

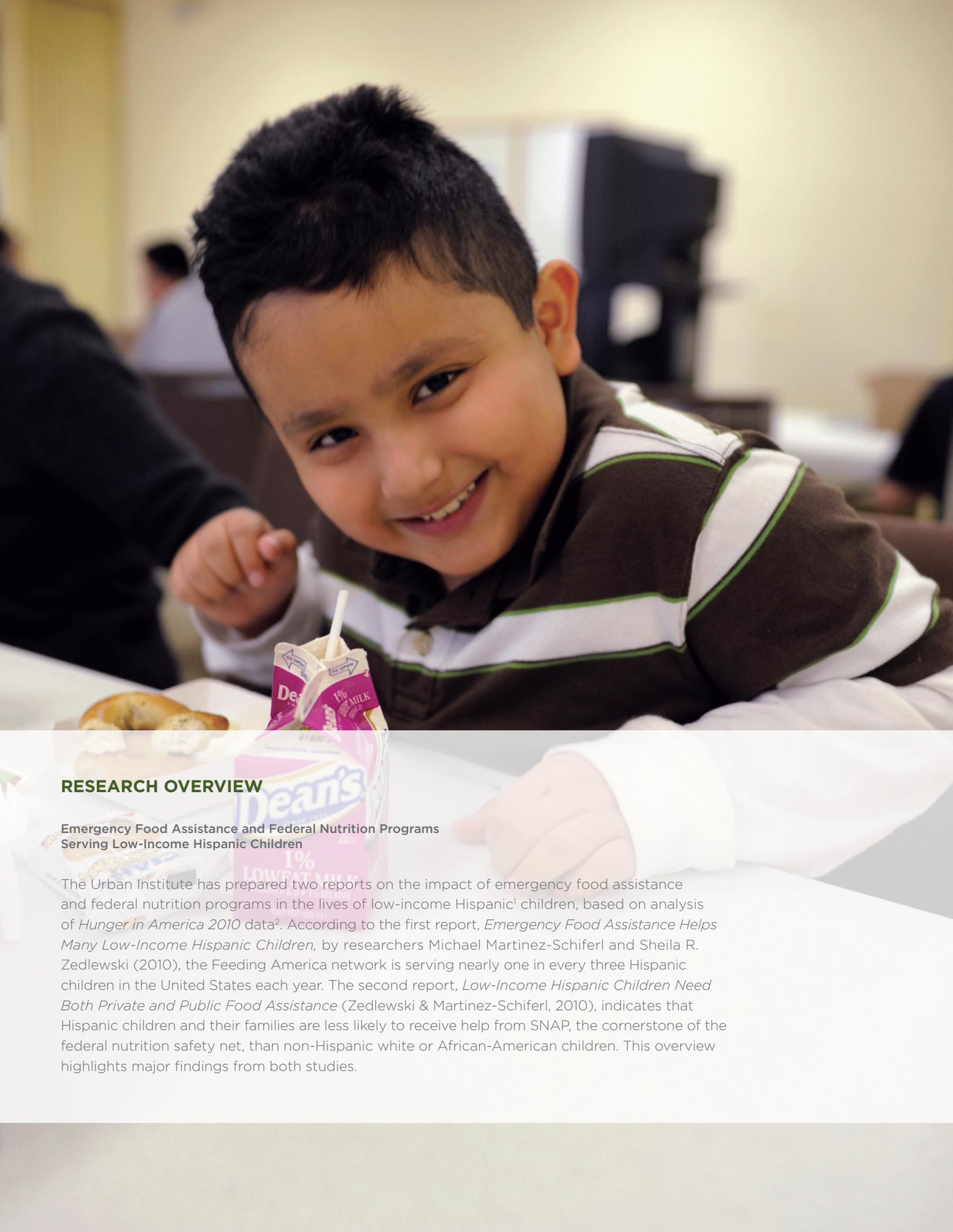


When the Pantry is Bare: Emergency Food Assistance and Hispanic Children

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



A Report on Emergency Food Distribution
in the United States in 2009



RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Emergency Food Assistance and Federal Nutrition Programs Serving Low-Income Hispanic Children

The Urban Institute has prepared two reports on the impact of emergency food assistance and federal nutrition programs in the lives of low-income Hispanic¹ children, based on analysis of *Hunger in America 2010* data². According to the first report, *Emergency Food Assistance Helps Many Low-Income Hispanic Children*, by researchers Michael Martinez-Schiferl and Sheila R. Zedlewski (2010), the Feeding America network is serving nearly one in every three Hispanic children in the United States each year. The second report, *Low-Income Hispanic Children Need Both Private and Public Food Assistance* (Zedlewski & Martinez-Schiferl, 2010), indicates that Hispanic children and their families are less likely to receive help from SNAP, the cornerstone of the federal nutrition safety net, than non-Hispanic white or African-American children. This overview highlights major findings from both studies.

