Children in Immigrant Families:
Key to America's Future

by Donald J. Hernandez, Ph.D.

Introduction

Children in immigrant families account for nearly one-in-four children in the United States. They are the fastest growing population of children, and they are leading the nation's racial and ethnic transformation. As a consequence, baby boomers will depend heavily for economic support during retirement on race-ethnic minorities, many of whom grew up in immigrant families. Given the changing face of America's children, it is critical that we develop policies and programs to foster a successful future for these children as they and their parents pursue the American Dream. This report first portrays the lives of children with immigrant parents mainly with data from Census 2000, and then highlights needed policy initiatives in the areas of education, health care, economic resources, and access to public benefits, language, and enforcement of immigration laws.

A Key Group

As of 2005, nearly one-fourth (23 percent) of children lived in immigrant families. The number of children in immigrant families is growing faster than in any other group of children in the nation.[1] This rapid growth, combined with the large proportion (88 percent) with origins in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa, is transforming the race-ethnic composition of America. The emergence of racial and ethnic minorities as the majority U.S. population is occurring most rapidly, and will become a reality first, among children.

The U.S. Census Bureau projects that the proportion of children who are non-Hispanic white will fall steadily into the future, dropping below 50 percent after 2030, just 22 years from now.[2] In contrast, by 2030, when the baby boom generation, born between 1946 and 1964, will be 66 to 84 years old, the Census Bureau projects that 72 percent of the elderly 65 and older will be non-Hispanic white, compared to 56 percent for working-age adults, and 50 percent for children.

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it is critical that the current circumstances and future prospects of children in immigrant families should become an important focus for policy makers and program administrators.

Diverse Global Origins

At the beginning of the 21st century, as was true in the early 20th century, the United States is again seeking to integrate many children who live in homes where languages other than English are spoken, and where cultural practices differ from those of the American mainstream. But the diversity of contemporary immigrant origins is far greater than a century ago.[3] As of Census 2000, the largest proportion of children in immigrant families (40 percent) has origins in Mexico. But the remaining 60 percent have origins that span the globe, with Europe (combined with Canada), the Caribbean, and East Asia each accounting for 10 to 11 percent, with 5 to 7 percent each from Central America, South America, West Asia, and Indochina (Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam), and 2 to 3 percent each from the former Soviet Union and Africa. This diversity poses unprecedented opportunities and challenges for policy makers and program administrators who are responsible for fostering the success of children and their families.

Diverse American Destinations

Children in immigrant families are highly concentrated in a few states, but also spread widely across many states. Attention often focuses on the states with the largest immigrant populations, but in 38 states at least one-in-20 children lives with an immigrant parent, and this rises to 10 percent or more in 27 states, and to 20 percent or more in 12 states and the District of Columbia. Thus, children in immigrant families merit substantial attention, not only from the federal government, but also throughout the nation, in states and localities spread across every region of the country.

Putting Down Deep Roots In America

Children in newcomer families have deep roots in the United States, as reflected by their parents' citizenship and length of residence in this country, and by their own citizenship.

Nearly one-in-four children in immigrant families has a parent born in the United States. Thus, almost one-in-four children of immigrants (24 percent) lives in a family in which one parent has been a lifelong American citizen since birth.

Nearly one-half of children in immigrant families (48 percent) have at least one parent who is a naturalized American citizen. Thus, including the 24 percent with a U.S.-born parent, a substantial majority of children in immigrant families (64 percent) lives with at least one U.S.-citizen parent. The large proportion who become naturalized American citizens reflects the high level of commitment

among these parents to the United States, their adopted homeland. Recent research indicates that naturalizations are increasing. Between 1990 and 2005, among all legal permanent foreign-born residents, the percent naturalized climbed from 38 to 52 percent.[4]

Two-thirds of children in newcomer families (68 percent) have parents who have lived in the United States 10 years or more. Including the 24 percent with parents who were born in the United States, 68 percent have parents in the home who have lived in the United States for more than 10 years. Thus, only about one-third (32 percent) of children in newcomer families lives with parents who themselves have lived in the United States less than 10 years.

