

Understanding Latino Children and Families' Well-being Requires Data Disaggregated by Birth Within or Outside the United States

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Nearly 1 in 5 people in the United States are Hispanic, and Latino children and families' well-being varies according to a number of factors—including whether they were born inside the United States or outside it, in their country of heritage. Disaggregated data that compare the lived experiences and outcomes of Hispanic children and families born in the United States to those born outside the country are needed to understand disparities in education, child care and health care access, employment opportunities, and other key areas that affect U.S. Hispanic children and families' well-being.

Introduction

The Latino population in the United States has experienced significant growth and change over the past several decades. As of 2022, 63.7 million people in the United States—or 19 percent of the total population—are Hispanic, tracing their ancestry or descent to Mexico, parts of the Caribbean, Central and South America, and Spain.^{b,1} Individuals of Hispanic heritage are now the largest ethnic minority group in the country.²

This demographic shift has been driven by multiple factors, including immigration patterns, births, and intergenerational transmission of Latino heritage.^{3,4} Moreover, the U.S. Latino population is notably diverse and heterogeneous. Although the share of Latinos who are of Mexican descent is large, at more than 37 million people, Latino individuals come from every country in South and Central America (including El Salvador and Guatemala) and the Caribbean (including the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, a U.S. territory).⁵ Further, Hispanic individuals vary in terms of their religion, languages spoken, race, immigration history, and whether they were born in the United States. Consequently, the Latino population's lived experiences and outcomes vary across several indicators or elements of diversity, including socioeconomic status (SES), ancestry/heritage, country of birth, time in the United States, language, educational attainment, economic opportunities, health care access, and political participation.^{6,7,8} To better understand this variation, there have been efforts to identify key data elements that can help “unpack” the diversity of the Latino population and inform future research focused on Hispanic populations.⁸

In this brief, we focus on one element of diversity: nativity status, a term used to distinguish people who were born in the United States (primarily referred to in this brief as “U.S.-born”) from those who were born outside of the United States (often referred to in this brief as “non-U.S.-born”). This categorization provides a broad framework for appreciating the distinct lived experiences, challenges, and opportunities that Latino individuals might have encountered based on their birthplace—each of which impacts their cultural identity, access to opportunities, and overall integration into American society.^{9,10}

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^b In the 1970s, the federal government adopted the term “Hispanic” to describe this group. We use “Hispanic,” “Latino,” “Latinx,” and “Latine” interchangeably throughout the brief. The terms are used to reflect the U.S. Census definition to include individuals having origins in Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Cuba, as well as other “Hispanic, Latino or Spanish” origins.

This brief has three main parts. First, we describe theoretical perspectives that support a disaggregated approach—that is, examining different Latino subgroups separately—to understanding Latino individuals' well-being by considering their nativity status. Second, we use a strength-based approach to summarize existing research on how Latino families vary by nativity status in their family processes (i.e., co-parenting and parenting), psychological functioning (i.e., mental health), stressors (e.g., poverty), promotive factors (factors such as optimism and bicultural identity that are related to positive outcomes), protective factors (factors that might mitigate the negative effects of risks on outcomes), and children's well-being. Third, we discuss implications of our findings and review important policy and program considerations

Summary of Key Findings and Implications^c

Key findings from the literature on how Latino individuals' experiences and outcomes vary by birth within or outside the United States

The research on Hispanic individuals' diverse experiences and outcomes by nativity status reveals three overall insights. First, there are differences in family processes, psychological well-being, stressors, protective factors, and outcomes between Latino children and families born in the United States and those born outside it. Second, the bulk of the research has primarily emphasized adversity and hardships rather than strengths, making it difficult to present a balanced view of these groups' capabilities and the barriers to their well-being. Third, because some of the differences between the groups are small and there is substantial variation within each group, future research and practice should focus on understanding how variation relates to these groups' experiences and outcomes.

Family processes and psychological well-being

- There are both similarities and differences between the parenting behaviors of Latino parents who were born inside versus outside the United States. Both groups report similarly high levels of warm interactions with their children, and U.S.-born Latino fathers report being more involved in the day-to-day care of their children than fathers born outside the United States. Latine parents do not spank their children very often, and those born outside the United States report spanking less frequently than their U.S.-born counterparts.
- Latine parents, overall, tend to favor raising bicultural children; they aim to retain the traditions of their Latino culture while embracing American parenting ideas and practices such as the value of independence.
- U.S.-born Hispanic parents are more in agreement about co-parenting than their counterparts born outside the United States, reflecting more egalitarian and shared parenting roles.
- Compared to U.S.-born parents, Latino parents born outside the United States report better mental health; however, non-U.S.-born Latina mothers report higher levels of parenting stress.