Background

In 2009, nearly one in every five children in the United States lived in families that used emergency food assistance through Feeding America (formerly America's Second Harvest), the nation's largest organization of emergency food providers. This represents approximately 14 million children nationwide, most of whom are food insecure³ and poor. The high levels of food insecurity and poverty among families using emergency food assistance result in part from the country's economic recession and the sharp rise in unemployment (the unemployment rate exceeded 10% at times in 2009). Latinos and blacks experienced disproportionately high rates of unemployment and underemployment during the downturn, increasing strains on their family budgets (Hipple, 2010).

Many children in families that received private food assistance in 2009 also received help from federal nutrition programs (see below for more information about these resources). This multifaceted food assistance safety net is intended to provide for the nutrition of poor and near-poor families with children, especially during tough economic times.

GOVERNMENT NUTRITION ASSISTANCE TARGETING FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

Program	General Eligibility	Benefit
SNAP	Households with gross income at or below 130 percent of the FPL and net income at or below 100 percent of the FPL with limited assets.	Electronic benefit cards to purchase groceries, monthly benefit size varies according to household size and income.
WIC	Pregnant, breastfeeding, and postpartum women, infants and children to age 5 with income below 185% of the FPL.	Checks, vouchers, or electronic benefit transfer cards to purchase specific items in food packages that vary by age of children and status of mother.
NSLP and SBP	Lunch is available in nearly all public and many private schools and breakfast is available in most schools. Meals are free if family income is below 130 percent of the FPL; reduced price if income is below 185 percent.	Reimburses schools for meal costs.
CACFP	The Child and Adult Care Food Program provides meals and snacks to children in certain nonresidential child care centers, family or group day care, after-school programs in low-income areas, and emergency shelters.	CACFP and SFSP reimburse costs of local providers.
SFSP	The Summer Food Service Program provides meals and snacks to low-income children during summer break and when schools are closed for vacation.	

FPL:	Federal Poverty Level
NSLP:	National School Lunch Program
SBP:	School Breakfast Program
SNAP:	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
WIC:	Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

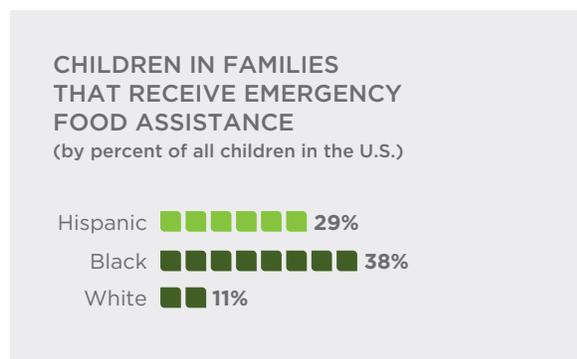
¹ The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document and *Hunger in America 2010* data to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race.

² About the Hunger in America study: *Hunger in America 2010* is the largest study of domestic emergency food assistance ever conducted. The study provides comprehensive and statistically valid data on the national charitable response to hunger and the people served by food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters in the Feeding America network. The Urban Institute report *Emergency Food Assistance Helps Many Low-Income Hispanic Children* is based on analysis of data collected in 61,000 Feeding America client interviews, a representative sample of people receiving emergency food assistance nationwide.

³ Food Insecurity is the USDA's measure of lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members; or limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods.

Major Findings

Data from the 2010 HIA study show that more than four million (one out of every three) Hispanic children and their families received services from the Feeding America network annually over the past four years. Although the racial and ethnic distribution of children receiving food assistance is fairly evenly divided, the rates of food assistance among Latino and black children are disproportionately high in relation to the U.S. population. As indicated in the chart below, 29% of all Hispanic children in the U.S. received food assistance in 2009, compared to only about 11% of white children.



Source: Feeding America 2010 Hunger in America (HIA) survey.

The reports also demonstrate that private emergency food assistance provides a particularly important lifeline to Hispanic families because they are significantly less likely than white and black families to access SNAP. For every ten white families receiving SNAP, there are only about seven corresponding Hispanic families using this resource. Since it is the largest federal nutrition program, lower receipt of SNAP benefits suggests that low-income Hispanic families are likely at greater nutritional risk than other demographic groups.

WORK AND FAMILY SIZE

Hispanic recipients of food assistance were found to be significantly more likely to have working adults in the household: 63% of Hispanic households with children receiving emergency food assistance had working adults,

compared with 51% of white households and 40% of black households. At the same time, Hispanic households that use emergency food assistance tend to have more members, a factor that places additional pressure on food budgets. Nearly 30% of all Hispanic children receiving food assistance lived with three or more adults, and 67% of Hispanic children receiving assistance lived in families with three or more children—significantly more than black or white households. Although Hispanic families receiving emergency food assistance frequently include more working adults than families of other race groups, their larger household sizes suggest that a higher household income is necessary to maintain an adequate diet.

INCOME AND ASSETS

As indicated, higher proportions of Hispanic and black children use emergency food assistance than white children, reflecting higher rates of poverty and deep poverty⁴.