Nearly four-fifths of children in immigrant families (79 percent) were born in the United States and are, therefore, American citizens. Thus, most children in newcomer families share precisely the same rights and privileges as do other citizen children in native-born families. Despite the fact that most children in immigrant families are U.S. citizens, that many have parents born in the United States, and that foreign-born parents 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 percent) live in mixed-citizenship-status families with at least one citizen and one non-citizen (often a parent and sometimes other siblings).

Some children or their parents are undocumented immigrants. Although most children in immigrant families are U.S.-born and have at least one U.S.-citizen parent, as of 2005 an estimated 11 percent of children in immigrant families were unauthorized immigrants, while 18 percent were U.S.-born, but had an unauthorized parent as of 2005.[5] Overall, nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of children who live with an unauthorized parent are themselves American citizens because they were born in the United States.

In Census 2000, which provides most of the data for this First Focus report, it is estimated that about 90 percent of unauthorized immigrants responded and are included in the results. And it appears that this response rate is holding steady for the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS), which also provides data reported in Marcelli and Ong, and in Passel, Van Hook, and Bean.[6] The possibility that worksite raids or other enforcement activities could damper response rates for unauthorized immigrants highlights the need for continuing assessments of the extent to which these immigrants and their children are, or are not, included in Census Bureau surveys, and for assessing non-response rates for this population in other national and local data collection efforts.

English Language Fluency And Language Diversity

The vast majority of children in newcomer families (74 percent) speak English exclusively or very well. The proportion who are English-fluent is nearly as high (at least 68 percent) for children in immigrant families in each of the U.S. states

and the District of Columbia. Schools in all states do, however, face the special challenges associated with communicating with and teaching children who are not fluent in English.

Three-fifths of children in newcomer families (60 percent) have at least one parent in the home who speaks English exclusively or very well. The remaining two-fifths (40 percent) live with parents who are only limited English proficient, while a total of 59 percent live with at least one parent who is not fluent in English. Thus, many children of immigrants have parents who are not English proficient, but a substantial majority has at least one parent who is well integrated linguistically into English-speaking society.

One-fourth of children in newcomer families (26 percent) live in linguistically isolated households, in which no one over age 13 speaks English exclusively or very well. This includes households where a child age 13 or younger is the only fluent English speaker in the household. Children in these families may experience a high degree of isolation from English-speaking society, because not even adolescent children in these households speak English proficiently.

Children in immigrant families are three times more likely to speak English fluently than to be limited in their English proficiency (74 percent vs. 26 percent). A large proportion of those who speak English very well are especially well-positioned to become bilingually fluent because they also speak another language at home. In fact, the largest proportion of children in newcomer families – nearly one-half (46 percent) – both speak English very well and speak the native language of the parent or parents at home. Bilingual children (those reported to speak English very well and to speak another language in the home) outnumber children in newcomer families with limited English proficiency in every state except South Dakota.

Parental Educational Attainments

Children in immigrant families are nearly as likely as those in native families to have a father who has graduated from college (24 percent vs. 28 percent). But they are more than three times as likely to have a father who has not graduated from high school (40 percent vs. 12 percent). It has long been known that children whose parents have completed fewer years of schooling tend, on average, to complete fewer years of schooling themselves, and to obtain lower paying jobs when they reach adulthood.[7] Parents whose education does not extend beyond the elementary level may be especially limited in knowledge and experience needed to help their children succeed in school. Immigrant parents often have high educational aspirations for their children,[8] 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 school work, 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.

Parental Employment And Wages

A strong work ethic characterizes both immigrant and native families. Among children living with a father, 93 percent in immigrant families and 95 percent in native families have fathers who worked for pay during the previous year. For most specific groups, the proportion is 90 percent 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.