Children's well-being

- Young children of U.S.-born Latinx parents have higher cognitive scores from 24 months through kindergarten than the children of parents born outside the United States. But children whose parents were born outside the United States exhibit faster academic growth in math and reading during early grades, potentially allowing them to catch up to or surpass their peers.
- Young children of Mexican mothers who were born outside the United States and immigrated as adults scored lower on externalizing behavioral problems than the children of U.S.-born Mexican mothers or of mothers who immigrated when they were young.

Social and economic stressors

- As a group, Latino parents born outside the United States are likely to experience acculturation- and immigration-related stressors such as language barriers, which can negatively affect their access to information and resources, educational opportunities, and job prospects.
- Despite having high employment rates, Latine parents who were born outside the United States face significant economic stressors related to working in jobs with low wages, lack of access to health care, and exploitation. These stressors are more salient among Latino immigrants who are unauthorized.

^c Early drafts of this product used ChatGPT to extract key findings from the results presented in this brief.

The published version presents the authors' main points and interpretations, although some language may overlap.

- Although U.S.-born Hispanic parents know the cultural norms and values of the United States and are native English speakers, they still experience discrimination and face economic challenges such as poverty, inadequate housing, and inadequate health care.

Potential promotive and protective factors

- Research comparing promotive and protective factors in U.S.-born Latino individuals versus non-U.S.-born Latino individuals is scant and typically points only to factors related to positive outcomes in one or both groups, but does not identify factors that mitigate risks experienced by U.S.-born or non-U.S.-born Latinx individuals specifically.
- Access to educational opportunities, bicultural identity, and bilingualism are important promotive factors for all Latino individuals, regardless of whether they were born in the United States.
- Social and cultural factors that promote better outcomes for Latine individuals born outside of the United States include a strong sense of community and social support networks within ethnic enclaves; the presence of a safety net for help; the sharing of resources; and the preservation of cultural practices.
- Psychological promotive factors for Hispanic parents born outside the United States include higher levels of optimism and a strong ethnic identity, which are positively related to their children’s developmental outcomes.

Implications for research, policy, and practice

- Disaggregating data by nativity status for Latino populations is an essential first step toward understanding and addressing their diverse needs, strengths, and experiences.
- To better understand and document the heterogeneity among Latine individuals, future data collection efforts should prioritize gathering information on family processes, including co-parenting, relationship quality, and father involvement—from both mothers’ and fathers’ perspectives—and on where they were born and other elements of diversity.
- Future research should further explore links between promotive and protective factors and family and child outcomes in different domains, as being born in or outside of the United States is not uniformly related to better outcomes.
- To comprehensively capture the diversity among Latino individuals, it is critical that researchers consider intersecting identities, such as race, ancestry, citizenship status, English proficiency, time in the United States, country of origin, parents’ country of origin, languages spoken at home, and proficiency in both English and native languages.
- Program developers and policymakers should consider the specific needs and strengths of Latinx individuals—including those born within and outside the United States—to ensure that policies and practices are efficient and impactful.



Background and Context

Latino nativity and demographic overview

A key element of examining the diversity of the Latino population in the United States is to look at whether individuals were born in the United States or outside it.⁸ Latino individuals born in the United States have U.S. citizenship by birthright and are referred to as “U.S.-born Latino individuals” or as “second-, third-, or fourth-generation Latino individuals,” depending on their generation status. In contrast, Latino individuals born outside the United States are those who migrated to the United States and who may have acquired U.S. citizenship. They are variously referred to as

“foreign-born,” “immigrants,” or “first-generation.” At the household level, a household with at least one adult born outside the United States is identified as an immigrant household, while a household in which all adults are U.S.-born may be identified as a native-born or non-immigrant household.¹¹

Latino individuals born within versus outside the United States differ in some key sociodemographic characteristics.¹² In 2021, the median age for U.S.-born Latino individuals was 21 years—significantly younger than their non-U.S.-born counterparts (44.5 years).¹³ In the same year, a higher percentage of Hispanic adults born outside the United States were married (58%) compared to U.S.-born Latino adults (37%), and this population was also more likely to live in multigenerational households (32% vs. 26%, respectively).¹² Although the poverty rate was essentially the same for both Latino groups (17% among those born outside the United States and 18% among the U.S.-born Latino population), a higher percentage of Latine children born elsewhere (29%) were living in poverty, relative to U.S.-born (23%) children (ages 17 or younger).¹² U.S.-born Hispanic adults had a slightly higher median income than their peers born outside the United States (\$62,000 vs \$55,000). Over 90 percent of U.S.-born Hispanic individuals ages 5 and older were proficient in English, compared to 38 percent of their peers born outside.¹² Thirty two percent of U.S.-born Hispanic adults ages 25 and older had at least some college education, compared to 17 percent of their non-U.S.-born counterparts.¹²

