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“Family Circumstances of Children in Immigrant Families:
Looking to the Future of America.”

Family Circumstances of Children in Immigrant Families

Looking to the Future of America

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Demography is the scientific study of human population change due to births, deaths, and migration, including changes in the size, distribution, composition, and characteristics of human populations. More broadly, demography studies the social, economic, cultural, and biological causes and consequences of population change. Thus, *immigration*—the movement of persons from one country to another with the purpose of permanently changing their place of residence—and the characteristics of immigrants are central to many demographic studies. This chapter presents a demographic portrait of children in immigrant families, that is, children who have at least one foreign-born parent.

The focus is on the family circumstances of children because families are important to society; they bear immediate and direct responsibility for rearing children, for creating and nurturing the next generation of parents, workers, and citizens. This is no less true for immigrant families than for others. The enormous rise in immigration since 1965 has brought corresponding growth in the proportion of U.S. children who live in immigrant families. Insofar as the circumstances and needs of children in immigrant and native-born families differ, it is important that educators, health providers, and policymakers be attuned to these differences as they make decisions that influence the current well-being and

future prospects of the next generation. This requires an understanding of both the strengths of immigrant families and the challenges they confront to make the best use of available, but necessarily limited, public resources.

Results presented in this chapter pertain mainly to children ages 0–17 living with at least one parent, and are based on new analyses of data from Census 2000, using microdata files prepared by Ruggles and colleagues (2004). Following standard definitions in the field of demography, we define children in immigrant families as including both the first generation (foreign-born children) and the second generation (children born in the United States with at least one foreign-born parent), whereas children in native-born families are third and later generation (children and parents all born in the United States) (Hernandez & Charney, 1998). Most results discussed in this chapter, and additional indicators for many topics and additional country-of-origin and race-ethnic groups, are available at mumford.albany.edu/children/index_sg.htm, the website of the Center for Social and Demographic Analysis at the University at Albany, State University of New York.

IMMIGRATION IS LEADING TO A NEW U.S. MAJORITY

Historically, the vast majority of persons in the United States were European American, but we are in the midst of a profound transformation. Between 1960 and 2000, the percentages of all children accounted for by children in immigrant families more than tripled, from 6% to 20%, whereas the proportion of children in immigrant families with origins in Europe or Canada dropped from 71% to only 14% (Hernandez & Darke, 1999). Largely resulting from these changes, the proportion of all children who were European American dropped from near 80% in 1960 to 61% in 2000.

U.S. Census Bureau projections, based on the assumption that no major changes will occur in the magnitude and composition of immigration to the United States, indicate that most future population growth will occur due to immigration and births to immigrants and their descendants, and that the transformation of the race-ethnic composition will continue. By 2030, less than 25 years from now, the Census Bureau projects that the proportion of children who are European American will decline to about 50%, and still further during later decades (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). The corresponding rise of the new U.S. majority will not, however, lead to the emergence of a single numerically dominant group,

but instead to a mosaic of diverse race-ethnic groups from around the world. By 2030, the projections indicate that among all children, the proportions will rise to 26% Latin American, 16% African American, 5% Asian American, and 4% Native American or Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. Insofar as children in race-ethnic minority and immigrant families are highly concentrated in a few states, but also spread widely across many states, this transformation will be felt throughout much of the United States.

IMMIGRANT FAMILIES HAVE VALUABLE STRENGTHS

Most children in immigrant families live with two parents, and they often also have grandparents, other relatives, or nonrelatives in the home who provide additional nurturance or economic resources to children and their families.

Two-Parent Families Are Quite Prevalent

Children living with two parents tend, on average, to be somewhat advantaged in their educational success, compared to children in one-parent families (Cherlin, 1999; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Overall, children in immigrant families are more likely than children in native families to live with two parents (84% vs. 76%). Children in immigrant families from many regions are about as likely or more likely than European Americans in native families (85%) to have two parents in the home (including stepparents and the cohabiting partners of parents). The only exceptions are children with origins in the Caribbean at 64–70% (except Cuba) and children with origins in Cambodia (75%). Thus, large majorities of children in all immigrant and most native groups benefit from having two parents in the home, although significant portions of all groups (at least 5–20%) at any given time live with only one parent.

