



The Complex and Varied Households of Low-Income Hispanic Children

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Overview

Roughly one in four children in the United States today is Hispanic.¹ As such, Hispanics represent the largest and fastest-growing racial/ethnic minority group among the nation's children.² It is also a group that is disproportionately poor: Approximately one-third of Hispanic children live in poverty and two-thirds live in low-income households.^{3,4} Given the size and growth of the Hispanic child population, as well as Hispanic children's high poverty rates, many policies and programs are attempting to better reach Hispanic children in need. A key to realizing these efforts is understanding the nature of the households in which low-income Hispanic children live.

A large body of research finds that children who grow up in stable, low-conflict, two-parent households generally fare better than children in other types of households.⁵⁻⁷ Low-income children are less likely than are other children to live in stable households or with their biological father.^{8,9} However, focusing on the immediate family structure of children (i.e., the relationship status of the parents) often overlooks the presence of other adults in households—both related and unrelated—who may also support the healthy development of children. For example, employment, child care, and housework by other household members can help provide needed resources to children and parents.^{10,11} At the same time, adult employment in the households of low-income children is more precarious than it is in other households, and the presence of additional household members can strain limited resources or become a source of stress and conflict.¹²⁻¹⁴

This research brief examines the household composition of low-income Hispanic children, based on our analyses of recent nationally-representative data. We report on the size and structure of low-income children's households and the employment status of adult household members. We also explore variation in these patterns by whether the parents were born in the United States or outside it, in light of the unique challenges that immigrant households may face.^{15,16} Roughly two-thirds of low-income Hispanic children live in households with at least one foreign-born parent; one in three low-income Hispanic children lives in a household with only U.S.-born parents.ⁱⁱ In addition, we compare the households of low-income Hispanic children with the households of low-income non-Hispanic white and non-Hispanic black children (hereafter referred to as "white" and "black").

ⁱThis body of research draws on data that assess the marital and cohabiting relationships of heterosexual couples with children and single-parent families, where the children are the biological offspring of at least one of the adults in the residential, romantic relationship or of the single parent. These studies did not identify adoptive or same-sex parents.

ⁱⁱThe proportions of Hispanic children with a foreign-born parent and with U.S.-born parents are derived from weighted estimates from the 2012 American Community Survey. Children living with only U.S.-born parents include those living with a single-parent (or guardian) who is U.S.-born and those living with two parents (or guardians) who are both U.S.-born. Low-income children are those who live in families with incomes in the bottom quintile.

Key findings

The characteristics of the households in which low-income Hispanic children live differ in important ways from those of their non-Hispanic white and black counterparts. Moreover, the households of low-income Hispanic children with at least one foreign-born parent differ from the households of Hispanic children with only U.S.-born parents.

Family structure:

- Thirty-six percent of low-income Hispanic children with at least one foreign-born parent live in married, two-parent households—households solely comprised of married parents and children—more than any other low-income group.
- Almost half of low-income Hispanic children with only U.S.-born parents live in single-parent households—households with children and one parent—more than low-income white children and Hispanic children with at least one foreign-born parent.
- Low-income Hispanic children with at least one foreign-born parent are more likely to live with their biological father than are other low-income children, including low-income black and white children.

Household structure:

- Nearly four in 10 low-income Hispanic children with at least one foreign-born parent live in crowded conditions—households with three or more people per bedroom—compared with two in 10 low-income Hispanic children with only U.S.-born parents. Less than 15 percent of low-income white and black children do.
- Regardless of where their parents were born, roughly one-quarter of low-income Hispanic children live in the same household as an unrelated adult, while about 10 percent live with a grandparent. This is similar to levels among low-income white children.

Adult employment:

- The majority of low-income children live with at least one employed adult. More than 80 percent of low-income Hispanic children with at least one foreign-born parent live with an employed adult compared with roughly two-thirds of low-income white children and Hispanic children with U.S.-born parents and just over 50 percent of low-income black children. Low-income Hispanic children with at least one foreign-born parent are also more likely than other low-income children to live with an adult who works full-time.

