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South Carolina is a relatively new settlement area for Latino immigrants compared to other regions of the country. Over the past two decades, South Carolina has experienced unprecedented growth in the Latino population. Latino immigrant families in South Carolina often face economic hardship, educational challenges, and difficulty in accessing health care. Building upon cultural strengths, increased family support services are needed to improve outcomes of Latino families across the State.
“Latino/Latinos” include individuals of Latin American origin, while “Hispanics” include individuals with origins in Spanish-speaking countries, including Spain. For this report, we focus on South Carolina’s Latino population; however, some data (e.g., Census data) classify this group as Hispanic. Thus, the terms “Latino” and “Hispanic” are utilized interchangeably in this report.

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The Latino population in South Carolina more than doubled from 30,551 in 1990 to 95,076 in 2000 [1], and increased 148% to 235,682 from 2000 to 2010 [2]. Between 2000-2010 in South Carolina, the Latino child population under age 18 more than doubled, with a 192% increase [3].

Based on a detailed examination of the Latino population demographic data, the Sisters of Charity Foundation of South Carolina held several Listening Sessions, site visits, and meetings to increase our understanding of the impact of this trend, listening directly to the experiences of Latinos from across the State. Our research strategy also included conversations with grantees to explore their efforts to improve the health, educational, and economic well-being of Latino families in South Carolina (e.g., The Franciscan Center, Our Lady of Mercy Community Outreach Center, Inc., PASOs/the Puentes Project, St. Cyprian Outreach Center, and Student Action with Farmworkers). These interactions provided rich, nuanced perspectives of the changing, diverse Latino community across the state that complemented findings from our broader research.

This research brief provides an overview of the demographic shifts and highlights eight themes that emerged through our various research conversations with foreign-born and native-born Latinos: motivation to migrate, making the journey, acculturation processes, shifting family expectations, multi-status families, economic hardships, educational challenges, and health concerns.

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CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS

The 2010 Hispanic population in the United States was reported by the Census Bureau\(^2\) as 50.5 million, 16% of the total US population [4]. Hispanics of Mexican origin accounted for 63% of all Hispanics [4]. In South Carolina, the Latino population consists of more than 235,000 representing 5.1% of the total population [4]. Mirroring national trends, over 58% of the Latino population in South Carolina originate from Mexico, followed by Puerto Rico, Guatemala, Honduras, and Colombia [5]. The median age of Latinos in South Carolina is 25, a much younger demographic as compared to other groups [6]. While not all Latinos in South Carolina are immigrants, over the past two decades opportunities to work and strengthened social networks among the Latino community have made South Carolina a resettlement destination [7].

Rapid growth in the Latino population has impacted urban, suburban and rural counties across South Carolina. In 2010, the following counties had the largest numbers of Hispanics and the highest percentage Hispanic growth (listed alphabetically): Aiken, Anderson, Beaufort, Berkeley, Charleston, Florence, Greenville, Horry, Lexington, Richland, Spartanburg, and York [8]. Although more populated counties often had greater numbers of Hispanics (Greenville, Beaufort, Charleston, Richland), smaller counties often experienced a higher percentage change in Hispanic growth (Lexington, Horry, York, Anderson) [8].

This tremendous growth has also impacted South Carolina’s economic workforce. Primary industries that employ Latinos in South Carolina include construction, agricultural and farm work, food processing, restaurant, landscaping, service and managerial [7, 9]. As an essential part of the state’s workforce, the economic contributions of the Latino community are significant. According to the Selig Center for Economic Growth, in 2010 the purchasing power of South Carolina’s Latinos totaled $4.5 billion [10], based on disposable income available to spend after sales, property, and state income taxes.

\(^2\) It is important to note that Census data is suspected by some to underrepresent hard-to-reach minority groups particularly from economically depressed areas due to mistrust and/or fear of reporting immigration status.
The population of nearly 40 million foreign-born (anyone who is not a US citizen by birth) includes naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents, temporary migrants, humanitarian migrants and undocumented migrants. Of the foreign-born population in the US, 29% are from Mexico and 24% are from other countries in Latin America. Of the 40 million foreign-born population, there are more than 11 million estimated undocumented immigrants, with South Carolina numbers ranging from 50,000 – 75,000.