Especially noteworthy is that, among children in immigrant families from Mexico, the largest immigrant group, 92 percent have working fathers. In addition, although they are among the groups least like to have a working mother (53 percent), they are substantially more likely (at 29 percent) than all other native and immigrant groups, except Central Americans, to have another adult worker in the home. Clearly, most children live in families with a strong work ethic, regardless of their race-ethnicity or immigrant origin, and have parents, and often others, who are committed to working for pay to support their families.

Despite the strong work ethic of parents, many children live with fathers who cannot find full-time year-round work. Among white children, 16 percent have fathers who do not work full-time year-round – the lowest level of any native or immigrant group. For other native race-ethnic minority groups (except Asians), the proportions range between 26 and 37 percent. At least 25 percent of children in 21 of 31 immigrant groups analyzed for this report also have fathers who do not work full-time-year round. The proportion is 30 to 37 percent for four native groups (blacks, island-origin Puerto Ricans, Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders, and American Indians), and for 15 immigrant groups from Latin America (Mexico and Central America), the Caribbean (Dominican Republic, and Haiti), Indochina (the Hmong, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam), and West Asia (Pakistan/Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Iraq), as well 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 whites in native-born families. 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.

Not surprisingly, lack of full-time year-round work for fathers goes hand-in-hand with low hourly earning for fathers and mothers in 18 immigrant and native groups, and these groups are especially likely to be officially or basic-budget poor.[9]

Economic Need

Children from low-income families tend to experience a variety of negative developmental outcomes, including less success in school, lower educational attainments, and lower incomes during adulthood.[10] Poverty rates merit considerable attention in part because extensive research documents that poverty has greater negative consequences than either limited mother's education or living in a one-parent family.[11]

The official poverty measure is used most often to assess economic deprivation in the United States, but is outdated in important ways. More than a decade ago, a National Research Council (NRC) report urged that the official measure be revised, because "…it no longer provides an accurate picture of the differences in the extent of economic poverty among population groups or geographic areas of the country, nor an accurate picture of trends over time.[12] The NRC report recommended a new approach explicitly accounting for various family costs, with attention to geographic differences in the cost of living. Two "Basic Budget Poverty" measures developed by the author and presented here reflect these recommendations, based on research by the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) in Washington, D.C.[13]

"Baseline Basic Budget Poverty" is calculated by taking into account the local cost of housing, food, transportation for work, other necessities (such as clothing, personal care items, household supplies, telephone, television, and school supplies), and federal taxes.[14] More than one-in-four children was "baseline" basic-budget poor in Census 2000 (21.3 percent), compared to 14.8 percent for the official poverty rate.[15]

Providing another standard for poverty comparisons across rich countries, researchers from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the United Nation's Children's Fund (UNICEF), and others have for nearly two decades relied on a measure based on 50 percent of national median post-tax and transfer income using data from the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) and other sources.[16] The close correspondence of results using the baseline basic budget (21.3 percent) and LIS poverty measures (23.5 percent) indicates that, at the national level, they are quite similar in their assessment of U.S. child poverty.

More than one-in-three children in immigrant families is baseline basic-budget poor (34.1 percent), compared to the official poverty rate of 20.7 percent, for a difference of 13.4 percent. Thus, the official measure indicates that children in immigrant families are more likely than those in native-born families to live in poverty (20.7 percent vs. 13.4 percent), while the baseline basic budget measure indicates the rates of economic need are substantially higher for both groups, but especially for children in immigrant families (34.1 percent vs. 18.1 percent)

The baseline basic-budget poverty rate does not take into account the costs of child care for young children, which the NRC report recommends should be

included in assessing economic deprivation. The LIS approach to measuring poverty, which is used widely in drawing comparisons across rich countries, also does not take these costs into account. But in rich European countries, children generally have access to, and participate in, formal Early Child Education and Care (ECEC) arrangements funded by the national government, or if they are infants or toddlers, they have parents who can care for them at home because of government-guaranteed, job-protected paid maternal or paternal leave arrangements.[17] Thus, for comparisons involving rich countries other than the United States, it is not necessary to take account of the costs to families of child care. But for the United States, the NRC recommends that these costs be included in calculating a U.S. poverty rate.