Sociodemographic differences between Latine individuals born in the United States and those born outside it are likely due to a confluence of factors, including migration patterns; differential access to educational, occupational, and other opportunities; and exposure to and familiarity with U.S. systems, culture, and norms.^{12,14,15}

About this brief

This brief builds on these findings and on our previous work showing that the challenges, opportunities, and lived experiences of Latinx individuals vary significantly by their nativity status^{4,6,11,16,17,18,19,20,21,22} and that these differences are tied in significant ways to their and their children's well-being. These differences should be considered when examining how policies and programs support the diverse needs of Latino individuals.

This brief summarizes existing literature and does not report original data analyses. It draws from the *Integrative Model for the Study of Developmental Competencies in Ethnic Minority Children* (hereafter, *Integrative model*), which argues that social positions of race, social class, ethnicity, immigration, and gender have implications for opportunities and outcomes of minoritized populations, influencing parenting and children's development.²³ According to the *Integrative model*, child development is influenced by a set of proximal (e.g., parenting behaviors) and distal (e.g., nativity status, SES) characteristics that shape parenting beliefs, practices, and relationships with their children. Thus, we expect nativity status to shape parents' choices and behaviors as individuals and as parents. The *Integrative model* is consistent with views that focus on multidimensional identities.²⁴ Latino parents' experiences are shaped not only by their ethnicity, but also by the languages they speak, their immigration experiences (i.e., whether they were born in the United States), and their culture. To the extent possible, our review includes studies that have examined differences in key variables by nativity status.

Theoretical Considerations in Understanding Differences Among Hispanic Individuals by Birth Within or Outside the United States

To understand the broad range of lived experiences of individuals by whether they were born within or outside the United States (i.e., their nativity status), researchers have developed several theoretical models. Here, we discuss the three most commonly used frameworks: assimilation models, acculturation, and the immigrant paradox.

All theoretical models used to study the variability in individuals' experiences by nativity status focus on the *process* through which individuals from different countries and cultural backgrounds participate in or integrate into the host country. Although each model described below emphasizes a slightly different aspect of this process, all aim to explain the differences between U.S.-born individuals (who were born into a culture that socialized them to its norms, values, and expectations) and non-U.S.-born individuals (who must learn and integrate these new norms and values into their culture-specific norms, values, and expectations).

A caveat to this section: These theoretical models have not always been tested to examine how U.S.-born and non-U.S.-born Hispanic individuals fare on multiple dimensions, including mental health, health, and education—indicating a potential direction for further research and inquiry.

Assimilation models

Assimilation (i.e., adoption of the host culture over one's heritage culture) models theorize that there are multiple patterns of assimilation and adaptation that can lead to divergent outcomes. Individuals can assimilate upwardly, downwardly, or horizontally into an American society.²⁵ Some non-U.S.-born Latine immigrants may experience upward mobility and integration into mainstream society while others may face downward assimilation, experiencing economic hardships and marginalization shaped by skin tone, levels of education, or language use. U.S.-born Latino individuals can also demonstrate different trajectories, with some achieving upward mobility and others experiencing downward assimilation due to factors such as discrimination or limited access to resources.



According to the segmented assimilation model, the experiences and outcomes of immigrants and their children vary based on their own characteristics as well as on the specific characteristics of the host society. Under welcoming conditions in the host country, immigrant families become part of the country's social and economic fabric—they learn English and attend schools to receive training or further their education—and their children have a good chance of thriving.²⁶ This process of adaptation can lead to a change in their identity and language; a loss of culture from their country of origin; and full adoption of “American” ways, values, and traditions. Because assimilation or adaptation to the new country also depends on individuals' and families' resources—human, social, and financial capital, and the unique circumstances of their immigration patterns—the process of adaptation is varied.^{27,28} In particular, premigration resources (money, knowledge, and skills), race, and social class status in immigrants' homelands can interact with the conditions of their host country—labor market conditions, public attitudes, government policies, and viability of ethnic communities—to yield different experiences of adaptation and assimilation.³