Nearly one out of every four children under age 18 in the US is Latino, representing 23% of America’s children; of which 93% are US citizens. In 2009, nearly sixty percent of all Hispanic children nationally lived in families in which at least one parent was an immigrant, making children in immigrant families the fastest growing segment of the child population. Children in immigrant families may be foreign-born (first generation) or US-born (second generation).

Between 2008-2010 in South Carolina, 88% of Latino children were citizens by birth; and of these children, 65% lived in immigrant families and 33% lived in linguistically isolated households. Of the more than 725,000 students enrolled during the 2010-2011 school year across South Carolina’s K-12 public schools, 6% were Latino, and 5% of the overall student population was Limited English Proficient.

MOTIVATION TO MIGRATE

Latino immigrants move to South Carolina for varying reasons, including opportunities for employment, low cost of living, and a relatively safe place to live as compared to other resettlement areas. Other reasons to migrate to South Carolina include a desire to pursue the “American Dream,” experiencing significant poverty and financial hardships or struggles in their country of origin, desiring to reunite with family members who have already migrated, wanting children to have the opportunity to access quality education and health care, or desiring to provide for family members in their countries of origin. The long-term impact of the recession on migration patterns in South Carolina, along with the passage and subsequent implementation of SB-20 immigration legislation, are not yet fully known.

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3 The term “undocumented” is utilized in this brief although “unauthorized” immigrant is also commonly used.
MAKING THE JOURNEY

For many Latino immigrants, the process of migrating includes facing unknown risks and hardships, navigating family life disruptions, making significant sacrifices, and enduring multiple losses along the way [20-24]. These losses may include coping with community of origin loss and separations as part of the migratory process.

Minimizing breaks in parental, sibling, and extended family relationships is crucial for all children as they grow. For children in transnational, migrant, and immigrant families, loss of a central parent or caretaker can amplify previous losses experienced [25]. Children may feel isolated, abandoned, or confused as to why their father, mother, siblings, or other primary caretakers have left them through processes of migration [26]. Some youth endure dangerous journeys through the desert just to reunify with parents they only remember or know through phone calls [19].

Processing the often unknown time factor of when reunifications will occur can be particularly difficult [19]. Making up for lost time is hard among all members of the family system, since time spent apart can never be replaced [26].

ACCULTURATION PROCESSES

For immigrants, living in a new country requires integration of previous cultural practices and norms with the present environment. Social and human capital, along with varying acculturation processes, play a significant role as predictors of successful immigration outcomes for families. Latino immigrant families bring varying levels of social capital (external resources and supportive networks) and human capital (internal resources and skills such as work experience or education) to draw from which impact the potential likelihood for success throughout their immigration transitions [27-30].

Numerous theories explore the impact of immigration and acculturation on various members of the family system [24, 31-35]. Individual, family, and social contexts also influence acculturation processes [21, 36-38]. Acculturation processes can also be experienced differently based on varying cultural groups, and other factors including the characteristics of the culture of origin, culture of reception by the country of destination, and adaptability of each culture [22, 39].

Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (GCIR) defines immigrant integration as “a dynamic, two-way process in which newcomers and the receiving society work together to build secure, vibrant and cohesive communities” [40, p. 2]. Community-based efforts that align with GCIR’s Immigrant Integration Framework...
SHIFTING FAMILY EXPECTATIONS

There are many unique aspects of the migration experience that impact Latino immigrant family success after settling in the US. Changing expectations in gender roles, parenting role loss and multigenerational family issues may emerge, compounding employment barriers, loss of language, and health concerns [19, 41, 42].

Across diverse family systems, the role parents and parental figures play in the lives of youth is crucial. Among immigrant families, research findings consistently show that within the family context, parental mental health, parenting styles and coping strategies are important [39, 43, 44], particularly given the constant renegotiation of roles within immigrant families as they navigate new expectations placed upon them in order to adjust and excel within the US. Additionally, research shows parenting, acculturation and educational outcomes are related [45].

MULTI-STATUS FAMILIES

The number of US-born children in mixed-status families has increased in recent years. Mixed-status families consist of an undocumented immigrant family member, along with a US citizen child. Varying immigration statuses or undocumentedness can also present unique challenges to negotiate survival among families [31, 32, 46]. For example, some families must balance perceptions of differential treatment among children due to their varied immigration status [19, 47].