The NRC report recommends, however, that child care costs be taken into account only for families where there is no stay-at-home parent to care for the children, and at a level that provides only for the minimum care necessary for the parent to hold down a job, not for care involving educational enrichment.[18] But research clearly indicates that early childhood education programs can promote school readiness and educational success.[19] In addition, participation in high quality preschool programs may be particularly valuable for cognitive development of children in newcomer families speaking a language other than English at home,[20] and socioeconomic barriers can account for most, or perhaps all, of the lower enrollment levels experienced by children with immigrant parents (See below).[21]

Furthermore, past research has found that many unemployed mothers would seek employment, and many employed mothers would work more hours, if child care were available at reasonable cost. This is especially true for mothers who are young, single, and with low education or little income.[22] For these reasons, our second basic budget poverty measure includes costs for all children regardless of parental work.

When the cost of early education and child care is included along with other costs in the basic family budget, the estimated poverty rate for children in immigrant families increases by 13.8 percent, from 34 percent to 48 percent. The corresponding increase for children in native-born families is nearly as large at 10.6 percent (18.1 vs. 28.7 percent). Another poverty measure often used in public policy discussion sets the poverty threshold at twice (200 percent) the official poverty thresholds. Poverty estimates using our baseline basic budget plus early education poverty measure are nearly as high as the 200 percent poverty measure, at 32.4 percent vs. 35.7 percent for children overall, 47.9 percent vs. 48.3 percent for children in immigrant families, and 28.7 percent vs. 32.7 percent for children in native-born families.

Insofar as it is useful to compare the economic circumstances of children in the United States and rich European countries, results from the LIS approach for other countries are most relevant. The LIS measure indicates that child poverty rates for six countries with near universal maternal/paternal leave and preschool (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, France, and Germany) are in the range of 2.4 to 10.2

percent, while the rate is nearly triple this level or more for the United States, using our baseline plus child care and early education measure, at 28.9 percent for children in native-born families and nearly five times this level, or more at 47.9 percent for children in immigrant families.[23]

The differences would be still larger if our U.S. measure were expanded to include not only child care and early education, but also health care costs, because health care costs are not included in our measure, but government-funded national health insurance is available to children in all other rich countries.

Strengths Of Immigrant Families

Most children in immigrant families live with two parents. Children living with two parents tend, on average, to be somewhat advantaged in their educational success, compared to children in one-parent families.[24] Children in immigrant families are more likely than children in native families to live with two parents (84 percent vs. 76 percent). Children in immigrant families from most origin countries/regions are about as likely, or more likely, than white native-born families (85 percent) to have two parents in the home (including step-parents and the cohabiting partners of parents). Thus, large majorities of children in all immigrant and in most native groups benefit from having two parents in the home, although significant portions of all groups (at least 5 to 20 percent) at any given time live with only one parent.

Children in immigrant families are somewhat more likely to have many siblings. Brothers or 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 smaller ones. Hence, children in larger families tend, other things equal, to experience less educational success and to complete fewer years of schooling than children with fewer siblings.[25] Siblings also, however, can serve as child care providers for younger siblings, as companions for siblings close in age, and as an important support network throughout life. Dependent siblings living at home are most likely to share available resources. Children in immigrant families are about one-third more likely than those in native families to live in homes with four or more siblings (19 percent vs. 14 percent).

Children in immigrant families often have grandparents, other relatives, or non-relatives in the home who can provide essential child care, nurturing, or economic resources. Children in most immigrant and race-ethnic minority, native-born groups are two to four times more likely than whites in native families to have a grandparent in the home, 10 to 20 percent vs. 5 percent. Some groups also are likely to have other adult relatives age 18 or older, including siblings, in the home. Many immigrant groups with large numbers of siblings also are especially likely to have grandparents, other relatives, or non-relatives in the home who may be nurturing and providing child care 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, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Indochina, and Afghanistan.

