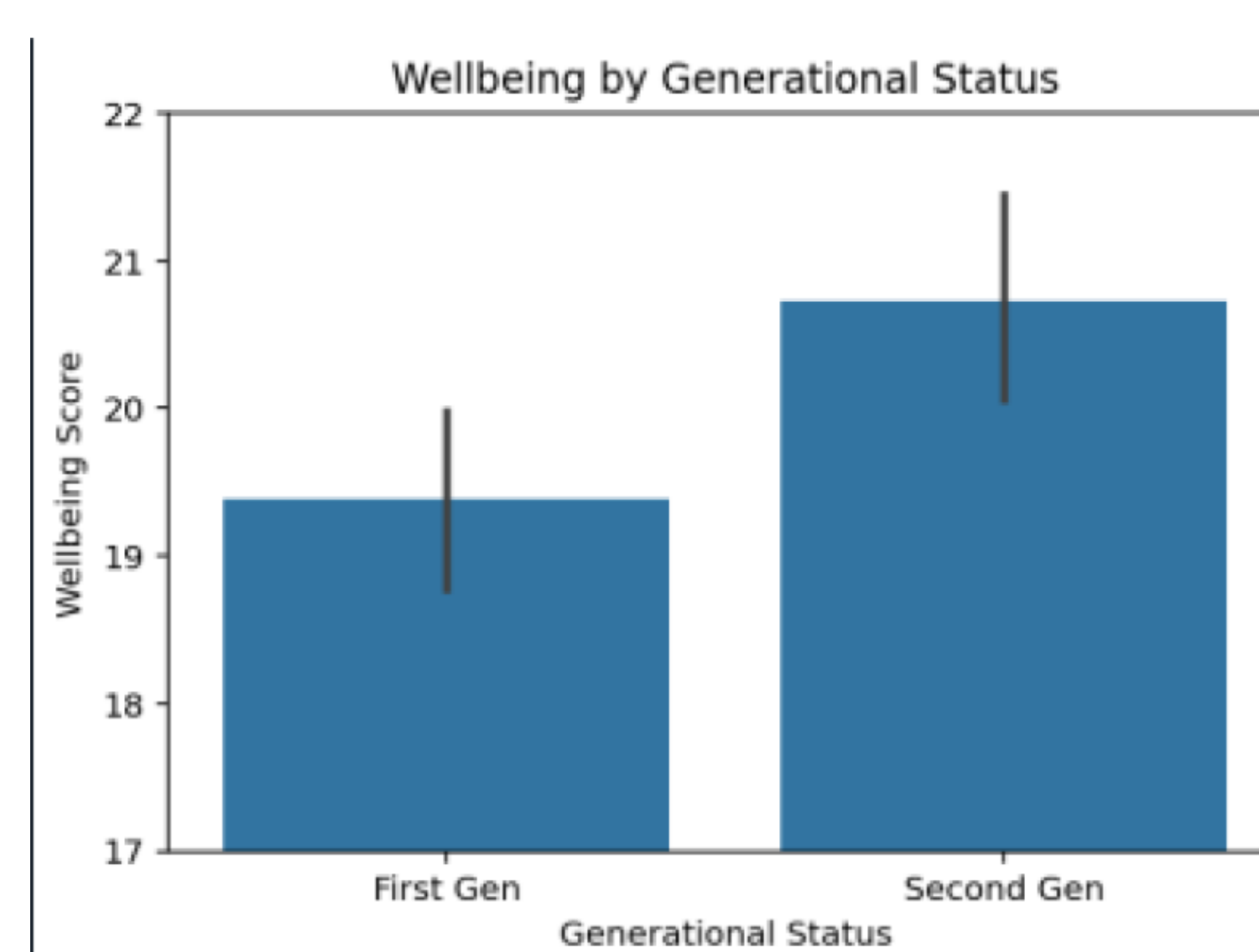


Figure 1. Wellbeing scores of first and second generation immigrants.