In some instances, the fear or threat of removal of an undocumented parent of a US-born child [48] weighs heavily on family members’ hearts as they face uncertainty each day as to whether their parents will return home [17, 18]. Random checks and stories of work-place raids can heighten anxiety. For example, in one study of work-place raids in three locations, researchers found on average, that the number of children impacted was about half the number of adults arrested, with the majority affected being infants, toddlers and preschoolers [49]. Once arrested, the processing and detention procedures of Immigration and Customs Enforcement made it challenging to arrange for care of children [49, 50].
When deported, remaining family members often faced economic hardships, food insecurity, and housing instability [51]. Another study revealed immigrant families were undercounted and underserved upon entering the child welfare system [52]. Concentrated efforts are needed to focus resources on keeping Latino families together while maintaining their dignity.

**ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS**

Latino families experiencing economic hardship are often ‘invisible’ within broader society. In 2009, 61% of Latino children nationally lived in low-income families, and 30% lived in poverty [2, 3]. Among immigrants, the poverty rate is highest among children with parents who recently arrived to the US, the majority of whom are in Hispanic households [53]. Adult undocumented immigrants are disproportionally likely to be poor with a third of their children living in poverty, nearly double the poverty rate for children of US-born parents [54].

In 2010, the median annual personal earnings for Hispanics in South Carolina was $18,000 [6]. Between 2008-2010, 44% of South Carolina’s Latino children lived in low-income working families, the majority living in two-parent families (a rate lower than children in White families but nearly double that of children in African American families) [14]. Despite many South Carolina Latino children having two parents in the home, 40% experienced poverty at the 100% poverty level, and 70% experienced poverty at the 200% poverty level, a rate equal to that of African American children, but more than double that of White children [14].

Additionally, nearly half of South Carolina’s Latino children live in households where housing costs exceed 30% of their household income, slightly higher than that of African American households, and significantly higher than that of White households [14]. Despite lower incomes, 41% of Hispanics are home owners [6]. However, actual housing conditions vary tremendously across the state, with some Latino families living in unsafe, substandard or crowded housing units [18].

Parental access to resources influences the likelihood their children gain access to various opportunities afforded their peers. Potential measures to reduce the burden of poverty and promote Latino family economic well-being should be identified, as well as exploring avenues for legalizing undocumented immigrants or creating legal pathways to citizenship and gainful employment [55].
EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES

Education is one of the greatest predictors for moving above the poverty line. In 2010, for the first time in the nation’s history, one in four public elementary school students was Hispanic, and the number of Hispanic 18-24 year olds enrolled in college exceeded 2 million making the Hispanic population the largest minority group on the nation’s college campuses [56].

Despite these national gains, numerous barriers remain for many Latino youth to complete public education and access higher education. In 2008, nationally only 58% of Latino children graduated from high school with a regular diploma [3]. As in the majority of other states across the nation, Latino students in South Carolina lag behind their white peers educationally. During the 2010-2011 school year in South Carolina, Hispanics students had the highest drop-out rate of all ethnic groups [57]. Barriers to educational success include a lack of understanding of the US educational system, language, mobility and stability challenges, poverty, and uncertainty about how to help children succeed [17, 18, 38, 60-63].

Educational barriers may be amplified among undocumented youth who have lived the majority of their lives in the US but remain in the shadows due to their undocumented status [63]. For those that work to complete a high school education, many undocumented youth do not have access to pursue further education and training to move ahead.

Past unsuccessful attempts to pass the bipartisan legislation, DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act) is one potential avenue being re-explored nationally to give eligible youth brought to the US as children the opportunity to resolve their immigration status, work towards citizenship, and further their education beyond high school [64]. The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) initiative currently accepts applicants who are young, undocumented immigrants without a serious criminal record who came to the US before they turned 16, are 30 or younger, high school graduates, in college or have served in the military. These applicants can apply to avoid deportation for up to two years to attend school or obtain a work permit.

Regardless of the measures employed, the strengths of Latino immigrant families should be utilized as the foundation for children to realize their educational dreams and aspirations [63].
Latino parents need support as they employ various strategies to encourage their children to succeed educationally [58, 59]. In some communities gains have been made among one of the most mobile Latino populations – migrant farm working families – where successful strategies to engage parents while working to prevent migrant students from dropping-out might provide insights that could be applied to other Latino populations [65, 66].

