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RECENT LATINO IMMIGRANTS TO MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA: A CHARACTERIZATION OF PRE- AND POST-IMMIGRATION TRAVEL

BACKGROUND: Understanding the preferred and frequently used modes of transportation among the U.S. population is crucial for urban planners to design and promote efficient, equitable, and sustainable living environments. Recent immigrants constitute a population group whose transportation needs have been severely understudied. Current consensus indicates that immigrants' travel needs and usage differ from their U.S.-born counterparts and that these differences evolve over time. Most of this understanding is based on research obtained from immigrants who have been in the U.S. for an extended period of time. This study aims to provide a characterization of the travel decisions made by recent Latinx immigrants (RLIs) within the first year of arrival to Miami-Dade County, Florida, and to examine whether those early travel patterns relate to pre-immigration travel behaviors

METHOD: This ongoing longitudinal study follows a cohort of 550 young adult RLIs (within a year of arrival). Participants were 18-34 years old, who immigrated from a Latin American country with the intention of staying in the United States for at least 3-years. Respondent-driven sampling was the primary recruitment strategy. Baseline (pre-immigration) information was elicited retrospectively.

RESULTS: Participants used multiple modes of transportation, with variations by immigrants' sex, income, and country of origin. Unlike previous studies, there was a relatively high prevalence of driving, particularly among men. An important and novel finding is that transportation choices made by immigrants soon after arrival are highly influenced by travel patterns in their country of origin.

CONCLUSION: The relatively high driving rates of the RLIs in our sample seems to reflect the uniqueness of the Miami-Dade Co. population, which compared with immigrants to other regions of the country, shows higher levels of affluency and educational achievement. Limited transit opportunities in the area may have also contributed to this finding. The finding that post-immigration travel patterns are strongly influenced by the pre-immigration travel patterns suggests the need for travel planners to take RLIs' culture and embedded travel behaviors into account when addressing this population travel needs.