Early Education Enrollment

Children's language development begins early, and participation in high-quality early care and education can contribute. Participation in high-quality preschool programs may be particularly valuable for the cognitive and language development of children in newcomer families with limited English proficiency.[26] Overall, Census 2000 recorded that children in newcomer families are less likely than are children in native-born families to be enrolled in pre-K/nursery school at age three (32 percent vs. 39 percent) and at age four (55 percent vs. 63 percent). Groups less likely than whites in native-born families to be enrolled are children in immigrant families from Mexico, Central America, Dominican Republic, Philippines, Indochina, and Iraq. Cultural preferences are sometimes cited as a reason for lower enrollment in early education programs among immigrant groups, especially Hispanics.

Recent research indicates that socioeconomic barriers can account for at least one-half and perhaps the entire enrollment gap in early education that separates children in newcomer families from Mexico, for example, and white children in native-born families.[27] These results may be surprising, 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 three will become obligatory in 2008–2009.[28] In fact, in Mexico where preschool is free, 81 percent of children age four were enrolled in 2005, compared to only 71 percent among whites in U.S. native-born families in 2004, and 55 percent for children in the United States in 2004 who lived in immigrant families from Mexico. (For additional international comparisons and discussion of early childhood education policies and a ranking of various OECD countries, see UNICEF (forthcoming)).

Educational Attainments Among Young Adults

High school completion among young adults is a key indicator for measuring basic educational success across diverse groups. Because young adults are especially likely to be immigrants, and to have immigrated within the past few years, and perhaps not to have entered the U.S. educational system, an analysis of educational attainments of young adults ages 20 to 24 should distinguish between first generation immigrants born abroad, the second generation born in the United States, and the third and later generation. Although it is not possible to distinguish the generation groups ages 20 to 24 in Census 2000, the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS) does ask the necessary questions. Because the CPS sample size is much smaller than Census 2000, we combine CPS data for 2001–2005 and report on a smaller number of race-ethnic and immigrant origin groups, focusing mainly on the largest group, those with origins in Mexico.

Among young adults from Mexico, 70 percent are first generation immigrants, compared to only 29 percent among school-age children in immigrant families from Mexico. Thus, many first generation young adults from Mexico immigrated during late adolescence or early adulthood. The high proportion of recent immigrants among the first generation of young adults is reflected in the very low 44 percent who have graduated from high school, insofar as 8 years of education is a common standard in Mexico. But many of these young adults should not be considered dropouts from the U.S. educational system, because no doubt many never entered the U.S. system.

The proportion of second generation Mexicans graduating from high school is 78 percent, much higher than the 40 percent reported for the first generation, but little different from the 80 percent of Hispanics in native-born families (other than Puerto Ricans) who completed high school. These results are encouraging for second generation Mexicans, because they complete high school at nearly the same rate as the third and later generation Hispanics. But the results also are discouraging, because the high school completion rate of 80 percent for third and later generation Hispanics implies a high school dropout rate (20 percent) that is more than twice the dropout rate (9 percent) for third and later generation whites, but similar to the rates for Native Americans (23 percent) and blacks in native-born families (19 percent).

The first generation also makes up a much larger proportion of the combined first and second generation population at ages 20 to 24 than is true for school-age children, for the all the immigrant groups analyzed for this report. The results indicate high school completion rates among first generation Dominicans, Haitians, Central Americans, and South Americans are higher than among first generation Mexicans, but much lower than among the native white group, while the rates reach or exceed the level of native whites for young first generation adults from many countries and regions. The second generation high school completion rate for Dominicans is similar to the low level experienced by the Mexican immigrant group, and while it is substantially higher for Central Americans, it does not reach the level of whites in native-born families.