**HEALTH CONCERNS**

Arriving and settling in a new land does not necessarily correlate to improved health outcomes for immigrants. Some immigrant health research shows that as the length of time immigrants reside in the US increases, the more likely they will experience preventable, chronic conditions, which may be linked in part to acculturative stress [67-69].

For example, obesity is reaching epidemic proportions among the Latino population, many of whom live in low-income neighborhoods with limited access to healthy foods or safe places to exercise [70]. Asthma also occurs at disproportionately higher rates among the young and poor, leaving the Latino population already burdened with limited economic resources to manage the disease and access appropriate health care [71].

Additionally, Latina women often experience perinatal health disparities, including a higher risk of gestational diabetes, and are less likely to receive early and adequate prenatal care [69]. In 2009, 17% of births in South Carolina were to Latino mothers with late or no prenatal care, nearly double the rates among African American mothers and triple the rates of White mothers; 7% of the Latino babies were born with low-birth weight (less than 2,500 grams) [14].

In South Carolina, 46% of Hispanics are without health insurance [6]. Additionally, between 2008-2010, 23% of South Carolina’s Latino children went without health insurance, more than double the rates of African American and White children [14]. As in other places nationally, children in immigrant families are more likely to lack health insurance coverage [52, 53, 72, 73].

While lack of insurance is a primary barrier for many families, adequate access to health care is also a challenge. Having an undocumented family member can heighten fears when needing to access necessary health care [74]. Effective community-organizing efforts must be utilized to address pressing health care needs that are both culturally and linguistically appropriate for Latino populations [69, 75].
CONCLUSION

South Carolina is a relatively new settlement area for Latino immigrants compared to other regions of the country. Over the past two decades, South Carolina has experienced unprecedented growth in the Latino population. Latino immigrant families in South Carolina often face economic hardship, educational challenges, and difficulty in accessing health care. Building upon cultural strengths, increased family support services are needed to improve outcomes of Latino families across the State.

Continuing in the tradition of the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine, the Sisters of Charity Foundation of South Carolina remains invested in the future of South Carolina. Our core values of compassion, courage, respect, justice and collaboration compel us to continue to work with our community partners to address multiple obstacles faced by Latino families in South Carolina given the numerous implications of the growing Latino population.

In order for the citizens of South Carolina to compete economically, all children need strong education, adequate health care, stable homes and safe communities. Continued efforts are needed to identify strategies to foster family resilience and strengthen Latino immigrant families in culturally responsive and appropriate ways.

The Foundation will continue to advocate alongside Latino immigrant families experiencing economic hardship to help them move out of poverty. We commit to work towards solutions in partnership with the Latino community to reduce the barriers Latino families face in order to promote family economic well-being and improve the socioeconomic status of all of South Carolina’s residents.
REFERENCES


ABOUT THE FOUNDATION

The Sisters of Charity Foundation of South Carolina, established in 1996, is a ministry of the Sisters of Charity Health System. We are committed to addressing the needs of the poor and underserved in all South Carolina counties, and strategically use resources to reduce poverty through action, advocacy and leadership. Our vision is for families in South Carolina to have the resources to live out of poverty.

SHARING KNOWLEDGE

The Sisters of Charity Foundation of South Carolina is dedicated to research and evaluation to strengthen the effectiveness of our work and facilitate learning. Research helps us to better understand the breadth and depth of issues that families in South Carolina experiencing poverty face, especially when viewed within a local, statewide and national context. Our research efforts specifically focus on the impact of poverty, and the intersecting disparities in education, health, and other family support services that must be addressed in order to overcome family economic hardship. We examine socially innovative, emerging and evidence-based strategies to reduce poverty from a social justice, strengths-based, people-centered, and place-centered perspective.

The work of the Sisters of Charity Foundation of South Carolina matters. By sharing the impact of poverty, best practices and lessons learned with others, we hope to advance knowledge and inspire others to join us in our efforts. Together, we can make a greater impact on the issues we care most deeply about and work so that families in South Carolina have the resources to live out of poverty.

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