Many Children Have Many Siblings

Brothers and sisters can be a liability but also an asset. Insofar as the time and finances of parents are limited, they must be spread more thinly in larger families than in smaller ones. Hence, children in larger families tend, other things being equal, to experience less educational success and to complete fewer years of schooling than children with

fewer siblings (Blake, 1985, 1989; Hernandez, 1986). Siblings also, however, can serve as childcare providers for younger siblings, as companions for siblings close in age, and as an important mutual support network throughout life. Dependent siblings living at home are most likely to share available resources. Children in various groups differ substantially in the proportion living in large families with many siblings ages 0-17 in the home.

Children in U.S. immigrant families are about one-third more likely than those in native families to live in homes with four or more siblings (19% vs. 14%). The proportion living in families with four or more siblings is two or three times the levels for European Americans and Asian Americans in native families (10-11%) among children in immigrant families from Mexico, Cambodia, Thailand, Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel/Palestine, and blacks from Africa (25-32%). This percentage jumps to 38% for children with origins in Laos and enormously to 75% for the Hmong. Thus, children with immigrant origins in these nine countries/regions are more likely than others to experience both the constraints and the benefits of having many siblings.

Children Also Often Live with Other Relatives or Nonrelatives

Grandparents, other relatives, and nonrelatives in the homes of children can provide essential childcare, nurturing, or economic resources. Children in most immigrant and race-ethnic minority native-born groups are two to four times more likely than European Americans in native families to have a grandparent in the home, 10-20% versus 5%.

Some groups also are likely to have other adult relatives age 18 or older, including siblings, in the home. The proportion is 25-37% for children in immigrant families who are from Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean (except Cuba), South America, the Philippines, India, China, Pakistan/Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Iraq, and blacks from Africa. Nonrelatives in the home also are common (5-13%) among children in families from many of five regions (Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean [except Cuba], South America, and the Philippines).

Thus, many groups with large numbers of siblings also are especially likely to have grandparents, other relatives, or nonrelatives in the home who may be nurturing and providing childcare for, as well as sharing economic resources with, the immigrant children and their families. This is particularly likely to be the case for children in immigrant families from Mexico, Central America, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Indochina, and Afghanistan.

Immigrant Families Have a Strong Commitment to Work

A strong work ethic characterizes both immigrant and native families. Among children living with a father, 93% in immigrant families and 95% in native families have fathers who worked for pay during the previous year. For most specific groups the proportion is 90% or more. Most children living with mothers also have mothers who work for pay to support the family. Other adult workers also live in the homes of many children.

Thus, children in both immigrant and native race-ethnic groups live in the United States with fathers and mothers who are strongly committed to working for pay to support their families, and many groups also are likely to have additional adult workers in the home. Especially noteworthy is that, among children in immigrant families from Mexico, the largest immigrant group, 92% have working fathers. In addition, although they are among the groups least likely to have a working mother (53%), they are substantially more likely than all other native and immigrant groups, except Central Americans, to have another adult worker in the home, at 29%, compared to the next highest proportions of 20-25%, and less than 20% for most groups. Clearly, children in immigrant families live in families with strong work ethics, regardless of their race-ethnicity or immigrant origins.

IMMIGRANTS CONFRONT EDUCATIONAL AND ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

Although most children in most immigrant and native race-ethnic groups live in strong families with two parents who are working to support their families, many have parents whose educational attainments are quite limited or who cannot find full-time year-round work. Many also live in poverty and experience other difficulties as a result.

Many Children Have Parents with Limited Education

Children in immigrant families are nearly as likely as those in native families to have a father who has graduated from college (24% vs. 28%), but they are more than three times as likely to have a father who has not graduated from high school (40% vs. 12%). The level is similar (21-24%) for native race-ethnic minorities who are African American, mainland-origin Puerto Rican, Mexican, other Hispanic, and Native

American, and for children in immigrant families from most Caribbean islands. However, 37% of island-origin Puerto Ricans have fathers who have not completed high school, similar to the level experienced by children in immigrant families (33–45%) who are from the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, and Iraq. Still higher, the proportion with a father not graduating from high school rises for children in immigrant families to 48% for Cambodia, 51% for the Hmong, 53% for Central America, and 69% for Mexico.

