

Key Facts on Food Insecurity and Hunger Among Latino* Children

Overview

Despite strong national nutrition assistance programs to support families in obtaining nutritious foods in times of great need, many Americans still struggle to put food on the table. More than 12.9 million households in the United States are food insecure, meaning that more than one in ten families lacks nutritionally adequate and safe foods and has a limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable

foods in socially acceptable ways.

Furthermore, more than one in six U.S. children (17.2%) is food insecure;¹ this is an alarming statistic, given that families often take great measures to ensure that their children do not go hungry. Data indicate that limited food resources play a strong role in the prevalence of hunger and food insecurity, negatively affecting Latino children's development.

Food Insecurity Rates in the Latino Community

- The rate of food insecurity among Hispanic children (26%) is similar to non-Hispanic Blacks (29.3%) and more than double that of non-Hispanic Whites (11.8%) (see figure 1).
- Hispanic children also experience high rates of very low food security[†] (0.7%), or hunger, a rate that is two times as high as the rate for non-Hispanic White

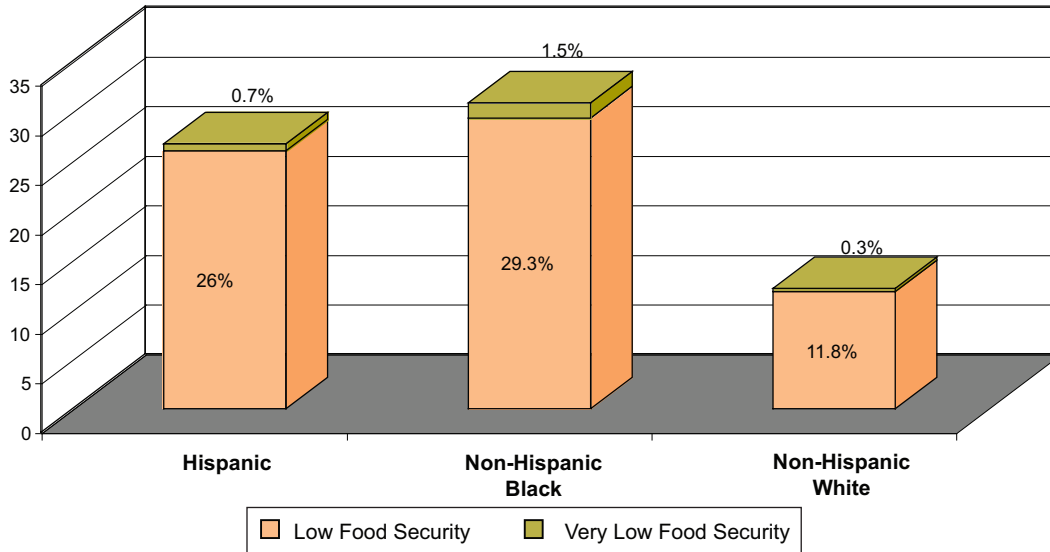
children (0.3%), though significantly lower than the rate for many non-Hispanic Black children (1.5%) (see figure 1). These children risk facing "recurrent mental and physical anguish as a result of inadequate food resources and have a stronger likelihood of becoming malnourished."²

* The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race.

† "Prior to 2006, households with low food security were described as 'food insecure without hunger' and households with very low food security were described as 'food insecure with hunger'. Changes in these descriptions were made in 2006 at the recommendation of the Committee on National Statistics...in order to distinguish the physiological state of hunger from indicators of food availability. The criteria by which households were classified remained unchanged." Source: Mark Nord, Margaret Andrews, and Steven Carlson, *Household Food Security in the United States, 2006* (Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture, 2007), <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR49/ERR49.pdf> (accessed May 15, 2008).

Figure 1

Food Insecurity Status of Children by Race/Ethnicity of Households, 2006



Source: *Household Food Security in the U.S., 2006* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2007), <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR49/ERR49.pdf> (accessed May 15, 2008).

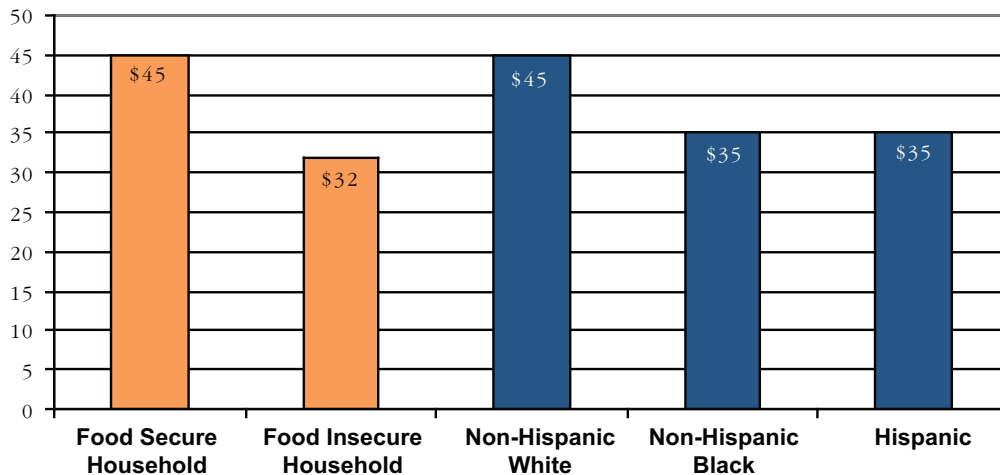
Food Resources for Latino Families

Despite typical Hispanic households allocating significantly more of their budget to food than non-Hispanic White households (23.6% and 16.4% of their budgets, respectively), they spend 22% less per person each week for food than non-Hispanic White households (\$35 and \$45 per person, respectively) (see figure 2).³ According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), this pattern is “consistent with the lower average incomes and higher poverty rates of...racial and ethnic minorities.”⁴