Data source and methodology

The data that we analyzed for this brief come from the Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) files of the American Community Survey, an annual survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau that is nationally representative of the U.S. population.¹⁷ We limited the 2012 profile to Hispanic (n=39,086), non-Hispanic white (n=49,181), and non-Hispanic black (n=29,272) children aged zero to 17 in families with incomes in the bottom quintile (less than or equal to \$23,000 in 2012 dollars). Nearly two-thirds of the Hispanic children (n= 25,394) in the study sample lived with at least one foreign-born parent or guardian.

We conducted descriptive analyses across a range of measures, including household size, family structure, household composition, crowdedness, and adult employment (any adult employed and any adult employed full time). In the brief, we present race-ethnic specific results in Figures 1 through 7, and we show full results in the appendix. All analyses were conducted in STATA and were weighted to be nationally representative of children. We conducted tests of difference between racial-ethnic groups; significant group differences are noted in the text and the appendix.

Definitions

Parental nativity. Parental nativity refers to whether a child has at least one foreign-born residential parent or guardian. If the child does not live with a biological parent, we identified whether the head of household or spouse of the head of household was foreign-born. A child is considered to have U.S.-born parents if all of the parents or guardians in the household were born in this country. Parental nativity status refers only to the nativity status of children's residential parents and guardians. We distinguished between the status of parents born in the United States and those born outside it because past research has shown that large differences exist in characteristics of the Hispanic population by nativity. We focused on parental nativity status, rather than child nativity status, because even though the vast majority of Hispanic children in the United States were born in this country, roughly half have at least one foreign-born parent;¹⁸ this percentage is even higher among low-income Hispanic children. In contrast, the vast majority of white and black children have U.S.-born parents.

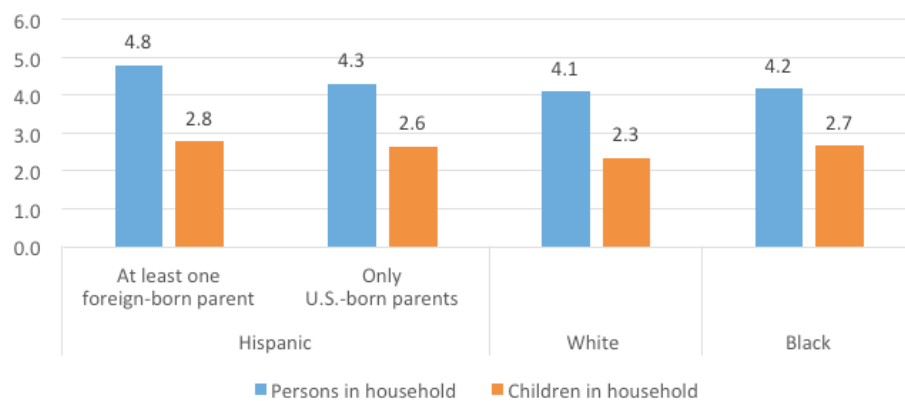
Family structure. A **family** is a group of persons related by blood, marriage, or adoption, and a **household** refers to all persons who occupy a housing unit. *Married, two-parent household* refers to households with married parents and biological, step, or adopted children, with no other persons present. A *cohabiting household* is comprised of a parent and biological or adopted children and the parent’s romantic partner (who may or may not be the parent of the child), and no other persons. A *single-parent household* is a household with one parent and children, and no other persons present. These three household types—married, two-parent; cohabiting parent; and single-parent—represent some of the household configurations experienced by children. Note that the three types do not add up to 100 percent.

Subfamily. A subfamily is family—a married couple without children, a married couple with children, or a single parent with children—that lives in someone else’s household. In this brief, a subfamily household indicates whether children live in households with a subfamily; some children in subfamily households are members of the subfamily while others are not. Members of the subfamily can be either related or unrelated to the householder.

Crowded housing. Crowded housing indicates that the child lives in a residential unit that has three or more household members per bedroom. If the dwelling has no bedrooms, then the measure of crowded housing becomes more than one person per room.