Especially striking is that fathers of children in many groups have not entered, let alone graduated from, high school. The proportion with fathers completing only 8 years of school or less is 12–20% for island-origin Puerto Ricans and for children in immigrant families from the Dominican Republic, China (not including Taiwan or Hong Kong), Thailand, Vietnam, and Iraq, and this rises to 24% for Thailand, 29% for Laos, 30% for Central America and Cambodia, 41% for the Hmong, and 45% for Mexico. Results for mothers are broadly similar to those for fathers.

It has long been known that children whose parents have completed fewer years of schooling tend, on average, to themselves complete fewer years of schooling and to obtain lower paying jobs when they reach adulthood (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Featherman & Hauser, 1978; Sewell & Hauser, 1975; Sewell, Hauser, & Wolf, 1980). Parents whose education does not extend beyond the elementary level may be especially limited in the knowledge and experience needed to help their children succeed in school. Immigrant parents often have high educational aspirations for their children (Hernandez & Charney, 1998; Kao, 1999; Rumbaut, 1999), but may know little about the U.S. educational system, particularly if they have completed only a few years of school.

Parents with little schooling may, as a consequence, be less comfortable with the education system, less able to help their children with schoolwork, and less able to effectively negotiate with teachers and education administrators. It may be especially important for educators to focus attention on the needs of island-origin Puerto Rican children, and on children in immigrant families from Mexico and Central America, the Dominican Republic and Haiti, China, Indochina, and Iraq, because these children are especially likely to have parents who have completed only a few years of school.

Many Children Have Parents Not Working Full Time Year-Round

Despite the strong work ethic of parents, many children in immigrant families live with fathers who cannot find full-time year-round work. The pro-

portion is 30–37% for four native groups (African Americans, island-origin Puerto Ricans, Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders, Native Americans), and for 15 immigrant groups from Latin America (Mexico, Central America), the Caribbean (the Dominican Republic, Haiti), Indochina (the Hmong, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam), and West Asia (Pakistan/Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Iraq), as well as the former Soviet Union, and blacks from Africa. For these children the proportion with a father not working full time year-round approaches or exceeds twice the level experienced by European Americans in native families. Immigrant groups with high proportions of fathers not working full time year-round also tend to have fathers with low hourly wages.

Children are much more likely to have mothers than fathers who do not work full time year-round, no doubt in part because mothers often have greater responsibility for the day-to-day care of children than do fathers, but a large number of dependent siblings in the home is not necessarily a strong indication of the amount that mothers work.

Many Children Experience Poverty

Children with poverty-level incomes often lack resources for decent housing, food, clothing, books, other educational resources, childcare/early education, and health care. Children from low-income families also tend to experience a variety of negative developmental outcomes, including less success in school, lower educational attainments, and earning lower incomes during adulthood (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; McLoyd, 1998; Sewell & Hauser, 1975). Poverty rates merit considerable attention because extensive research documents that poverty has greater negative consequences than either limited mother's education or living in a one-parent family (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; McLoyd, 1998).

Children in various immigrant and race-ethnic groups differ enormously in their exposure to poverty in the United States. The official poverty rate is the measure most commonly used to assess economic need, but it has come under increasing criticism because it has not been updated since 1965 for increases in the real standard of living, and it does not account for the local cost of living (Citro & Michael, 1995; Hernandez, Denton, & Macarmey, 2006). To provide a more complete picture of economic need for children, results are presented for two alternatives that take into account federal taxes and the local cost of various goods and services (Bernstein, Brocht, & Spade-Aguilar, 2000; Boushey, Brocht, Gundersen, & Bernstein, 2001; Hernandez et al., 2006).