Health Insurance Coverage

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 race-ethnic and immigrant origin groups are presented here based on the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey data for 2001–2005. The proportion of uninsured children in native-born families rises from 8 percent to 9 percent for whites and Asians to 11 percent to 17 percent for other race-ethnic groups. The proportion uninsured among children in immigrant families is as low as whites and Asians only for children with origins in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, India, Iran, and whites from

Africa (7 to 9 percent). The chances of being uninsured for many other immigrant groups are in the range of most native race-ethnic minorities, but is higher still for children in immigrant families with origins in Central America, South America, and Cuba (22 to 25 percent), and in Mexico and Haiti (29 to 30 percent).

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-around.[29] 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, not offering family coverage, or not offering coverage for part-time employees.

Policies And Programs To Foster Children's Success

What strategies might federal, state, and local governments (including school districts) pursue to foster the positive development and successful integration of children in newcomer families? Policies and programs in five arenas (education, income and economic resources, health care, language outreach, and enforcement of immigration laws) can help to ensure that children in immigrant families have the resources they need succeed as they pursue the American Dream.

Education And Language

Children in immigrant families should have access to high-quality early education programs. Recent research indicates that such programs may be particularly valuable for the cognitive and language development of children in newcomer families with limited English proficiency.[30] But additional research indicates that socioeconomic barriers play a critical role in limiting the access of key immigrant groups to early education programs.[31] Seven states are either currently providing (Florida, Georgia, Oklahoma), or phasing in (Illinois, Iowa, New York, and West Virginia) voluntary universal pre-kindergarten programs in which parents can enroll their four-year-old children.[32] Additional resources should be devoted to ensuring that children in immigrant families have access to high quality early education.

Early education programs should be welcoming and effective for children in immigrant families and their parents. This may require active outreach in the home languages of families within some communities to foster the inclusion of children whose parents have limited English proficiency, as well as a culturally competent early education workforce.

There is a need for education policies, programs, and curricula that encourage fluency not only in English, but also in the home languages of children, and that foster bilingual spoken fluency and literacy (reading and writing). Schools with a large number of children with limited English proficiency who speak one particular language can benefit from economies of scale in hiring teachers or assistants who are bilingual. That approach is less feasible in schools with only a small number of limited English-proficient students in a single classroom, or when various children speak multiple languages other than English. Fortunately, research indicates that it is not essential for teachers to be fluently bilingual in a child's home language.

For example, even when PK-3 teachers have no experience with a child's first language, they can introduce young English language learners to English and also adopt teaching practices that support home language development. Teachers who encourage the families of children to talk, read, and sing with the child in the parents' home language, and to use the home language in everyday activities, will foster the child's first language development even as the child is learning English.[33] New, more effective programs may require the development of teaching techniques and teacher preparation programs. They also are likely to benefit from new research and program initiatives aimed at teaching strategies that scaffold up from the practices of immigrant families.[34]

Research for children who learn English after their home language is established, typically around age three, indicates that they can add a second language during the Pre-K and the early school years, and that this bilingual skill leads to long-term cognitive, cultural, and economic advantages. Importantly, a dual language approach to teaching has been found to be effective for English language learners, while not having negative consequences for other students. In fact, dual language programs are effective not only for improving the academic achievements of English language learning students, but also provide benefits to native English speakers, as reflected in standardized test scores, and reports by parents, teachers, and school administrators.[35]

There is a need for English language training for immigrant parents. Two-generation family literacy programs should be examined as a strategy for providing the opportunity for both children and parents with limited English language skills to learn together how to build literacy into their homes and daily lives. While the most recent national evaluation of the Even Start family literacy program did point to gains in literacy outcomes for participants, it did not provide evidence that gains were greater for those assigned to the program than for those in the control group.[36] The researchers note the need for a better understanding of the bases for variation in the effectiveness of the Even Start program as implemented in various localities. Work is needed to understand the specific features of family literacy programs that can help parents in immigrant families improve their capacity to provide for the economic support of their families while also fostering the children's development.

Children in newcomer families in all states are well-positioned to become fluent bilingual speakers, writers, and readers – if they receive formal training in both English and the native language of their parent or parents.

