



Center for Family Policy  
and Research  
University of Missouri

## Food Insecurity among Latino Children in the U.S.

*“Food security is a moral imperative, but it’s also an economic imperative. History teaches us that one of the most effective ways to pull people and entire nations out of poverty is to invest in their agriculture.”<sup>1</sup>*

- According to the United States Department of Agriculture, low food insecurity is defined as low access to food that reduces the quality, variety, or desirability of a diet. Very low food insecurity is a disruption of eating patterns and reduced food intake.<sup>2</sup>
- In 2014, 14% (17.4 million households) were food insecure and 5.6% ( 6.9 million households) had very low food insecurity and 15.3 million of children lived food insecure households.<sup>3</sup>
- An inherent association with food insecurity is poverty. The federal government defines low- income for a family of four to be below \$47,248 and poor families to be below \$23,624.<sup>3</sup> In 2012, 46% of children with an annual income below the poverty line were in a food insecure household.<sup>5</sup> In 2013, Children with low food insecurity were almost twice as high in poor households.<sup>5</sup>

### **Poverty and Food Insecurity among U.S. Latino Families**

- 11 million (63%) of Latino children are in low-income families.<sup>6</sup>
- 9.7 million (55%) of second generation children live in low-income families.<sup>6</sup>
- 26.9% of Latino households are food insecure while the national average is 14.7% .<sup>7</sup>
- Nearly 31% of the 16.6 million children that suffer from food insecurity are Latino children.<sup>6</sup>
- Latino families are more likely than their non-Latino White counterparts to live in a neighborhood that does not offer healthy food at affordable rates.<sup>7</sup>

### **Food Assistance**

- U.S. Latino families are less likely to participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) than non-Latino Whites. Only 41% of Latino families participate versus Black (56%) and White families (61%).<sup>8</sup>
- 67% of Latino children who are receiving benefits are in families with three or more children. This necessitates a greater food budget for Latino families.<sup>8</sup>

## **Health Consequences**

- Expecting mothers who are food insecure are at a higher risk to have children with birth defects.<sup>9</sup>
- Physical symptoms of hunger may include: stomach pain; dizziness; headaches; reduced strength; hyper sensitive to noise; light and cold; and poor motor control.<sup>10</sup>
- For children 5-16 years old who were food insecure were 1.47 times more likely to express symptoms of anxiety, depression or withdrawal than food secure children. They were also 2.01 times more likely to express symptoms of aggression , hyperactivity, or noncompliance than children who were food secure.<sup>9</sup>
- For children 6-12 years old, food insecurity was related to inferior math scores and grade repetition.<sup>10</sup>

## **Policy Recommendations**

- Service providers may consider adding Spanish reading materials to their agencies and to their websites. Hiring bilingual staff may be effective to better communicate with the Latino community. It is also important for all staff members to be culturally sensitive and competent.
- Considering Latino families are least likely to participate in food assistance programs, service providers may consider doing outreach to the families that are eligible for the benefits.
- Expand the SNAP and electronic benefit transfer criteria by adding organic food as a healthier option as well as access to natural and health food stores.
- Combine job training and free educational prep classes for low-income and poor families.
- Policy makers also need to reconsider cutting the budget for the SNAP and other programs that benefit many low-income and poor families. The reduction of the budget for these programs would leave many families with lack of resources for their livelihood.

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The Center for Family Policy & Research is housed in the Department of Human Development and Family Science at the University of Missouri. The center serves as a resource for the development of effective public policies relating to all children, families, and communities.

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