The first alternative measure of economic need presented here is the “baseline” Basic Budget Poverty rate, which takes into account the local

cost of food, housing, transportation for parents to commute to work, and "other necessities" such as clothing, personal care items, household supplies, telephone, television, school supplies, reading materials, music, and toys. The second, more comprehensive, Basic Budget Poverty rate takes into account, in addition, the local cost of childcare/early education and health care, although it may somewhat overestimate the effect of the cost of childcare/early education and underestimate the effect of health care costs (Hernandez et al., 2006).

The Baseline Basic Budget Poverty rate is only slightly higher than the official rate for children in native families who are European American (11% vs. 8%) or Asian American (14% vs. 8%), but the difference is much larger for the other immigrant and native groups with official poverty rates of 20% or more. For example, the Baseline Basic Budget Poverty rate for children in immigrant families from Mexico is 47%, compared to an official rate of 30%. Thus for the 11 immigrant country/region-of-origin groups and the six native race-ethnic groups with official poverty rates of 20% or more, the Baseline Basic Budget Poverty rates are between 30 and 54%, that is, about three to five times greater than for European Americans in native families.

The Baseline Basic Budget Poverty measure does not, however, take into account the cost of childcare/early childhood education, which is essential for many working parents, and which can have important beneficial consequences for the educational success of children in elementary school and beyond. It also does not take account of the cost of health insurance, which can assure timely access to preventive health care and to medical care for acute and chronic conditions, which in turn can affect the capacity of children to function effectively in school. A more comprehensive Basic Budget Poverty measure including these costs classifies about one-fourth (26–27%) of European American and Asian American children in native families as poor, compared to about one-half to four-fifths (45–82%) of children in other native race-ethnic groups, or in immigrant families from the former Soviet Union and "other" West Asia (45%); Vietnam and English-speaking Caribbean (48%); Africa (blacks only), Iraq, and Pakistan/Bangladesh (52–55%); Central America, Haiti, Cambodia, Laos, and Afghanistan (62–65%); Mexico and the Dominican Republic (73%); and the Hmong (82%).

In European countries, children have access to nearly universal preschool and national health insurance programs, but this is not the case in the United States. Comparable child poverty rates are 2–10% in the six European countries of Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, and Sweden (Hernandez et al., 2006; UNICEF, 2005). Thus, taking into account the full range of needs of children and families, including childcare/early education and health care, no more than one in 10 chil-

dren in several major European countries live in poverty, compared to one in four European American and Asian American children in native families, and between one-half and four-fifths of children in many immigrant and native race-ethnic groups.

Residential Stability and Homeownership

Immigrants are, by definition, distinguished by the fact that they were born in another country. Continuing relationships of immigrants with their origin countries, and the possibility of returning, lead some observers to question their commitment to the United States. Although temporary visits and permanent returns to the country of origin surely occur, 68% of children in immigrant families live with parents who have lived in the United States 10 years or more. In fact, among children in immigrant families, the proportion (28%) with a nonimmigrant parent who was born in the United States is nearly as high as the proportion (32%) with a parent who has lived in the United States fewer than 10 years.

Children in immigrant families also live in families with rates of homeownership and residential stability that are not greatly different from children in native families. The proportion living in homes owned by their parents or the householder is more than one-half, at 55% for children in immigrant families, compared to 70% for children in native families, a difference of only 15 percentage points. The homeownership gap is even smaller if similar subgroups are compared. Thus, many children in immigrant families have parents who are making strong financial investments in and commitments to their local communities by purchasing their own homes.

Children in immigrant and native families also have similar rates of 5-year residential mobility, 52% and 45%, respectively. There is little variation across groups. Thus, migration rates for children also indicate that immigrant and native families have broadly similar commitments to staying in (or moving from) their local communities. Children in various groups are broadly similar in the challenges and opportunities presented by changes in residence or by remaining in their communities for longer periods of time.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY IN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

Because children in immigrant families live with at least one parent who was born in and moved from another country, many have parents

whose first language is not English. As a consequence, many parents and children are limited in their English proficiency, whereas others are in the process of becoming bilingual, presenting both formidable challenges and valuable opportunities to schools, health providers, social service organizations, and other public and private agencies. Policies to implement family literacy programs and dual-language programs would be especially useful, as would outreach in the country-of-origin languages of immigrants by organizations serving immigrant populations.