Results presented in this report suggest the need for two sets of policies for adolescents and youth. First, education policies, programs, and curricula for recent first generation, adolescent immigrants with little or no experience in U.S. schools must address a very different set of issues from policies for first generation immigrants who arrived at younger ages, and who obtained most or all of their education in the United States prior to reaching high school. Second, because many immigrant adolescents and youth with limited education and limited English proficiency have by-passed the U.S. education system to directly enter the work force, immigrant adolescents and youth need special outreach activities to draw them into the schools, and specially designed programs to help assure their educational success.

Economic Resources And Access To Public Benefits

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) should be expanded and increased. It is a major policy that increases the economic resources available to children and families with limited income. The 1996 federal welfare reform brought increased funding for the EITC that was intended to encourage work among low income persons. With this change the EITC acted by 2004 to reduce the child poverty rate by about 2.3 percent, that is, lifting out of poverty about one-in-eight children who would otherwise be classified as poor. The peak monetary value of the EITC in 2007 for families with two children was $4,716 ($2,358 per child) for two-parent families with incomes of $11,750 to $17,400, and one-parent families with incomes of $11,750 to $15,400. The value of the EITC declines at higher incomes, to less than $2,000 for two-parent and one-parent families, with more than $30,000 and $28,300 incomes respectively. The value also falls to less than $3,000 for families with incomes below $7,500, and to less than $2,000 for families with incomes below $5,000. If eligibility for EITC were extended to include more families, and the monetary value were increased for all eligible families, but especially lower income families, the EITC would become even more effective in improving the lives of children in low-income families.

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program should be revised. It is a second major policy that increases the economic resources available to children and families with limited income. With changes brought by the 1996 welfare reform as of 2004, TANF acted to reduce children poverty by less than 1 percent.

In addition, although TANF is available to some families with very low income, eligibility requirements under the 1996 welfare reform drew, for the first time, a sharp distinction between citizens and non-citizen documented immigrants, with non-citizen documented immigrants becoming ineligible for important public benefits and services. As a result, many non-citizen documented immigrant parents

who are ineligible for TANF or other specific public benefits may not be aware that their citizen children are eligible, or they may hesitate to contact government authorities on behalf of their children for fear of jeopardizing their own future opportunities to become citizens.[37]

Insofar as the exclusion of some immigrant parents from eligibility for welfare programs acts to deprive their U.S. citizen children of important public benefits and services, and insofar as most of the children and parents are or will become American citizens, the elimination of these eligibility exclusion rules is in the interest not only of immigrant children and families, it is in the interest of all Americans, including members of the baby boom generation who will benefit from having a healthy and productive labor force to support them during retirement.

Health Care, Language, and Professional Cultural Competence

The State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) should be expanded. The program has led to increased health insurance coverage for children, but continuing high proportions of children in immigrant families are not covered. Insofar as children and their families require good health to succeed in school and work, it is important that they be covered by health insurance, pointing to the need to increase funding for SCHIP to assure access to health insurance for children in immigrant families, particularly those experiencing high poverty rates.

The "Legal Immigrant Children's Health Improvement Act" (ICHIA) is needed, as additional legislation for a specific sub-population of children in immigrant families. In 1996, federal welfare reform made new legal immigrants to the United States, including children, ineligible to receive SCHIP and Medicaid, and after the five years they face additional barriers to becoming eligible for these programs. ICHIA would give states the option to provide federally funded SCHIP and Medicaid to low-income legal immigrant children and pregnant women.

Home language outreach and interpretive services, as well as the culturally competent provision of health care, are essential because many children and parents are limited in their proficiency with English, and many come from cultures with different traditions of health care provision.

Language Outreach

Children and parents who have limited English proficiency may have great difficulty communicating with educators, health care providers, and officials in social service, justice, and other institutions. In families where only the adolescents or young children are fluent in English, the parents are not in a position to communicate with professionals on behalf of themselves or their children. In fact, it may be the child who must act as the primary intermediary between family members and professionals in various institutional settings.

