

The State of Latino Children and Youth in the United States

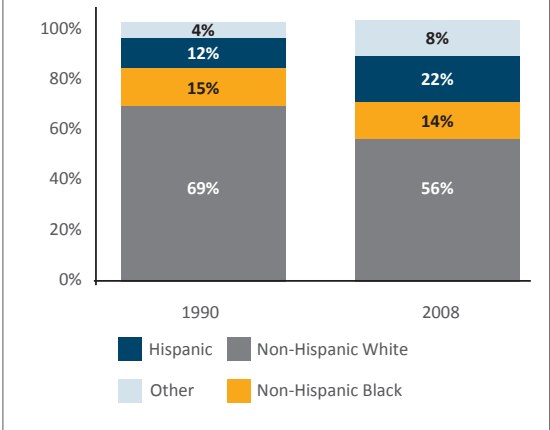
Since 1990, the number of Latino children under age 18 living in the United States has doubled, making them one of the fastest-growing segments of the national population (see Figure 1). Significantly, of the 16 million Latino children currently living in the U.S., nine out of ten are U.S.-born citizens. Clearly, Latino children and youth—our future workers, voters, taxpayers, and consumers—are poised to become a critical part of the country’s economic, social, and political well-being.

Latino families have many strengths, including stability, youth, a commitment to the health and welfare of their children, a strong work ethic, and an ability to develop cohesive communities. However, Latino children also face unique and substantial challenges, and their circumstances can vary widely depending on their parents’ countries of origin, education levels, English language ability, and income. Poverty levels in particular remain unacceptably high among Latino children: while 32% of children living in poverty in 2007 were Latino, it is projected that by 2030 that portion will rise to 44% if the trend remains constant. The information that follows paints a broad portrait of today’s Latino children and youth, highlighting particular areas of concern that must be addressed by our policies and programs in order to ensure the future well-being of this population. Attending to the needs of Latino children and youth will lead not only to improved opportunities in Latino communities, but to the success of our entire nation.

Family Composition

- Having an immigrant parent can prevent children from accessing important benefits to which they are entitled, including education and health services. More than three out of five (62%) Latino children live in families in which at least one parent is an immigrant, and more than one in ten lives in a mixed-status family with one parent who is U.S.-born and one parent who was born outside of the United States (see Figure 2).
- Having two parents living at home may serve as a protective factor for children, especially among Latinos, who place particular importance on families.¹ In 2007, while a majority of Latino children lived in two-parent households, about 37% lived in single-parent families, compared with 23% of White children and 65% of Black children.

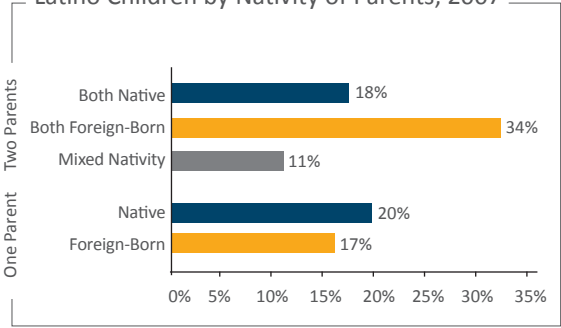
FIGURE 1:
Distribution of Children by Race/Ethnicity, 1990 and 2008



Note: Estimates for Whites, Blacks, and others are for those who identify with only one race.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, “Annual State Resident Population Estimates for 6 Race Groups (5 Race Alone Groups and One Group with Two or more Race Groups) by Age, Sex, and Hispanic Origin: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2008.” Washington, DC, 2009, <http://www.census.gov/popest/datasets.html> (accessed Sept. 25, 2009); National Center for Health Statistics, “Bridged-race intercensal estimates of the July 1, 1990-July 1, 1999, United States resident population by county, single-year of age, sex, race, and Hispanic origin.” U.S. Census Bureau with support from the National Cancer Institute. Washington, DC, 2004, http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/bridged_race/data_documentation.htm#inter1 (accessed September 25, 2009).

FIGURE 2:
Latino Children by Nativity of Parents, 2007



Source: Population Reference Bureau calculation of the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2007 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) 1-Year Data, http://factfinder.census.gov/home/en/acs_pums_2007_1yr.html (accessed September 25, 2009).