Some Children Are Limited English Proficient, but Many Are Potentially Bilingual

Limited English proficiency among children in immigrant families may be a barrier to success in English-only schools. Overall, 26% of children ages 5-17 in immigrant families are limited English proficient. Of course, the proportions of limited English proficient are quite low for children in immigrant families from some countries, particularly if English is widely spoken in the origin country.

The percentages of limited English proficient is quite high, however, for children who are Hmong (51%) or in immigrant families from Mexico (38%); China, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam (33-37%); or Central America, the Dominican Republic, Thailand, or the former Soviet Union (27-29%). Proportions of limited English proficient are somewhat lower but substantial at 20-24% for children in immigrant families from Haiti, South America, Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Pakistan/Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

Although many children in immigrant families are limited English proficient (26%), nearly twice as many (46%) speak a language other than English at home, but also speak English very well. These children are well positioned to become fluent bilingual speakers. The highest proportions (50-66%) are found for children in immigrant families from Mexico, Central America, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, South America, China, Taiwan, Laos, India, Pakistan/Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and other West Asia countries. Even among children in immigrant families from Mexico with the second highest proportion of limited English proficient (38%), a large 53% speak Spanish at home but also speak English very well. Thus, with appropriate support from schools for both languages, these children might become proficient in both languages. Bilingual speakers are a valuable economic resource for the United States in the global economy, and policies to make dual-language programs available to all U.S. children would enhance competitiveness in the global marketplace.

Many Children Have Parents with Limited English Proficiency

Parents with limited English skills are less likely to find well-paid full-time year-round employment than English-fluent parents, and they may be less able to help their children with school subjects taught in English. Insofar as early education, health, and social service institutions do not provide outreach to immigrants in the language of their country of origin, parents in immigrant families may be cut off from accessing programs important to their children and themselves. Immigrant groups with large proportions of limited English proficient parents also often are ones with limited parental education, high proportions not working full time year-round, and high proportions earning low wages.

For example, the highest proportions with a limited English proficient father are for children in immigrant families who are Hmong (80%), or from Mexico, Central America, the Dominican Republic, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam (60-70%). The percent with a limited English proficient father is also very high for children in immigrant families from China, Thailand, and the former Soviet Union (55-57%), and from Haiti, South America, Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand, Afghanistan, and Iraq (40-48%). Results for mothers are generally similar. Policies assuring outreach in country-of-origin languages by education, health, and social service organizations could help to ensure that children and families receive needed services.

Many Children Live in Linguistically Isolated Households

Many children with limited English proficient parents are themselves fluent in English or have an older sibling, another relative, or another adult in the home who is fluent in English. Linguistically isolated households are defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as households where no one over age 13 speaks English exclusively or very well. One-fourth (26%) of children in immigrant families live in linguistically isolated households, and the proportion is at least this high for children from a dozen countries/regions distinguished here.

Children in these families may be largely isolated from English-speaking society and institutions. Insofar as most or all family members in linguistically isolated households would benefit from learning English, not only for day-to-day interaction with the broader society but also as a means of improving education and work opportunities, two-generational family literacy programs offer an especially promising vehicle for public policies to facilitate the integration and foster the well-being of both children and parents in immigrant families.

POLICIES FOR EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND ECONOMIC SUPPORT

Beyond policies and programs that would foster English language proficiency and bilingualism, three additional policy arenas with important implications for the well-being, development, and future prospects of children in immigrant families focus on education, health, and economic resources. These are extremely complex topics that cannot be discussed in detail in this chapter. Data from Census 2000 do, however, provide a strong basis for a broad analysis of immigrant circumstances regarding the earliest years of education (pre-K/nursery school enrollment), and a key immigrant eligibility criterion for economic support programs (citizenship), whereas the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey provides the capacity for assessing health insurance coverage for a limited set of immigrant groups. These data provide the foundation for a discussion in this section of several key policy issues for children in immigrant families.