Household size

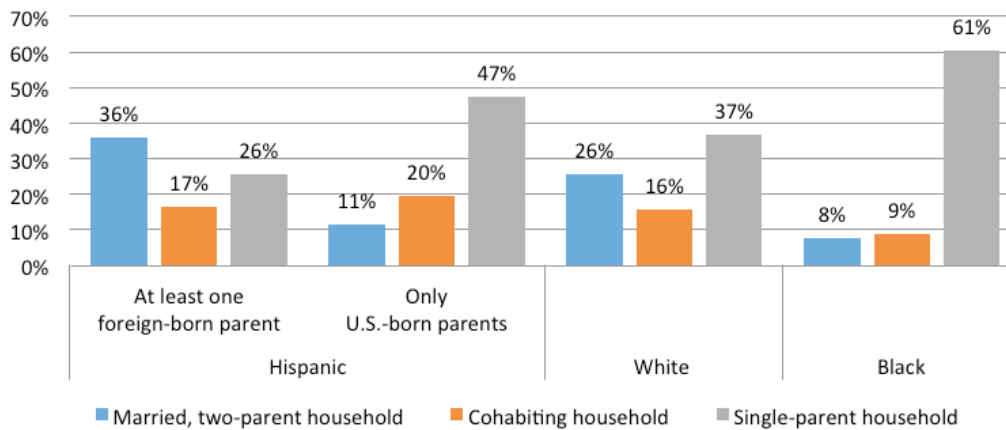
Figure 1. Low-income children’s household size, by race/ethnicity



Low-income Hispanic children with at least one foreign-born parent live in larger households than those with only U.S.-born parents, and their white and black peers. Specifically, low-income Hispanic children with at least one foreign-born parent live in households with close to five people (4.8), on average, compared with slightly more than four people among their counterparts with only U.S.-born parents (4.3), and compared with their white (4.1) and black (4.2) peers. Additionally, low-income Hispanic children with at least one foreign-born parent also live in households that have more *children* than their white counterparts (see Figure 1); the number of children in households is similar among Hispanic children with foreign-born and U.S.-born parents as well as among black children.

Family structure

Figure 2: Married, two-parent, cohabiting, and single-parent households, by race/ethnicity



Approximately one-third of low-income Hispanic children with at least one foreign-born parent live in married, two-parent households—those made up of only married parents and children. This proportion exceeds that among low-income white children (26 percent). It also is more than three times the proportion of low-income Hispanic children with only U.S.-born parents (11 percent) and more than four times that of low-income black children (8 percent) (see Figure 2).

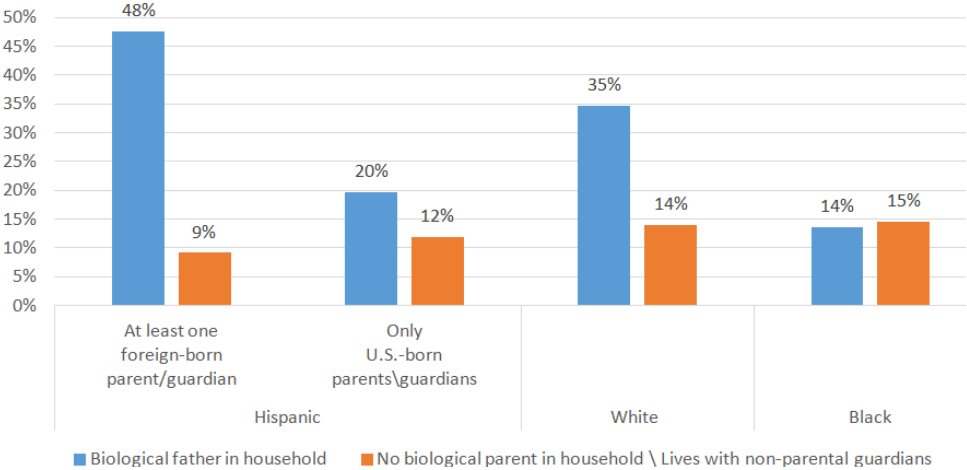
Approximately one in five low-income Hispanic children, regardless of where their parent or parents were born, lives in a cohabiting household. The proportion living in cohabiting households—a parent with children, living with a partner and no other people—is comparable to the level among low-income white children and about twice that of low-income black children.