Acculturation theory

Acculturation theory is concerned with individuals' cultural adaptation and how it relates to their health, well-being, and social outcomes.^{29,30} The degree and level of acculturation depend on several factors, including length of time spent in the receiving country, age at migration, language proficiency, and adaptation of norms and values of the host country.^{31,32} At the core of the acculturative process is the way in which both U.S.-born and non-U.S.-born Hispanic individuals negotiate their heritage culture and adopt aspects of “American” culture.³³ It is a dynamic process in which individuals show varying levels of attachment to both their heritage and mainstream cultures. Broadly, the acculturation model highlights two dimensions: retention or rejection of the host culture and maintenance or rejection of one's heritage culture. These dimensions suggest four acculturation strategies, including assimilation, integration (adoption of both the host and native cultures), separation (preservation of one's native culture while rejecting the host culture), and marginalization (rejection of both the host culture and native culture). From this perspective, researchers investigate how the process of acculturation impacts parenting behaviors, family dynamics, mental health, and other social and economic outcomes among Latino families. In theory, U.S.-born Latino individuals do not “acculturate” in the same way as those born in another country because they were born in the United States and socialized to its predominant practices and norms. However, U.S.-born Latinx individuals can embrace ethnic identity and learn the language as a way to retain their heritage culture. Research shows that different acculturation strategies can lead to different social, economic, and health experiences for Latino families.^{7,34,35}

Immigrant advantage or immigrant paradox

Although not a theory *per se*, the immigrant advantage or immigrant paradox describes a population-level phenomenon by which individuals born outside the United States present better health outcomes than their U.S.-born counterparts despite their relatively lower SES.³⁶ These outcomes are often explained by a self-selection process that distinguishes individuals who immigrate from those who do not.³⁷ Specifically, immigrants have a particular set of characteristics and dispositions that enabled them to endure the immigration process and settle in the United States.^{38,39,40}

However, researchers have also observed that as immigrant children and adolescents acculturate to the United States (over time and generations), their developmental outcomes become less optimal.^{41,42,43} Researchers have documented an “erosion of family closeness” in later generations that can minimize families’ influence on their children.⁴⁴ An increase in risk factors (e.g., increased stress) and a decrease in promotive factors (e.g., family cohesion) are likely to contribute to negative outcomes for later generations of Latine immigrants.⁴⁵

Findings From Research Showing Variability Among Latino Individuals by Birth Within or Outside the United States

Although the topic is not extensively researched, some research has documented variability in Latino individuals’ characteristics, lived experiences, and outcomes by nativity status. This section summarizes findings regarding differences in family processes and psychological well-being, children’s well-being, social and economic stressors, and promotive factors. The variability in outcomes—including within those born both inside and outside the United States—is the most significant finding in research conducted on nativity status to date. Moreover, research has mostly focused on challenges and adversity rather than strengths,¹⁰ so it is difficult to provide a complete picture of these groups’ strengths or their resilience in the context of their challenges. The diversity of Latino families and children in the United States—both across and within groups by nativity status—should be the next big goal for researchers to address.

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Family processes and psychological well-being

There are notable but small differences in key family processes such as parenting and co-parenting that reflect cultural differences, acculturation processes, and social contexts.

Parenting

Differences in parenting among Latino parents by whether they were born within or outside the United States can be observed in some parenting behaviors but not in others. U.S.-born Latino mothers and fathers report similarly high levels of warm interactions with their children relative to Latino mothers and fathers, respectively, born outside the United States.^{16,46} However, U.S.-born Latino fathers report more involvement with their younger children and show more positive engagement (e.g., singing songs, reading books) and caretaking (e.g., feeding) with their young children, relative to non-U.S.-born Latino fathers.^{46,47} Although differences in parenting behaviors between the groups are statistically significant, they are also small and, as a result, their practical significance is unclear. These findings do not suggest that parents born outside the United States are not involved with their children, nor do they suggest these parents do not engage in positive interactions with their children. Rather, they merely show some small differences that may or may not be related to children’s outcomes.