Pre-K/Nursery School Enrollment Rates Differ Greatly

Early education programs have been found to promote school readiness and educational success in elementary school and beyond (Gormley, Gayer, Phillips, & Dawson, 2005; Haskins & Rouse, 2005; Lynch, 2004). Research suggests that children with low family incomes and limited English proficiency may be most likely to benefit from early education programs (Gormley & Gayer, 2005; Takanishi, 2004), but children in several groups challenged by these circumstances are less likely than European Americans and the other groups noted above to be enrolled in early education programs. The overall difference in enrollment rates between children in immigrant and native families is accounted for mainly by five immigrant groups who experience high rates of poverty and limited English proficiency. The enrollment rates for these groups at age 3 are only 18–28% for children with origins in Mexico, Central America, Indochina, Iraq, and Pakistan/Bangladesh, compared to 37% for children in native families, and 43–49%, respectively at age 4, compared to 63% for children in native families. Children in native families who are Mexican also have low age-3 and age-4 enrollment rates, at 28% and 52%, respectively, as well as high poverty rates, and substantial proportions of limited English proficient parents.

What accounts for these very low enrollment rates? One reason sometimes cited, particularly for Latin American immigrants, is more familistic cultural values with parents desiring that their children be cared for at home, in preference to care by nonrelatives in formal educa-

tional settings (Liang, Fuller, & Singer, 2000; Takanishi, 2004; Urtal, 1999). But alternative explanations include the following socioeconomic or structural factors (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2007). First, early education programs are costly, but most low-income families eligible for childcare assistance receive none because of limited funding (Mezey, Greenberg, & Schumacher, 2002). Thus, cost can be an insurmountable barrier for poor families. Second, parents with extremely limited educational attainments may not be aware of the importance of early education programs or the fact that these programs are used by most highly educated parents to foster their children's educational success. Third, the number of openings available in immigrant neighborhoods with many non-English speakers may be too few to accommodate the demand (Hill-Scott, 2005). Fourth, even if spaces are available, such programs may not reach out to parents in their country-of-origin language, restricting access by limited English proficient parents (Matthews & Ewen, 2006). Fifth, parents may hesitate to enroll their children in programs that are not designed and implemented in a culturally competent manner, especially if teachers lack a minimal capacity to communicate with children in the country-of-origin language (Holloway, Fuller, Rambaud, & Eggers-Pierola, 1997; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Research indicates that socioeconomic or structural influences, especially family poverty, mother's education, and parental occupation, account for most or all of the enrollment gap separating children in immigrant and native Mexican families and children in immigrant families from Central America and Indochina from European American children in native families (Hernandez et al., in press). Depending on the age and the group, socioeconomic and structural factors account for at least one-half and perhaps all of the enrollment gap, but cultural influences account for no more than 14% of the gap for the Mexican groups, no more than 39% for the Central Americans, and no more than 17% for the Indochinese.

These results may be surprising, especially for the Latin Americans, but it is important to note that these estimates are consistent with the strong commitment to early education in contemporary Mexico, where universal enrollment at age 3 will become obligatory in 2008–2009 (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2006). In fact, in 2002–2003, 63% of children age 4 in Mexico were enrolled in pre-school, precisely the proportion for European American children in native families in Census 2000 (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2006, p. 25 and Table 1). Insofar as preschool is less costly in Mexico than in the United States, and insofar as poverty for the Mexican immigrant group in the United States is quite high, it is not surprising that the proportion of children enrolled in school for the immi-

grant Mexican group at age 4 in the United States at 45% is substantially lower than the age-4 enrollment in Mexico at 63%.

In sum, familistic cultural values are sometimes cited as a plausible explanation for lower early education enrollment rates among children in immigrant families than among European American children in native families, but research indicates that socioeconomic and structural influences can account for at least 50% and for some groups essentially all the gap.

Health Insurance Coverage Rates Differ Greatly

Children and their families require good health to succeed in school and in work. Although Census 2000 does not measure health insurance coverage, health insurance coverage data for a more restricted set of racial/ethnic and immigrant origin groups are presented here based on the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey data for 1998-2002. The proportion uninsured for children in immigrant families from the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia is fairly low at 11%, but this jumps to 18-23% for those from Indochina, the Dominican Republic, and blacks from Africa; 30% for Central America; 35% for Mexico; and 44% for Haiti.