Low-income Hispanic children with only U.S.-born parents are almost twice as likely to live in single-parent households—those solely comprised of children and one parent—than are their counterparts with at least one foreign-born parent. Forty-seven percent of low-income Hispanic children with only U.S.-born parents live in single-parent households, compared with 26 percent of those with at least one foreign-born parent. For comparison, 37 percent of low-income white children and 61 percent of low-income black children live in single-parent households.

Family structure

Figure 3: Low-income children with resident fathers and nonresident parents, by race/ethnicity



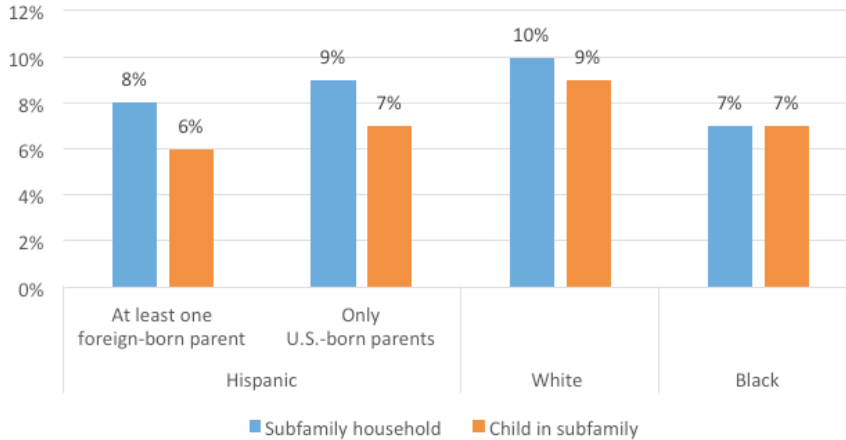
Low-income Hispanic children with at least one foreign-born parent are more likely to live in the same household as their biological father than are other low-income children.

Nearly half of low-income Hispanic children with foreign-born parents live with their father, compared with 20 percent of low-income Hispanic children with a U.S.-born parent or parents. At 48 percent, the proportion of low-income Hispanic children with at least one foreign-born parent who live with their biological father contrasts sharply with the proportion of low-income white children (35 percent) and low-income black children (14 percent) who do so (see Figure 3).

Roughly one in 10 low-income Hispanic children does not live with either biological parent. The proportion of those in this situation is about the same among their white and black peers (see Figure 3).

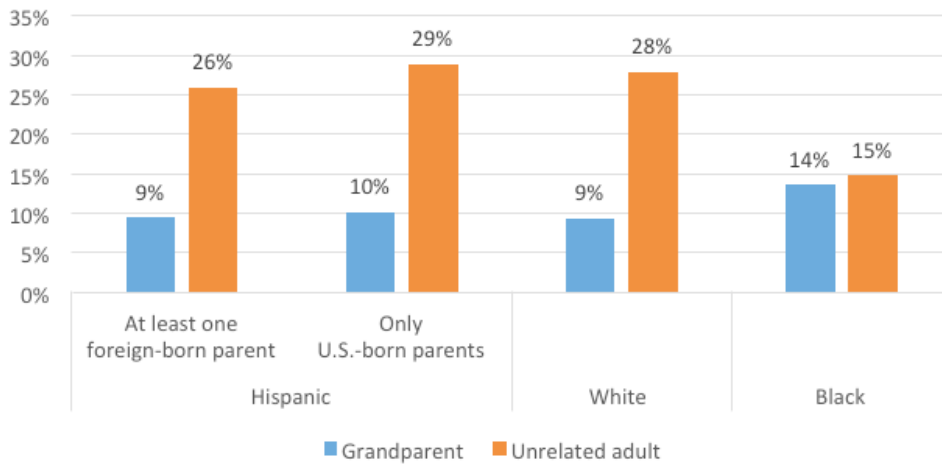
Non-parent household members

Figure 4: Low-income children living in subfamily households and children in a subfamily, by race/ethnicity



Less than 10 percent of low-income Hispanic children live in a household that contains a subfamily. The prevalence of subfamily households among low-income Hispanic children does not vary by parental nativity status and falls between that of low-income black (7 percent) and low-income white (10 percent) children. Approximately six percent of low-income Hispanic children are members of a subfamily—a family that lives in someone else’s household (see Figure 4).

