

October 1996

## Hispanic Children, Poverty, and Federal Assistance Programs

### Overview

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Hispanic children are a rapidly growing and increasingly poor population group in the United States. Since 1980, the Hispanic child population has nearly doubled, from 5.7 to 9.7 million, and as the number of Hispanic children has increased so has the number and proportion of Hispanic children living in poverty.<sup>1</sup>

With the Social Security Act of 1935 and the anti-poverty programs of the 1960s, a number of federal programs were established to help combat child poverty. These include the now block-granted Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, which provided cash payments to families in which one parent was absent, incapacitated, unemployed, or deceased; Food Stamps, which increases the food purchasing power of eligible low-income households; Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), which provides food and nutritional assistance to low-income pregnant and postpartum women, infants, and children under age five; Medicaid, which provides medical assistance to low-income persons who are aged, blind, disabled, and members of families with dependent children; and school lunch programs. However, while Hispanic children may benefit from these assistance programs, the state of Hispanic children in the U.S. continues to worsen.

### Population Profile

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- ❖ **Hispanic children are a significant portion of the total Hispanic population.** In 1995, over one-third (35.8%) of the total Hispanic population was estimated to be under age 18, a larger proportion than either the Black (32.4%) or White populations (25.0%).<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ **The Hispanic child population has risen dramatically since 1980, and will soon become the largest minority population under age 18.** Between 1980 and 1995, the Hispanic population under age 18 increased by 70.3%, while the number of Black and White children increased 13.4% (from 9.5 to 10.7 million) and 3.8% (52.5 to 54.5 million), respectively, over the same period. Furthermore, the number of Hispanic children is projected to grow by 28.9% (to 12.5 million) by 2005, as compared to 9.9% for Black children (to 11.8 million).<sup>1</sup>

### Poverty

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- ❖ **Poverty among Hispanic children is severe and has been steadily increasing.** In 1995, two-fifths (40.0%) of Hispanic children lived below the poverty level, compared to 16.2% of White children and 41.9% of Black children. In fact, since 1980 the number of poor Hispanic children has increased by an average of approximately 6.0% each year, compared to 1.7% annually for White children and 1.3% annually for Black children.<sup>2</sup> Overall, since 1980 Hispanic child poverty has increased by 133.3% (1.7 to 4.1 million), compared to 25.1% (7.2 to 9.0 million) for White children and 20.2% (4.0 to 4.8 million) for Black children.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Percentages were computed by NCLR using Census numbers in thousands.

<sup>2</sup> Average annual increases were reached by first computing the percentage changes year-to-year, and then dividing the total by the total number of years (16).

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## Poverty Cont.

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- ❖ **Hispanic families with children continue to experience substantially higher poverty rates than families without children.** In 1995, over one-third (33.2%) of Hispanic families with children were poor, compared to 12.1% of Hispanic families without children. In comparison, 12.9% of White families with children and 34.1% of Black families with children lived in poverty, compared to 4.0% and 11.3% of White and Black families without children, respectively.<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ **Regardless of family type and when compared to non-Hispanic families, Hispanic families with children are more likely to live below poverty.** In 1995, 57.3% of Hispanic female-headed families with children lived in poverty, compared to 35.6% of comparable White families and 53.2% of comparable Black families. Likewise, Hispanic married-couple families with children (22.6%) are three times as likely as comparable White families (7.0%), and twice as likely as comparable Black families (9.9%), to be poor.

## Federal Assistance Programs

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- ❖ **A large proportion of Hispanic children received AFDC.** In 1994, 21.2% of AFDC recipient children, or 2.1 million children, were Hispanic, compared to 33.0% for White children and 37.9% for Black children. Since 1990, the percentage of Hispanic AFDC recipient children increased 3.5 percentage points, while the percentage of White and Black AFDC recipient children decreased 0.1 and 3.5 percentage points, respectively.
- ❖ **A substantial number of Hispanic mothers receive Food Stamps and WIC benefits.**<sup>3</sup> In 1993, one in four (25.3%) or 1.1 million Hispanic mothers age 15 to 44 received Food Stamps, compared to about one in three (33.2%) or 1.9 million Black mothers and one in nine (11.2%) or 3.2 million White mothers. In addition, 12.3% of Hispanic mothers age 15 to 44 (or 0.5 million) were WIC recipients in 1993, compared to 10.3% of Black mothers (or 0.6 million) and 6.1% of White mothers (or 1.7 million).
- ❖ **The majority of Hispanic school age children participate in school lunch programs.** In 1994, more than one-half (55.2%) of Hispanic school age children, or 3.8 million children, received free or reduced-priced school lunches, a proportion larger than that of White school age children (23.6%) and similar to that of Black (57.4%).
- ❖ **While Hispanic children represent a significant number of Medicaid recipients, they are still more likely than any other racial group to lack health insurance.**<sup>4</sup> In 1995, over one-third (37.4%) of Hispanic children received Medicaid benefits, a much higher proportion than White children (18.3%), and a lower proportion than Black children (45.4%). However, in 1995 more than one-quarter (26.8%) of all Hispanic children were not covered by any form of health insurance, compared to 15.3% of Black children and 13.4% of White children.

## Sources

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*U.S. Population Estimates by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1990 to 1995*, U.S. Bureau of the Census; *Population Projections of the United States by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1995 to 2050*, U.S. Bureau of the Census; *Poverty in the United States: 1995*, U.S. Bureau of the Census; AFDC Data, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Statistical Briefs, U.S. Bureau of the Census; and Health Insurance Data, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

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<sup>3</sup> Since Hispanic households are about three times more likely to be poor than non-Hispanic households, the receipt rate that is twice that of non-Hispanic households actually represents a relatively lower use of these benefits. Food Stamp and WIC data were broken out by race and Hispanic origin separately.

<sup>4</sup> The term "health insurance" refers to both governmental coverage, i.e., Medicaid and Medicare, and private coverage provided by an employer, or union, or coverage purchased by an employee.