Thus, many children in immigrant families from countries of origin with high U.S. poverty rates are not covered by health insurance. Past research has found that substantial risk of not being insured remains even after controlling for parental education and duration of parental residence in the United States, as well as reported health status, number of parents in the home, and having a parent employed full time year-round (Brown, Wynn, Yu, Valenzuela, & Dong, 1999). This research also found the main reason reported by parents for lack of insurance coverage for children is the same for both immigrant and native groups: the lack of affordability of insurance coverage. The reason cited second most frequently related to employers not offering coverage at all, or not offering family coverage, or not offering coverage for part-time employees. These findings, and continuing high proportions not covered by health insurance, point to the need for public policies that increase access to health insurance for children in immigrant families, particularly those experiencing high poverty rates.

Family Citizenship Status Can Limit Access to Economic Supports

The vast majority of children in immigrant families (80%) are U.S. citizens because they were born in the United States. Although all children

in immigrant families have at least one immigrant parent, according to Census 2000 a sizable minority of children in immigrant families (28%) have a parent who also was born in the United States. Despite the fact that most children in immigrant families are U.S. citizens, that many have parents born in the United States, and that adult immigrants are increasingly likely to become U.S. citizens the longer they live in this country, more than one-half of children in immigrant families (53%) live in mixed-citizenship-status families with at least one citizen and one noncitizen (often a parent and sometimes other siblings).

Eligibility requirements under the 1996 welfare reform drew, for the first time, a sharp distinction between noncitizen immigrants and citizens, with noncitizens becoming ineligible for important public benefits and services. As a result, many noncitizen parents who are ineligible for specific public benefits may not be aware that their children are eligible, or they hesitate to contact government authorities on behalf of their children for fear of jeopardizing their own future opportunities to become citizens (Capps, Kenney, & Fix, 2003; Fix & Passel, 1999; Fix & Zimmermann, 1995; Hernandez & Charney, 1998; Zimmermann & Tumlin, 1999). All together, 53% of children in immigrant families live in mixed-status nuclear families, with the proportions highest for children with origins in Mexico and Central America (65-66%), followed by the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Cambodia, Laos, and the Hmong (51-58%). Children with origins in these countries are not only most likely to live in mixed-citizenship-status nuclear families, they also are especially likely to experience high poverty rates, and therefore a need and eligibility for public benefits and services.

CONCLUSIONS

The strong families and vigorous work ethic of immigrants provide firm foundations for their children to succeed in the United States, but major challenges to successful integration include high poverty, limited access to full-time year-round work, and low levels of education and English fluency. Children with origins in the 17 countries or regions in Table 1.1 experience especially high Basic Budget Poverty Rates of 45% or more, compared to 26% for European American children in native-born families.

Among children of immigrants from the seven Western-hemisphere origins listed in Table 1.1, 40% or more have limited English proficient fathers, excepting only those from the English-speaking Caribbean, and 21% or more have fathers who have not graduated from high school, although many benefit from grandparents, other relatives, or nonrelatives

in the home. Children with Mexican, Central American, and Dominican origins also have lower pre-K/nursery school enrollment than European Americans in native-born families. Mexico alone accounts for 39% of all children in immigrant families, and together with the other Western-hemisphere origins in Table 1.1, they account for 58%.

Since at least the time of Theodore Roosevelt, the United States has, periodically, been involved economically, politically, and militarily with various Western-hemisphere countries, leading to the creation of pathways to immigration (Rumbaut, 1996). Mexico has long served as a source of agricultural labor needed by the U.S. economy. Since the 1960s the contributions of immigrants from Mexico to the U.S. economy have become much more diverse (Chavez, 1996). The U.S. military occupation of the Dominican Republic in 1965 opened the way to substantial Dominican immigration, while wars, deteriorating economic conditions, or both led many Central Americans from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua to flee to the United States during the 1980s, and many Haitians to seek a better life in the United States (Rumbaut, 1996).