Figure 5: Low-income children living with grandparent and unrelated adult, by race/ethnicity

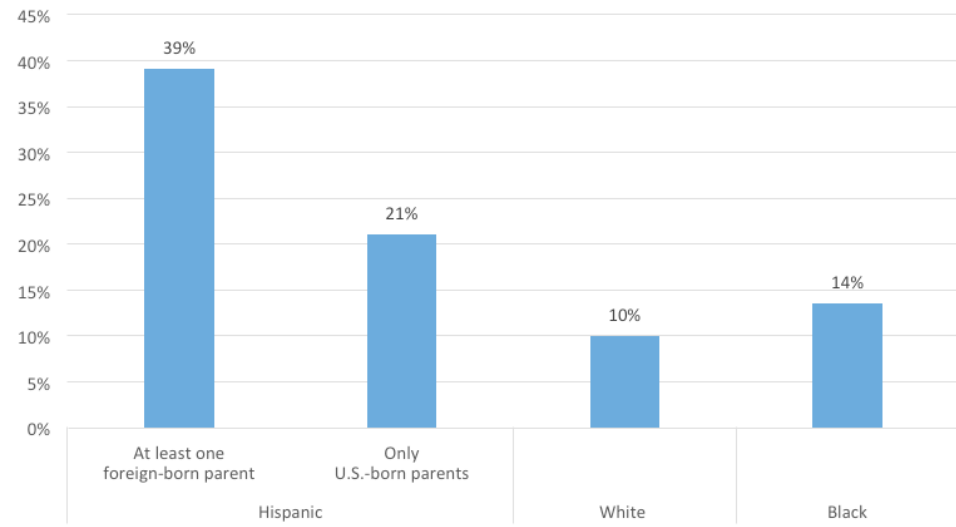


Roughly one in 10 low-income Hispanic children, regardless of parental nativity, lives with a grandparent. This proportion is similar to the percentage of low-income white children living with a grandparent (9 percent), though less than that of low-income black children (14 percent) (see Figure 5). Most of the children who live with a grandparent live in multigenerational households. Specifically, eight percent of low-income Hispanic children live in households made up of three or more generations—a child, parent, and grandparent (see Appendix).

More than one in four low-income Hispanic children, regardless of parental nativity, lives in a household with an unrelated adult. This proportion is comparable to levels among low-income white children (28 percent) and exceeds that of low-income black children (15 percent) (see Figure 5). For all low-income racial/ethnic groups, the majority of unrelated adults in the households are cohabiting partners of the resident parent (results not shown).