- Food insecure Hispanic households typically do not spend enough to meet the minimum thresholds of the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP), the “bare bones” food plan designed by the USDA as a guide for families during food deficit emergencies, which is typically less than one dollar per meal per family member for food expenditures.⁵

Figure 2

Median Weekly Household Food Spending per Person, 2006



Source: *Household Food Security in the U.S., 2006* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2007), <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR49/ERR49.pdf> (accessed May 15, 2008).

As the prices of basic necessities and common household expenses increase, Latinos must make trade-offs between resource payments and eating.

- Energy prices have continued to increase since 2000, and there is evidence that Latino families are struggling to balance household energy expenditures, such as for heating and cooling, against food expenditures.⁶ Household energy expenditure prices increased 42.1% between 2000 and 2005 according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.⁷ U.S. Consumer Expenditure Survey data from 2000 to 2005 note that during the same period, “as food prices increased by 13.5% overall, the share of total annual expenditures going for ‘utilities, fuels, and public services’ (which includes household energy spending) among Latino families increased by 12.1% on average, while the share of their spending going for food decreased by 15.8% on average.”⁸
- Researchers at the Children’s Sentinel Nutrition Assessment Program (C-SNAP) note that the growing gap between rising energy costs and limited family resources results in unsafe living conditions that threaten child health.⁹ **Latino infants and toddlers whose families are energy insecure, meaning they have trouble paying for energy needs, are 76% more likely to experience food insecurity than those families that have adequate resources to pay for energy needs. The same study found that Latino infants and toddlers whose families are severely energy insecure are three times more likely to experience food insecurity than their energy secure counterparts.**¹⁰

Consequences of Food Insecurity for Latino Children

Food insecure children are twice as likely to be in fair or poor health as similar children in food secure households.¹¹ Food insecure children also face higher odds of developing difficulties in cognition, language, motor skills, behavior, learning, and socio-emotional skills.¹²

Links exist between young, food insecure Latino children and developmental delay.

- A study conducted by C-SNAP found that young children (4-36 months of age) of color, including Hispanic children, who live in low-income food insecure households are at higher risk of developmental delay than low-income, food secure children of color.¹³
- The same study found that parents of low-income, food insecure Latino children have significant concerns for the development of their children at a rate two times higher than parents of low-income, food secure Latino children.¹⁴
- Latino infants and toddlers who are severely energy insecure are 93% more likely to be developmentally at risk compared to young, energy secure Latino children.¹⁵
- Trade-offs in expenditures have been observed to coincide with a drop-off in the brain and body growth of young children during periods of extreme cold weather, labeled “heat or eat,” or during periods of extreme heat, labeled “cool or eat,” when families’ financial resources are insufficient to cover all necessary costs.¹⁶

Conclusion

Childhood food insecurity and hunger are issues that persist throughout our country. Latino children, who represent the fastest-growing child population in the U.S., are disproportionately affected by food insecurity and hunger.

Thus, a large number of our nation’s children are at grave risk of a range of illnesses and developmental problems due to lack of access to nutritious foods.

Endnotes

1. Mark Nord, Margaret Andrews, and Steven Carlson, *Household Food Security in the United States, 2006*. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Service. Washington, DC, November 2007.
2. Ibid.; Jennifer Ng'andu and Emilia M. Leal Gianfortoni, *Sin Provecho: Latinos and Food Security* (Washington, DC: National Council of La Raza, 2006).
3. Jessie X. Fan and Virginia Solis Zuiker, "A Comparison of Household Budget Allocation Patterns Between Hispanic Americans and Non-Hispanic White Americans," *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* 19, no.2 (June 1998): 151-174.
4. Nord, Andrews, and Carlson, *Household Food Security*.
5. Ibid.
6. Children's Sentinel Nutrition Assessment Program (C-SNAP), *Balancing Acts: Energy Insecurity Among Low-Income Babies and Toddlers of Color Increases Food Insecurity and Harmful Health Effects*. Commissioned by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies Health Policy Institute. Washington, DC, March 2007.
7. White House, *Economic Report of the President* (Washington, DC: The United States Government Printing Office, February 2007).
8. C-SNAP, *Balancing Acts*.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. John T. Cook, Deborah A. Frank, Carol Berkowitz, et al., "Food Insecurity is Associated with Adverse Health Outcomes Among Human Infants and Toddlers," *Journal of Nutrition* 124 (2004): 1432-1438.
12. Children's Sentinel Nutrition Assessment Program (C-SNAP), *The Impact of Food Insecurity on the Development of Young Low-Income Black and Latino Children*. Commissioned by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies Health Policy Institute. Washington, DC, May 2006.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. C-SNAP, *Balancing Acts*.
16. C-SNAP, *Impact of Food Insecurity*; Mark Nord and Linda S. Kantor, "Seasonal Variation in Food Insecurity Is Associated with Heating and Cooling Costs among Low-Income Elderly Americans," *Journal of Nutrition* 136 (2006): 2939-2944.