Poverty and Income

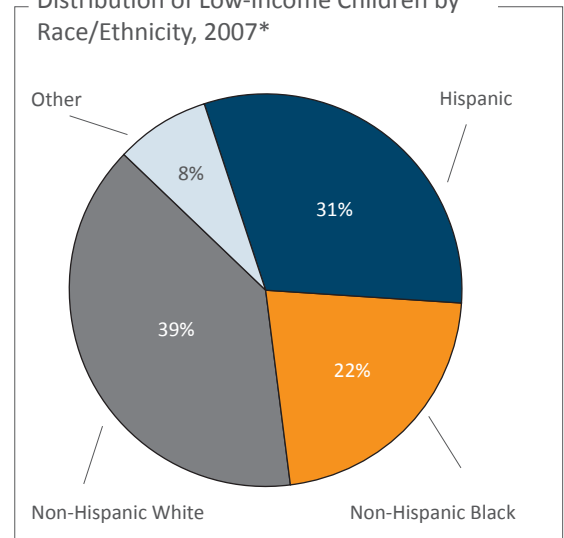
- Economic hardship can adversely affect a child’s development in domains that are fundamental to later success. In 2007, Latino children were particularly at risk, as more than one-quarter (28%) were poor, which is more than double the share of White children (11%) but below the poverty rate for Black children (34%) (see Figure 3). About one in ten Latino children lived in deep poverty—in families with income less than 50% of the official poverty threshold.*
- Children in lower-income families have worse health and educational outcomes, are more likely to experience parental divorce and live in single-parent families, and are more likely to experience violent crime, compared to children growing up in more affluent families.² Relatively high employment rates keep most Latino families out of deep poverty, but Latino children account for a disproportionate share (31%) of children in families with incomes below 200% of the poverty threshold. Many Latino parents, especially first-generation immigrants from Latin America, work in low-wage service, manufacturing, and agricultural occupations with few benefits or worker protections.
- Many Latino and Black children are doubly disadvantaged because they live in high-poverty neighborhoods that are socially and economically isolated from more affluent communities. In 2007, more than one-third of Latino children lived in neighborhoods that had poverty rates of 20% or higher at the time of the 2000 Census.³

Education

- High-quality early childhood education is a critical stepping stone in helping children succeed in school and become productive adults later in life. However, Latino children are underrepresented in early childhood education programs. In 2005–2006, 27% of Latino four-year-olds lacked regular (nonparental) arrangements for child care, compared with 18% of White preschoolers and 16% of Black preschoolers.
- Teenagers who drop out of high school are at a severe disadvantage in terms of future employment opportunities and potential earnings, and Latino youth are less likely than other groups to graduate from high school. About 76% of Whites who enter ninth grade complete twelfth grade with a regular diploma, compared with only 55% of Latino youth and 51% of Black youth (see Figure 4). Male youth are less likely than female youth to complete high school, especially among Latinos and Blacks.

* In 2008, the poverty threshold for a family of four, including two children, was \$21,834.

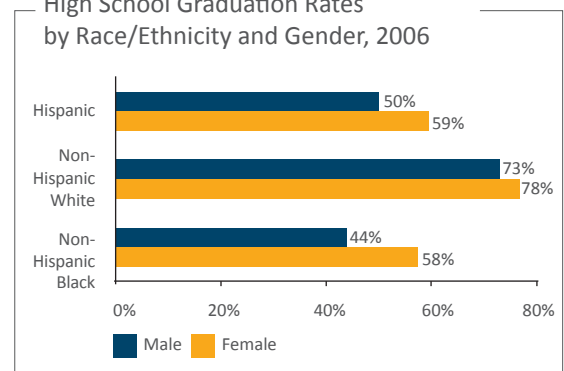
FIGURE 3:
Distribution of Low-Income Children by Race/Ethnicity, 2007*



* Estimates for Whites, Blacks, and others are for those who identify with only one race. “Low-income” indicates 200% below the federal poverty level (FPL). FPL for 2007 is defined as \$21,027 for a family of four.

Source: Population Reference Bureau calculation of the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2007 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) 1-Year Data, http://factfinder.census.gov/home/en/acs_pums_2007_1yr.html (accessed September 25, 2009).

FIGURE 4:
High School Graduation Rates by Race/Ethnicity and Gender, 2006



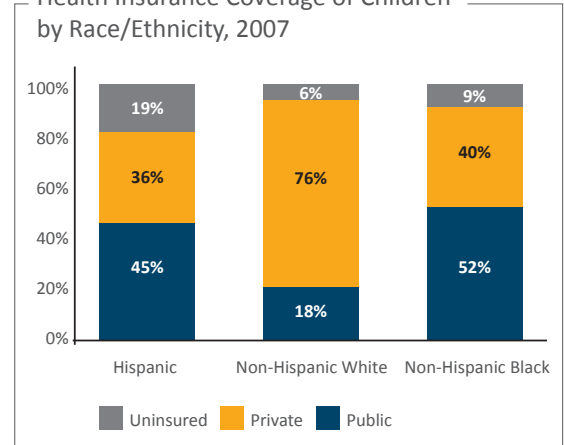
Source: Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, “Graduation rates (cumulative promotion indices) for students by race and gender, 2006,” EdCounts Database, <http://www.edcounts.org/createtable/step1.php> (accessed September 25, 2009).