Another significant finding is that Latino parents, overall, do not spank their children very often.¹⁶ There are, however, differences in the methods Latino parents use to discipline their children depending on whether they were born within or outside the United States. U.S.-born Latina mothers and fathers report spanking their preschoolers more often than those born outside the United States.⁴⁸ U.S.-born Latino fathers report using more verbal and harsh discipline than their non-U.S.-born counterparts.¹⁶

In terms of how Latino parents rear their children in a culturally diverse society, qualitative data show that both U.S.-born and non-U.S.-born Latino parents engage in a process of intentional acculturation. They emphasize certain aspects of American culture while retaining other cultural practices from their country of heritage.³⁵ Additionally, they aim for a balance between maintaining cultural traditions—such as language, food, and celebrations—while incorporating American parenting ideals and practices such as the value of independence.⁴⁹ This intentional socialization to be competent in two cultures can result in a co-existence of norms and beliefs that includes behaviors and elements from both cultures. Latino parents’ overall goal seems to be biculturalism: to rear children who can navigate successfully in two cultures.

Importantly, parenting behaviors are not fixed or static and can evolve over time as families adapt to new environments, navigate intergenerational dynamics, and respond to changing cultural and social contexts. Individual variations, personal beliefs, and socioeconomic factors also contribute to the diversity of co-parenting and parenting practices within the Latino community, regardless of parents’ birth within or outside the United States.

Co-parenting

Co-parenting refers to the processes whereby parents work together as a team to rear their children.⁵⁰ At the core of co-parenting is the idea that both parents should be equally involved and participate in all decisions related to child rearing. Studies show that while non-U.S.-born mothers and fathers have different perceptions of their co-parenting relationships (fathers are more positive), U.S.-born parents perceive their relationship in the same way.¹⁶ In general, U.S.-born Latino parents report more egalitarian and shared parenting roles than their counterparts born outside the United States.⁵¹ Other studies of mostly non-U.S.-born Latino parents have shown that U.S.-born Latino parents report higher levels of prioritizing active involvement by both parents in child care responsibilities, decision making, and support for each other's parenting roles, relative to their counterparts born in another country.⁵² As a group, U.S.-born Latino parents exhibit cultural shifts toward more gender equality.^{53,54}



In contrast, studies with select samples of Latino families have shown that some non-U.S.-born Latino parents report more adherence to “traditional” gender roles that emphasize the nurturance role of mothers and the instrumental role of fathers in child rearing.⁵⁵ Latino parents born outside the United States hold cultural values and expectations from their home countries that emphasize distinct gender roles and the primary responsibility of mothers in child care, which shape their parenting practices.^{56,57} Although research is limited, theoretically, rigid gender roles can result in less shared decision making and limited involvement of fathers in daily parenting activities.^{58,59} However, there is considerable variability in non-U.S.-born Latino parents’ co-parenting practices that should not be overlooked.

Psychological well-being

There are distinct differences in the mental health of Latino parents based on whether they were born in or outside of the United States. U.S.-born Latina mothers report more depression symptoms and less parenting stress than their non-U.S.-born counterparts.^{16,21,60} U.S.-born Hispanic parents also have a higher prevalence of mental health disorders than their counterparts born outside the United States.²¹ Possible explanations for these findings include intergenerational effects of structural racism and discrimination on health outcomes—such as depression, anxiety, psychological stress, high blood pressure, and a weakened immune system.⁶¹ Racism and discrimination are related to social, economic, and environmental determinants such as low income, under-resourced educational opportunities, inadequate housing, and lack of access to high-quality mental health treatment.⁶² These differences in mental health outcomes have also been attributed to differences in Latino individuals’ frames of reference regarding their socioeconomic circumstances, based on whether they were born in or outside the United States. Non-U.S.-born individuals perceive that their circumstances are better in the United States than they were in their countries of origin.⁶³

Children’s well-being

Although the vast majority (93%) of Latino children in the United States are U.S.-born, roughly half have at least one immigrant parent.⁶⁴ The section below describes research on the variability in cognitive and social-emotional outcomes of Latino children who are born to U.S.- versus non-U.S.-born parents.

Cognitive outcomes

Several studies have focused on the differences in cognitive outcomes between children with U.S.-born parents and children with parents born outside the United States. Latino children with U.S.-born mothers have scored higher on cognitive tests at 24 months relative to children with non-U.S.-born mothers.⁶⁵ These cognitive differences are small but are also evident in older children. For example, children of U.S.-born Latino parents enter kindergarten with higher cognitive and language skills than children living with parents born in another country.^{66,67} This may reflect the fact that

Latino children with U.S.-born parents benefit from better access to educational opportunities and social networks than children of non-U.S.-born Latino parents. Latino children of U.S.-born parents often experience a smoother acculturation process, as their families are more familiar with American culture and the English language, which can result in higher academic achievement, greater engagement in extracurricular activities, and higher levels of psychosocial well-being. However, studies have also shown that, although children living with non-U.S.-born parents start behind their peers, they exhibit faster academic growth in math and reading in the early grades, which may allow them to catch up to or surpass the levels of performance of children living with U.S.-born parents.⁶⁸