Crowded housing

Figure 6: Children in crowded housing, by race/ethnicity

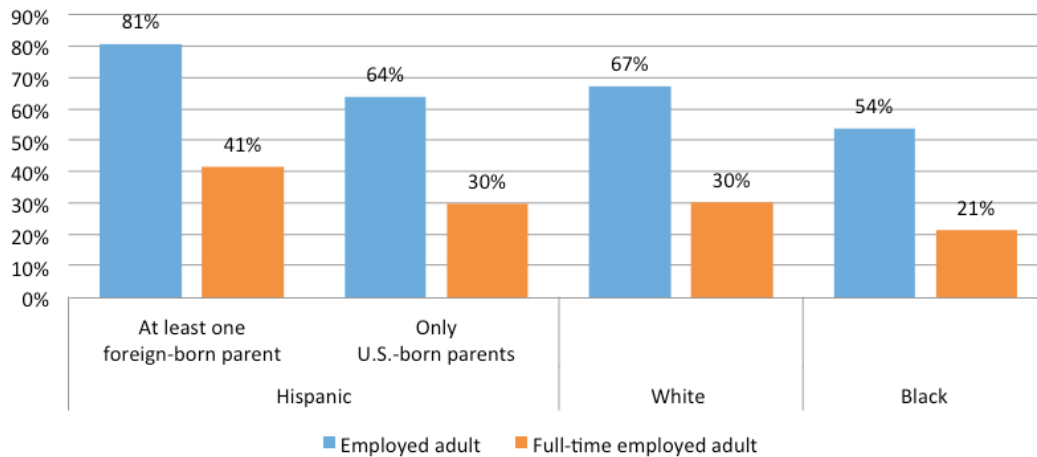


Despite having the largest household sizes, low-income Hispanic children live in houses and apartments that have fewer rooms and fewer bedrooms than do their low-income racial-ethnic counterparts. This situation is particularly true for those with foreign-born parents: low-income Hispanic children with at least one foreign-born parent live in residential units that average 4.6 rooms and 2.4 bedrooms, whereas those with only U.S.-born parents live in units that average 5.1 rooms and 2.7 bedrooms. Low-income white children live in the largest residential units, averaging 5.8 rooms and 2.9 bedrooms (see Appendix).

Low-income Hispanic children with at least one foreign-born parent are almost twice as likely to live in crowded housing as those with only U.S.-born parents. Nearly 40 percent of Hispanic children with at least one foreign-born parent live in crowded conditions, compared with 21 percent of those with only U.S.-born parents. Less than 15 percent of low-income white and black children live in crowded conditions (see Figure 6).

Employment

Figure 7: Low-income children who live with employed adults, by race/ethnicity



A higher proportion of low-income Hispanic children with at least one foreign-born parent live in households with an employed adult and with an adult who works full time than is the case for other low-income children.

- The vast majority (more than 80 percent) of low-income Hispanic children with at least one foreign-born parent live in households with an employed adult, compared with about two-thirds of low-income Hispanic children with only U.S.-born parents and white children and with slightly more than half of low-income black children (see Figure 7).
- Additionally, more than 40 percent of low-income Hispanic children with at least one foreign-born parent live with an adult who worked full time (40 or more hours per week for at least 50 weeks) in the past year, compared with 30 percent both of low-income Hispanic children with only U.S.-born parents and low-income white children, and with 21 percent of low-income black children (see Figure 7).

Summary and discussion

The findings presented in this brief indicate that low-income Hispanic children live in households that differ in many cases from the households of their non-Hispanic black and white peers. Our analyses also show that the households of low-income Hispanic children differ in several ways based on whether a parent or parents were born in the United States or in another country. Among low-income Hispanic children, children of immigrants are more likely to grow up in married households and to live with their biological fathers than are their low-income Hispanic peers with only U.S.-born parents. This finding translates into a notable advantage for those with at least one foreign-born parent, given the benefits of stable, two-parent families, such as relative economic well-being and parents spending more time with children.¹⁹ In contrast, only one in 10 low-income Hispanic children with a U.S.-born parent or parents lives in a household with two married parents, and almost half live in single-parent households.

Despite the advantages that many Hispanic children with immigrant parents may enjoy because of the alignment of their family structures with positive child development, these same children may be at a disadvantage when it comes to their living conditions. With larger household sizes and smaller residential units, the prevalence of crowded housing for these children is nearly four times that of low-income white children and twice that of their peers with only U.S.-born parents. Crowded housing is associated with a host of adverse outcomes for children, such as sleep deprivation, behavioral problems, and less-responsive parenting.^{20, 21} Moreover, concerned policymakers and service providers may regard these conditions as a signal of greater residential instability or economic insecurity. Still, in some cases, living in seemingly overflowing households may be beneficial. For example, additional adults in the household may contribute resources, if these adults work or help provide child care or other vital assistance to children and other family members.