Health

- Children without insurance are 18 times more likely than children with continuous private health coverage to have unmet needs for medical care.⁴ In 2007, 19% of Latino children lacked health insurance, compared with 9% of Blacks and just 6% of Whites (see Figure 5). Among Latino children who had health insurance, more than half were covered through public health insurance programs such as Medicaid or the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), which provide affordable care for low-income working families.
- High rates of overweight/obesity among Latino children put this population at higher risk of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, asthma, hypertension, and other health problems.⁵ Over the past 30 years, the share of overweight or obese children ages 6 to 11 has nearly tripled, while the rate among adolescents has doubled.⁶ In 2007, 41% of Latino and Black children were overweight or obese, compared with 27% of White children.

FIGURE 5:

Health Insurance Coverage of Children by Race/Ethnicity, 2007



Note: Estimates for Whites, Blacks, and others are for those who identify with only one race.

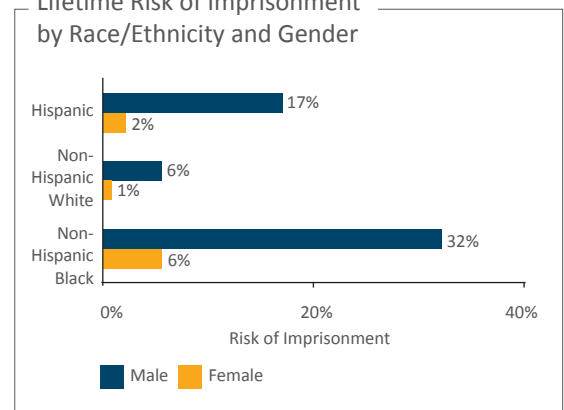
Source: Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative, “2007 National Survey of Children’s Health”, The Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health, <http://www.nschdata.org/DataQuery/SurveyAreas.aspx?yid=2> (accessed September 25, 2009).

Juvenile Justice

- Based on current incarceration rates, about one in six Latino males—and one in three Black males—will be imprisoned at some point during their lifetimes (see Figure 6).⁷ In 2006, there were more than 19,000 Latino youth incarcerated in the United States, mostly for nonviolent offenses. However, these numbers underestimate the actual number of incarcerated youth. Indeed, a recent report found that one in four incarcerated Latino youth were held in adult prisons, which are less likely to offer age-appropriate educational, health, and counseling services.⁸

FIGURE 6:

Lifetime Risk of Imprisonment by Race/Ethnicity and Gender



Source: Thomas P. Bonczar, *Prevalence of Imprisonment in the U.S. Population, 1974-2001*. Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report. Washington, DC, 2003, <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/piusp01.pdf> (accessed September 25, 2009).

A larger state-level report to be released next year by the National Council of La Raza will provide information about regional variations in the well-being of Latino children and families, as well as key trends since 2000.

Endnotes

¹ Glenn Flores and J. Brotanek, "The Healthy Immigrant Effect: A Greater Understanding Might Help Us Improve the Health of All Children," *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* 159 (2005): 295-297.

² Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, Greg J. Duncan, and Nancy Maritato, "Poor Families, Poor Outcomes: The Well-Being of Children and Youth," in *Consequences of Growing Up Poor*, eds. Greg J. Duncan and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1997), 1-17; Eugene M. Lewit, Donna L. Terman, and Richard E. Behrman, "Children and Poverty: Analysis and Recommendations," *The Future of Children* 7, no. 2 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2007), http://futureofchildren.org/futureofchildren/publications/docs/07_02_Analysis.pdf (accessed September 25, 2009).

³ Mark Mather and Nadwa Mossaad, *Children in High Poverty and Distressed Neighborhoods: Results Since 2000* (Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau, 2009).

⁴ Lynn M. Olson, Suk-fong S. Tang, and Paul W. Newacheck, "Children in the United States With Discontinuous Health Insurance Coverage," *The New England Journal of Medicine* 353, no. 4 (2005): Table 4, <http://content.nejm.org/cgi/content/full/353/4/382/T4> (accessed September 25, 2009).

⁵ Food Research and Action Center, *Obesity, Food Insecurity, and the Federal Child Nutrition Programs: Understanding the Linkages* (Washington, DC: Food Research and Action Center, 2005), http://www.frac.org/pdf/obesity05_paper.pdf (accessed September 25, 2009).

⁶ Institute of Medicine, *Childhood Obesity in the United States: Facts and Figures* (Washington, DC: Institute of Medicine of the National Academies, 2004), <http://www.iom.edu/Object.File/Master/22/606/FINALfactsandfigures2.pdf> (accessed Sept. 25, 2009).

⁷ Thomas P. Bonczar, *Prevalence of Imprisonment in the U.S. Population, 1974-2001*. Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report. Washington, DC, 2003, <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/piusp01.pdf> (accessed September 25, 2009).

⁸ National Council of La Raza, *American's Invisible Children: Latino Youth and the Failure of Justice* (Washington, DC: National Council of La Raza, 2009), <http://www.nclr.org/content/publications/detail/57405> (accessed September 25, 2009).