Social-emotional outcomes

Research on the effects of nativity status on the social-emotional outcomes of young Latino children is quite sparse. One study found that young children (birth to age 4) of Mexican-origin U.S.-born mothers or mothers who immigrated as minors had more externalizing behavioral problems compared to children of non-U.S.-born Mexican-origin mothers who immigrated as adults.⁶⁹ Studies of children of unauthorized Mexican migrants show that they tend to have higher internalizing and externalizing behavior problems than their peers with documented or naturalized citizen mothers.⁷⁰ These differences are not explained by group differences in SES, maternal depression, or family routines.⁷⁰ However, these differences may reflect opportunities and unique stressors faced by those who have not yet obtained authorization to reside in the United States.

Nativity status can intersect with other factors, such as SES, racism, discrimination, and neighborhood conditions, creating further disparities in children's development. Understanding how children's developmental outcomes vary by nativity is critical for policymakers, educators, and health care providers to ensure that effective interventions and support systems are available to address the specific needs, challenges, and strengths of Latino children in both U.S.-born and non-U.S.-born households. By recognizing the differences between these groups and the factors that contribute to such differences, it becomes possible to develop strategies that promote equitable opportunities and positive outcomes for all Latino children, regardless of their nativity status.

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Social and economic stressors

U.S.-born and non-U.S.-born Latino families and children experience unique social and economic stressors due to their distinct backgrounds, experiences, and circumstances. In this section, we do not present comparisons between the groups because of a lack of research; however, the research that is available—and its findings—suggests an important direction for future work.

Social stressors specific to non-U.S.-born Latinx individuals include the challenge of acculturation and language barriers, which can hinder communication and limit access to information, resources, educational opportunities, and better job prospects.^{71,72} Studies have shown that the immigration experience can lead to increased stress and anxiety that can spill over to the ways in which parents are involved with their children, with potential consequences for children's well-being.⁷³ Compared to U.S.-born parents, parents born outside the country—especially those who are unauthorized—may experience increased stress.⁷³ Fears of deportation and ensuing economic hardship may increase parental stress, which affects children's development via lower-quality parenting practices such as less warmth or less time spent in direct interactions with children.^{74,75,76} Lack of fluency in English can also limit social connections, which can impede building support networks and navigating various aspects of daily life.⁷⁷ The process of adjusting to a new culture with limited resources can lead to feelings of isolation, identity conflicts, and cultural stress, which can further impact immigrants' overall well-being. Finally, non-U.S.-born Latino individuals have fewer social ties than their U.S.-born counterparts.^{78,79}

In contrast, U.S.-born Latine individuals may face a different set of social stressors. Although they are more familiar with American culture and the English language, they still encounter discrimination and prejudice in education, housing, and employment opportunities.⁸⁰ As U.S.-born Latino adolescents navigate the expectations of their heritage culture and American society, they may experience cultural identity conflicts, intergenerational conflicts, and pressures to succeed academically or economically.^{81,82} However, there is huge variability in the outcomes of U.S.-born Latino individuals: Recent data show that 47 percent of second-generation Latino adults attend college⁸³ and that many have strong ethnic identity and cultural values that can be protective.³⁵

Regarding *economic stressors*, although non-U.S.-born Latino individuals have strong ties to the labor market,⁸⁴ they are more likely to have jobs that pay low wages or lack health care and other benefits or services, relative to U.S.-born Latino adults.⁸⁵ This is due to their limited access to job networks and educational resources, labor market segregation, discrimination, and required documentation.^{86,87} Many non-U.S.-born Latino parents work in low-wage jobs with poor working conditions and face labor exploitation and job insecurity.⁸⁸ In some cases, employers may exploit Latino adults born outside the United States based on their immigration status, particularly if they lack authorization. Non-U.S.-born Latino parents are more likely to report language barriers, long working hours, stressful conditions at work, and unfamiliarity with services and institutions (e.g., schools), which makes it difficult for them to navigate their workplace.⁸⁹ Working long hours is problematic because it does not allow parents to build human capital (e.g., learn English) for themselves or their children or to spend time with their children. The fear of deportation or immigration enforcement can add significant stress and uncertainty to parents' financial status and lives in general, in turn affecting their mental health and overall quality of life. Living in ethnic enclaves is related to stronger social networks and greater social integration for all Latinos, but this association is weaker for those born outside the United States.⁷⁸ Moreover, non-U.S.-born Latino individuals have limited access to public services that support their well-being.^{90,91}

Economic stressors such as poverty, lack of affordable housing, and inadequate health care can be prevalent in certain Latino communities.^{92,93} Some U.S.-born Latino individuals may have limited opportunities to break the cycle of poverty and achieve higher socioeconomic status, which can affect their mobility.