Parental employment, in itself, benefits children. For low-income Hispanic families, the numbers in this area are promising: the vast majority of low-income Hispanic children with at least one foreign-born parent, and almost two-thirds of low-income Hispanic children with only U.S.-born parents, live in households with an employed adult (either any or full-time employment). Beyond the money that comes into a household from wages, the presence of an employed adult may offer other stabilizing benefits, such as providing regularity in schedules and routines, as well as a role model for others in the household.^{22, 23} Conversely, if the employment is associated with long or irregular work hours, it may also minimize opportunities for wage earners' interaction with children or disrupt family schedules.

Household composition is linked to processes that are critical to the healthy development of children, including parental well-being, relationship quality, and the parent-child relationship.^{24, 25} Low-income Hispanic children live in households that offer both potential advantages and challenges when compared to the households of other low-income children. The differences in the characteristics of households headed by parents who were born in the United States and those born elsewhere have implications for the resources available to households. These differences are important to understand when developing and administering programs designed to meet the needs of low-income Hispanic children.

Appendix

Table 1. Household complexity of low-income children, by race/ethnicity

	Low-income children			
	Hispanic		White	Black
	At least one foreign-born parent	Only U.S.-born parents		
Number of persons in household	4.81 ^{abc}	4.30	4.10	4.17
Number of minors in household	2.78 ^b	2.65 ^d	2.33	2.66
Married, two-parent household (%)	36.1 ^{abc}	11.4 ^d	25.7	7.7
Single-parent family household (%)	25.7 ^{abc}	47.4 ^{de}	36.8	60.6
Cohabiting household (%)	16.5 ^c	19.5 ^e	15.6	8.7
Father in household (%)	47.6 ^{abc}	19.6 ^d	34.6	13.5
No biological parents in household (%)	9.1	11.9	14.0	14.5
Grandparent in household (%)	9.5	10.1	9.4	13.6
3 or more generations in household (%)	8.4	8.3	6.7	9.9
Unrelated adult in household (%)	25.9 ^c	28.9 ^e	27.9	14.8
Subfamily household (%)	8.1	8.5	10.0	7.5
Related subfamily in household (%)	5.5	5.4	4.7	6.1
Unrelated subfamily in household (%)	2.7	3.2	5.4	1.4
Member of subfamily (%)	5.9	7.1	8.5	6.7
Number of rooms	4.59 ^{abc}	5.07 ^d	5.77	5.30
Number of bedrooms	2.40 ^{abc}	2.65 ^d	2.94	2.76
Crowded housing (%)	39.2 ^{abc}	21.1 ^{de}	10.0	13.5
Employed adult in household (%)	80.7 ^{abc}	63.8 ^d	67.2	53.6
Full-Time employed adult in household (%)	41.4 ^{abc}	29.7	30.0	21.2
Sample size	25,394	14,412	49,181	29,272

Source: 2012 American Community Survey

Notes: Results in the appendix table and figures are based on the same analyses. In the table, results for binary indicators were rounded to the nearest tenth, and results for continuous indicators were rounded to the nearest hundredth. Results in the figures were rounded to the nearest whole number. Any apparent differences are due to rounding. Tests of difference between racial-ethnic groups that are independent of sample size were conducted. Cohen's d effect sizes were calculated for continuous variables, and values greater than .2 are noted. Phi coefficients were calculated for binary variables, and values greater than or equal to .1 are noted.

a Significant difference between low-income Hispanic children with at least one foreign-born parent and those with only U.S.-born parents.

b Significant difference between low-income Hispanic children with at least one foreign-born parent and low-income white children.

c Significant difference between low-income Hispanic children with at least one foreign-born parent and low-income black children.

d Significant difference between low-income Hispanic children with only U.S.-born parents and low-income white children.

e Significant difference between low-income Hispanic children with only U.S.-born parents and low-income black children.

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About the Center

The National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families is a hub of research to help programs and policy better serve low-income Hispanics across three priority areas—poverty reduction and economic self-sufficiency, healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood, and early care and education. The Center was established in 2013 by a five-year cooperative agreement from the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to Child Trends in partnership with Abt Associates and New York University, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and University of Maryland, College Park. This publication was made possible by Grant Number 90PH0025 from OPRE. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of OPRE, ACF, or HHS.

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