

ISSUE 1: CHILD HUNGER AND FAMILY FOOD INSECURITY WITHIN THE LATINO COMMUNITY

Millions of Latino¹ families and children live in households without reliable access to healthy foods.² This means that, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), these households are “food insecure”—they do not have “consistent access to enough food for active healthy lives for all household members at all times during the year.” When budgets are stressed, many families have difficulty accessing enough resources to put sufficient food on the table, and in an era of economic crisis, this problem is magnified.

Food insecurity can have lasting impacts on children’s health; when access to nutritious foods is limited, healthy growth and development may be at risk. With Hispanic families experiencing some of the highest rates of food insecurity in the U.S., this problem is a real threat to the health and well-being of Latino children.

Food insecurity affects millions of Americans, including more than one in four (29.4%) Hispanics.³

- In 2008, 17 million U.S. households, representing more than 49 million people, were food insecure.
- Hispanics made up more than one-fifth (21.2%) of all food-insecure households.

Rates of food insecurity are highest among Hispanic and non-Hispanic Black households and are particularly acute among families with children.

- Overall, more than one in four Hispanic (26.9%) and non-Hispanic Black (25.7%) households were food insecure in 2008, compared to about one in ten (10.7%) non-Hispanic White households.
- In families with children under age 18, these rates are even higher. About one in three Hispanic (32.1%) and Black (31.9%) households with children are food insecure, along with about one in seven (15.5%) White households in which children are present.
- There are nearly five million Hispanic children living in food-insecure households, representing more than one-quarter (29.8%) of all children in food-insecure families.

Food insecurity with hunger—described by the USDA as “very low food security”—is a significant problem among Latino families with children.

- There are nearly four million Hispanics living in households with very low food security.
- Hispanic children are more than four times as likely (2.7%) as non-Hispanic White children (0.6%) to be living with very low food security.
- Latinos make up the largest share (37.1%) of all households with very low food security among children, followed by non-Hispanic Blacks (32.6%), non-Hispanic Whites (25.2%), and children of other races/ethnicities (5%).

Latinos’ food-insecurity rates have been relatively high over the past decade and have increased with the recent economic crisis.

- Over the past decade, children in homes headed by Latinos and Blacks have consistently faced much higher rates of food insecurity than children in households headed by Whites (see Figure 1).
- The proportion of Latino children living in food-insecure households has remained high, fluctuating between one-quarter and one-third of all Latino children.
- While this rate dipped by several percentage points between 2005 and 2007, food insecurity among children jumped sharply from 26% in 2007 to 33.9% in 2008, a year marked by the onset the severe economic recession.

These consistently high rates of food insecurity among Latino families have serious implications for the health and nutrition of Latino children.

Box 1:
Food Insecurity Defined

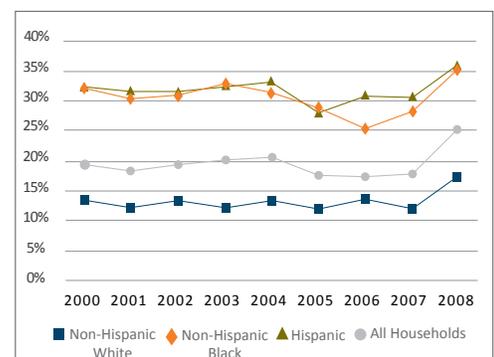
Food insecurity: At times during the year, households with food insecurity were “uncertain of having, or unable to acquire, enough food for all household members because they had insufficient money and other resources for food.”

Food insecurity with hunger (very low food security): Households that were “food insecure to the extent that eating patterns of one or more household members were disrupted and their food intake reduced, at least some time during the year, because they could not afford enough food.”

Food insecurity with hunger (very low food security) among children: While many food-insecure households are able to protect their children from reduced food intake, for some households with very low food security, “one or more children were also subject to reduced food intake and disrupted eating patterns at some point during the year.”

Source: Mark Nord, Margaret Andrews, and Steven Carlson, *Household Food Security in the United States, 2008*. Economic Research Services, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Washington, DC, 2009.

Figure 1:
Percent of Children Living in Food-Insecure Households by Race/Ethnicity, 2000–2008



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Household Food Security in the United States*. Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Washington, DC, 2001–2009.

Endnotes

¹ 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. Furthermore, unless otherwise noted, estimates in this document do not include the 3.9 million residents of Puerto Rico.

² This profile was authored by Kara D. Ryan, Research Analyst with the Health Policy Project at the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), with oversight and substantive input from Jennifer Ng’andu, Deputy Director of the Health Policy Project, and substantive support from Brad D. Johnson, consultant. Kari Nye, Assistant Editor, and Tiptavee Thongtavee, Graphic Designer, provided technical support and prepared the document for publication. NCLR is the largest national Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States.

³ All statistics in this document are derived from Mark Nord, Margaret Andrews, and Steven Carlson, *Household Food Security in the United States, 2008*. Economic Research Services, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Washington, DC, 2009.