Addressing the social and economic stressors experienced by both U.S.-born and non-U.S.-born Hispanic individuals requires comprehensive policies that focus on enhancing educational opportunities, promoting cultural integration and acceptance, providing pathways to citizenship for undocumented individuals, and combating discrimination and socioeconomic disparities. Supporting the well-being of Latinos—regardless of whether they were born within or outside the United States—is essential for creating a more equitable and inclusive society.

Potential promotive factors

Research is virtually nonexistent on which promotive factors (factors related to positive outcomes) might serve as protective factors (factors that mitigate the negative effects of risks on outcomes) when nativity differences are observed. In this section, we discuss potential promotive factors that have yet to be tested but which show promise in identifying factors that might be protective for U.S.-born or non-U.S.-born Latino populations.

Both U.S.-born Latine families and children and their counterparts born outside the United States can experience different protective factors that contribute to their resilience and well-being. For non-U.S.-born Latino individuals, one significant potential protective factor is the *strong sense of community and social support networks* that often develop within ethnic enclaves or neighborhoods.¹⁷ These communities/neighborhoods provide a source of support and a safety net through which individuals can ask for help, share resources, and maintain cultural traditions.^{94,95} The sense of belonging and social connections within these communities can be protective against the challenges of acculturation, language barriers, and discrimination, promoting a sense of resilience and strong social and cultural identities.

Non-U.S.-born Latino parents are also more likely than U.S.-born Latino parents to exhibit more *optimism and a strong ethnic identity* that foster positive developmental outcomes in their children.⁹⁶

For Latino individuals—whether born inside or outside the United States—educational opportunities, bicultural identity (i.e., close identification with both U.S. culture and their heritage culture), and bilingualism are strong promotive factors.⁹⁷ Having access to the education system can open doors to higher education and better job prospects.⁹⁸ As Latino individuals achieve higher levels of educational attainment, their resilience to economic hardships increases, as do their contributions to their communities and families.⁹⁹ Being bicultural or having cultural competence in two cultures can enable individuals to function and thrive in diverse environments and adapt to different social contexts.¹⁰⁰ This

contributes to their overall resilience and ability to succeed. Increased proficiency in English can improve communication skills and make it easier to navigate social, educational, and economic systems among those who are not born within the United States.¹⁰¹ Being English-proficient can increase access to better jobs and educational and economic opportunities, and promote more social integration with mainstream communities that can enhance overall well-being and economic stability.¹⁰² Moreover, biculturalism is also promotive of better parenting behaviors, which are, in turn, related to better outcomes in children.¹⁰³

Parenting and parental investments by both U.S.-born and non-U.S.-born Latino parents are also important promotive factors, as these translate into high-quality parenting characterized by high levels of warmth and supportiveness; this, in turn, can lead to improved child outcomes.¹⁷ Additionally, family stability and household composition (stable two-parent households), a strong sense of family unity and cohesion (living in intergenerational households, strong co-parenting), and psychological functioning (optimism and social support) can improve resilience and overall well-being.^{17,51,104,105}

To support Latino families, programs should recognize the potential for these factors to promote overall well-being and protect families from the challenges they face. Programs designed to build upon the strengths of each group have a better chance of promoting community engagement, language proficiency, educational opportunities, and bicultural identity, which can enhance resilience, reduce disparities, and nurture a more inclusive and supportive society for all Latinos.

Implications

Implications for policy and practice

Disaggregated data on Latino individuals by birth within or outside the United States reveal a diverse set of strengths, needs, stressors, and lived experiences within the Latino community. This approach provides a deeper understanding of the unique contributions, challenges, and opportunities available to each group. Disaggregation also provides a level of granularity and nuanced understanding that allows policymakers and programs to leverage the strengths of each group and identify specific areas where targeted interventions are necessary, leading to more efficient and impactful policy decisions and programmatic approaches.