Southeast Asia is another region with immigrants fleeing to the United States as a result of war, not only from Vietnam, but also from Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand, including the Hmong who were recruited to fight on behalf of the United States. Like those with origins in some, or all, of the Western-hemisphere countries/regions above, children in immigrant families with these Indochinese origins are likely to have fathers who are limited English proficient and/or who have not graduated from high school, to have grandparents, other relatives, or nonrelatives in the home, and if they are ages 3 or 4 not to be enrolled in pre-K/nursery school.

Children with parents from two West Asian nations where the United States has been involved for more than two decades, Iraq and Afghanistan, also have high poverty rates. Children with origins in Iraq have high proportions of fathers who are not high school graduates and limited English proficient; high proportions with grandparents, other relatives, or nonrelatives in the home; and low rates of pre-K/nursery school enrollment, whereas children with parents from Afghanistan share similar circumstances except fathers are more likely to be high school graduates, and sample size does not provide the basis for reliable estimates of pre-K/nursery school enrollment. These nations have suffered from wars and their sequelae since 1980. Children from Pakistan/Bangladesh also share these family and socioeconomic circumstances, except the proportion with limited English proficient fathers is lower. In the post-9/11 era, it is important to note that most Iraqis, Afghanistans, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis are Muslim and that their integration into U.S. society is of considerable importance.

TABLE 1.1. Indicators of Well-Being for Children in Immigrant Families from 17 Countries/Regions with High Basic Budget Poverty Rates in the United States: 2000

Indicator	Western hemisphere	Mexico	Central America	South America	Dominican Republic	Haiti	Jamaica	Other English-speaking Caribbean	Southeast Asia	Hmong	Cambodia	Laos	Thailand	Vietnam	West Asia	Iraq	Afghanistan	Pakistan/Bangladesh	Europe	Former Soviet Union	Africa	Blacks from Africa	
Native American %																							
Immigrant %																							
Basic budget poverty (based on all costs) ^a	26%+	45%+	21%+	10%+	16%	30%+	1%	40%+	1%	40%+	2%	40%+	10%+	1%	10%+	11%	11%	5%	10%+	21%+	11%	2%	
Number	5,165,982	939,082	647,643	350,101	201,981	230,808	226,786	71,598	80,812	87,264	60,487	386,645	39,298	17,897	136,621	238,403	237,078						
Child limited English proficient (LEP) ^b	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Father limited English proficient (LEP)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Father not working full time	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Other adult relative in home	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Grandparent in home	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Four or more siblings ages 0-17	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Fluent and limited English-speaking language at home ^c	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
School enrollment age 4	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
School enrollment age 3	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
School enrollment age 4	63%	<37%	3%	11%+	26%+	6%+	3%	37%	<37%	63%													

^a Basic budget poverty is based on all costs for a decent standard of living, including food, housing, other necessities, transportation for work, childcare, and health insurance.
^b For children ages 5-17 years.
^c Note: Calculated from Census 2000 5% microdata (IPUMS) by Donald J. Hernandez, Nancy A. Denton, and Suzanne E. Macareney, Center for Social and Demographic Analysis, University at Albany, State University of New York. x, at or above threshold; -, sample size is too small to estimate.

The end of the cold war and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 opened the West, including the United States, to many refugees. Children with parents from the former Soviet Union are more likely than children from countries/regions above to have a father who graduated from high school, but have high proportions with limited English proficient fathers, and to have a grandparent in the home. Finally, blacks from Africa taken as a whole are more likely than children from the other countries/regions above to have a high school graduate father and less likely to have a limited English proficient father, but do, nevertheless, have a Basic Budget Poverty rate in excess of 45%.

Altogether, children with the origins included in Table 1.1 account for 68% of children in immigrant families, and children from these countries/regions, with the exceptions only of Iraq, Afghanistan, and the former Soviet Union, are Hispanic, Asian, or black. These immigrants arrive seeking economic opportunities in the United States, and many also were driven from their country of origin by war or by persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, or political opinion. It will be unfortunate for the future of these children and families, and for the United States as a whole, if the United States does not adopt education, language, health, and employment policies that will provide these children in immigrant families with the opportunity to overcome the challenges of limited education and English proficiency and high poverty to successfully integrate into U.S. society and achieve the aspirations for the American dream that brought them to this country.

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