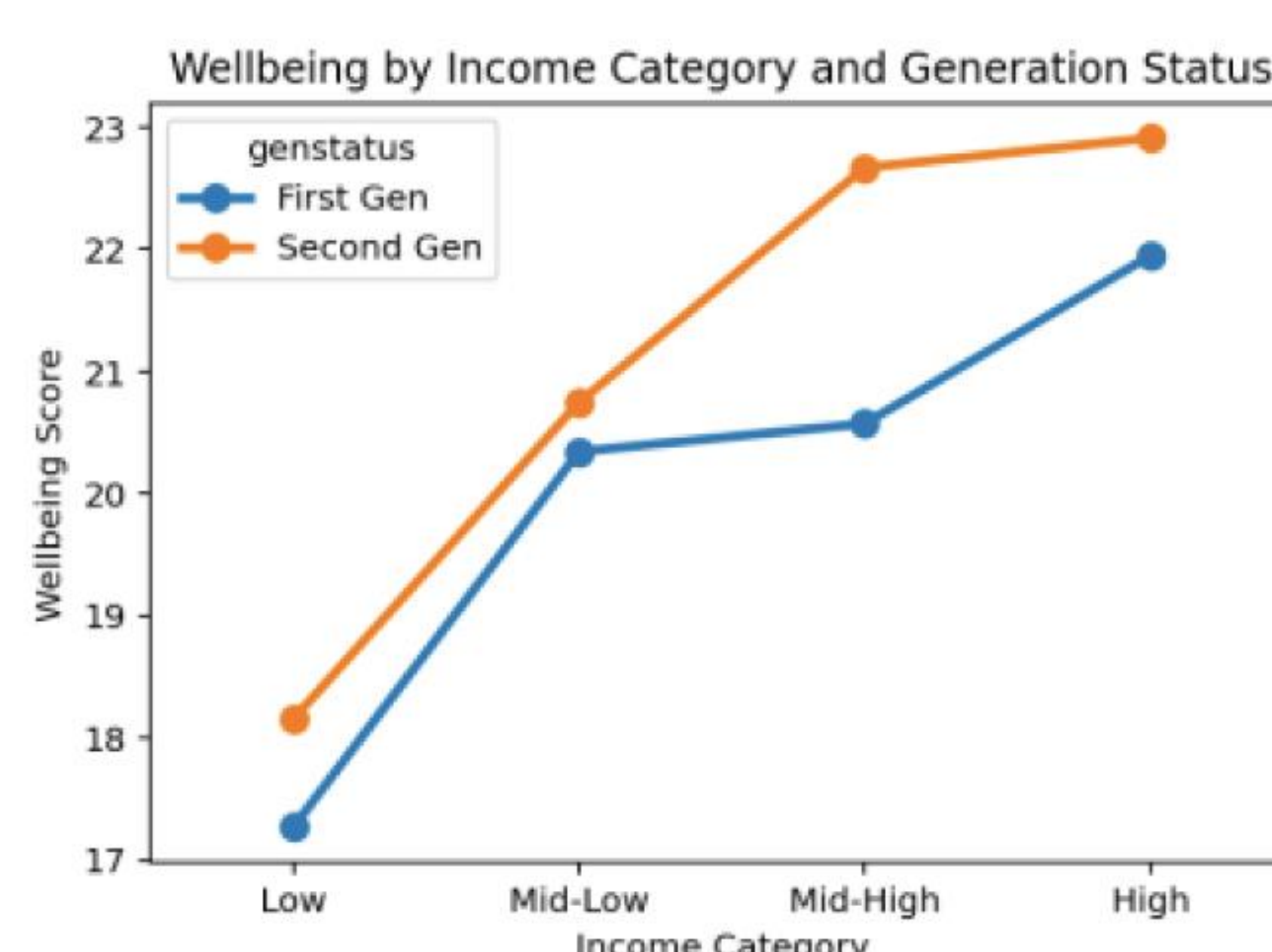


Figure 2. Wellbeing of immigrants as it corresponds with income level and generation status.

## Discussion

- The significant correlation between generation status and wellbeing disagrees with the findings of the literature that first generation immigrants exhibit higher health.
- Data from the GSS show that second generation immigrants have a higher wellbeing score than first generation.
- Data from the GSS show that second generation immigrants have a significantly higher family income, which is found to significantly correlate with wellbeing score.
- After controlling for income, sex and race had no significance with wellbeing score, suggesting that income and generation status are the primary variables associated with wellbeing in this analysis.
- Further research is needed and should include a larger sample size. This research should focus on physical health, marital status, and other potential health indicators that aren't factored into this analysis.

### References

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