This role may be critical in helping immigrant families negotiate and integrate into the unfamiliar terrain of American society, but it can also lead to conflicts by undermining traditional parent-child roles and parental authority.[38] Also, although children (and adolescents) may be fluent in everyday English, they may not have the technical vocabulary necessary either in English or in the parent's origin-country language for effective contacts with health, social service, or legal organizations.

It is, therefore, critical that education, health, and other organizations provide outreach and interpretive services in the home languages of children and their parents. Without these efforts, these organizations may be cutting themselves off from the rapidly growing client population of immigrant children and families.

Enforcement Of Immigration Laws

During recent years, worksite raids have been used increasingly by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) as a means of enforcing immigration laws. A recent study of three sites found that, on average, for every two adults affected there was a child whose parent was arrested.[39] Two-thirds (66 percent) of these children were American citizens. At the sites collecting information about age, the vast majority of affected children were ages 10 or younger (79 to 88 percent), and in one site 71 percent were under age six.

Many of the apprehended parents were afraid to tell authorities that they had children because they believed their children also would be taken into custody.

Some single parents and other primary caregivers were released the same day they were apprehended, while others were held overnight or for several days. But many parents were detained as long as five or six months, and others who were released had to wait for several months until their final appearance before an immigration judge – during which time they were not allowed to work. Many other parents were deported within a few days, often before they could contact immigration lawyers or their families.

The affected parent often was the primary family breadwinner, leaving children and other family members without their main source of economic support, and with the need to cope with fear, isolation, and other psychological stresses. Economic hardship increased over time as earlier paychecks and savings were spent. Privately funded assistance generally lasted for only two or three months.

Based on these and other detailed findings, the recent study offered recommendations for minimizing the harm to children as a result of worksite raids.[40] Several of these recommendations especially relevant to the federal government are offered here:

- Congress should provide oversight of immigration enforcement activities to assure that children are protected during worksite enforcement and other operations.

- ICE should assume that there will always be children – generally very young children –affected whenever adults are arrested in worksite enforcement operations, and should develop a consistent policy for parents' release. Single parents and primary caregivers of young children should be released early enough in the day so that their children do not experience disruptions in care; they should not be held overnight.
- ICE should provide detainees access to counsel and advise them of their right to confer with their country's consular office. Detainees should be allowed access to telephones, and the confidentiality of their telephone conversations should be ensured.
- Social services and economic assistance need to be provided over a prolonged period of time – often many months – until parents are released from detention and their immigration cases are resolved. Longer-term counseling for children and their parents to mitigate psychological impacts may also be necessary.
- A clearinghouse of information about responses to raids should be developed nationally. Such a clearinghouse could be a repository for stories about raids, a conduit for sharing information, and a setting for developing best practices in service delivery.

There is a wide agreement that immigration laws should enforced, but there are many possible approaches to enforcement, and the manner in which enforcement occurs should not bring harm to children, including those who are American citizens.

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This report mainly discusses results for children ages 0 to 17 and living with at least one parent, although some attention is devoted to early education among young children ages 3 to 4, and to the educational attainments of youth ages 20 to 24 (For a discussion of differences in the circumstances of children and adolescents in immigrant families, see Hernandez, Denton, and Macartney, in press a). Following standard demographic definitions, children in immigrant families are classified here as including both the first generation (foreign-born children) and the second generation (children born in the United States with at least on foreign-born parent), whereas children in native-born families are third and later generation children (children and parents all born in the United States) (Hernandez and Charney, 1998).

This report presents results based mainly on analyses of data from Census 2000, using microdata files prepared by Ruggles and colleagues (2004). Most results discussed in this report, and additional indicators for many topics and additional country-of-origin and race-ethnic groups, are available at www.albany.edu/csda/children, click on the report title, or on other "data" features of the webite. For internationally comparable results presenting indicators and analysis for eight rich countries including the United States, see Hernandez (forthcoming).

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