Without disaggregated analysis, it is almost impossible to understand whether there are disparities in education, child care access, health care access, self-sufficiency efforts, employment opportunities, and other key areas that affect the well-being of both U.S.-born and non-U.S.-born Latine parents and children in either the short or long term. A deeper and more nuanced understanding can inform the selection, modification, and provision of programs that are responsive to each group's cultural strengths and specific needs and that account for their distinct cultural and social backgrounds, language proficiency, and levels of acculturation. For example, given that non-U.S.-born Hispanic individuals are generally highly motivated to better their economic circumstances, providing them with educational opportunities (e.g., English language classes, GED) can improve their job prospects and increase wealth accumulation. Investments in education can have cascading effects that may result in lower levels of stress and better quality of parent-child interactions for Latino parents born outside the United States. For U.S.-born Latino students, college readiness initiatives can increase access to educational resources, which can, in turn, improve mobility and decrease the likelihood of experiencing poverty. Although all parents benefit from mental health support, U.S.-born Latina mothers seem to be particularly at risk from depressive symptoms and would specially benefit from regular depression screenings and access to mental health services, given their higher reports of depressive symptoms.⁶⁰ Among non-U.S.-born Latino individuals, investments in improving mental health screening for immigrant populations could also lead to better identification of needs and improved access to services for this population. Finally, parenting programs can encourage U.S.-born Latino parents to adopt non-physical methods of discipline (e.g., time-outs).

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Policy considerations must also recognize the intersectionality of nativity status with other factors such as race, ethnicity, SES, migration histories, relocation patterns, and geographic location.¹⁰⁶ These factors can further influence the experiences and outcomes of Latino families and children. Disaggregated data analysis by nativity status would

allow for a more nuanced understanding of how these overlapping identities interact in complex and dynamic ways to affect well-being. Policymakers can then develop comprehensive and equitable strategies that address the multiple dimensions of diversity within the Latinx population. Treating Latino individuals as a heterogeneous group can maximize limited resources and create the most impact. For example, children with parents born outside the United States might have parents with limited English proficiency, relative to children with U.S.-born parents. For both groups, educational opportunities are important but the type of opportunity should be different to address their specific needs.

Implications for researchers and data collection efforts

- Although many current national datasets (e.g., Early Child Longitudinal Study - Birth Cohort; Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey) collect information on Latino individuals' nativity status and household and family structure, there are limited data on family processes (e.g., parenting from both parents), which prevents researchers from understanding and documenting heterogeneity among Latino individuals.¹⁰³ Future data collection efforts should aim to collect more data on coparenting, relationship quality, and father involvement in tandem with information on nativity and other elements of diversity.
- Another current limitation of national datasets is that Latina mothers, regardless of their country of birth, are often the only informants of parenting; in other words, Latino fathers' parenting behaviors are often excluded.¹⁰⁷ Researchers should also actively recruit fathers for their studies to obtain their perspective on their own parenting, co-parenting, and levels of stress.
- To further document diversity among Latino individuals, researchers should incorporate questions that capture the experiences associated with the intersectionality of their various identities. These include ancestry, citizenship status (when appropriate), English proficiency, time in the United States, country of origin, parents' country of origin, languages spoken at home, and English and native language literacy.¹⁰⁸
- Finally, there is an urgent need to collect better data on racism and discrimination, and to conduct research on which promotive factors are protective (and for whom). Without this information, it is impossible to leverage families' existing strengths.

Conclusion

We conclude by making a strong plea for disaggregated data analysis by nativity status. This approach is essential for informed policy making and effective allocation of resources to address the diverse needs and challenges faced by U.S.-born and non-U.S.-born Latino individuals, but also to build and support this population's strengths and resilience. As we have described above, while both groups of Latine families share similarities, they also have differences that might require different approaches. Issues related to acculturation, for example, are more salient with immigrant families than with families born in the United States.

A nuanced approach to collecting data on Latino individuals and families—disaggregated by birth within or outside the United States—allows for targeted, culturally relevant interventions that can lead to improved outcomes in education, child care, health care, employment, and overall well-being for the Latino community as a whole. A disaggregated approach is the only way to emphasize the importance of Latino individuals' accomplishments and their tremendous contribution to our society, to acknowledge and embrace the richness of diversity within the Latino population, and to craft policies that promote inclusivity and equity for all.

Finally, disaggregating data by nativity represents just one initial step toward understanding the diverse experiences of Latino families and children. Future research should also examine other key elements of diversity, such as time in the United States, parental and child country of birth, home language, citizenship status (when appropriate), English proficiency, education, literacy, and legal status.¹⁰⁷

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About the Center

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