- 30% of all Hispanic children lived in poverty in 2008
- 34% of all black children lived in poverty in 2008
- 10% of white children lived in poverty in 2008

Although food insecurity and poverty are not synonymous (USDA data indicates that 31% of the food insecure population is 185% above the poverty threshold), the study indicates that there is a strong relationship between these variables. This relationship is supported by answers that

⁴ Defined as income below 50% of the federal poverty level.



Hispanic non-applicants provided when asked why they had not applied to SNAP. Black and white respondents were more likely to cite that their income was too high or they had too many assets to be considered eligible when compared to Hispanic clients.

Even for those families able to access SNAP, the report suggests that Hispanic families may lack the financial resources to supplement SNAP benefits with their own food supply. On average, families said that their SNAP benefits lasted 2.7 weeks, while Hispanic families reported that this assistance only lasted 2.5 weeks⁵. These families' reliance on emergency food assistance indicates that the SNAP benefit, combined with their own resources was not necessarily sufficient to afford a minimally adequate diet.

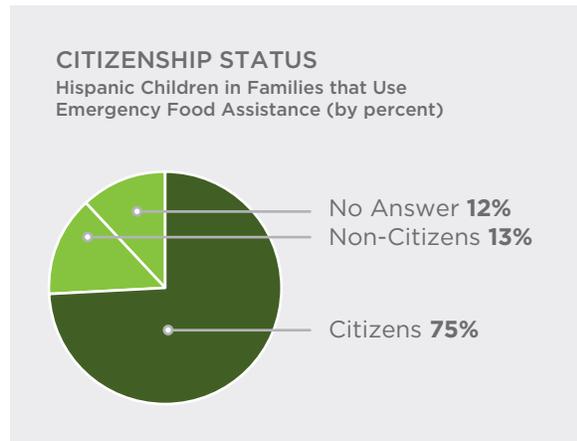
CITIZENSHIP

The studies revealed that three out of every four Hispanic children receiving emergency food assistance are U.S. citizens, but over half of them reside in mixed-status households that include non-citizens.

It is important to note that non-citizen is not synonymous with undocumented, although it is frequently misinterpreted as such. **Non-citizen family members can include legal immigrants, individuals with refugee status, trafficking victims that have been granted permanent legal residency, and temporary legal residents.**

Hispanic households more often include non-citizens who may be ineligible for federal benefits due to state residency requirements. Although all U.S.-born children are eligible for

⁵ SNAP benefits are not intended to last a full month. SNAP plus one-third of a family's net income are expected to be enough for a family to afford a basic, nutritionally adequate diet.



Source: Feeding America 2010 Hunger in America (HIA) survey.

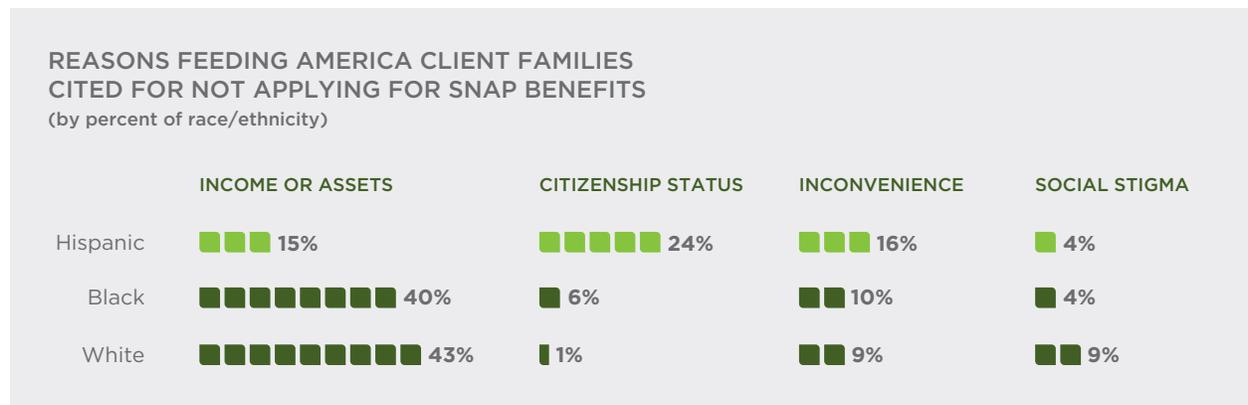
federal nutrition assistance benefits regardless of their parents' immigration or citizenship status, many mixed-status Hispanic households may avoid government nutrition programs fearing that enrollment will jeopardize their ability to live and work in the United States (National Council of La Raza, undated).

FEDERAL FOOD SAFETY NET

In 2008, about 13.5 million low-income children in the U.S. received SNAP benefits and almost 9 million individuals received benefits through WIC. Thirty-one million low-income children participated in NSLP in 2008 and almost

11 million children received SBP benefits. Findings show that age-eligible Hispanic children in families receiving food assistance receive WIC, NSLP, and SBP benefits about as often as their black and white counterparts. However, Hispanic families are less likely to receive SNAP benefits during the course of a year than families in other demographic groups. At 41%, Hispanic families' SNAP participation is significantly lower than black (56%) and white (61%) families.

Additionally, 41% of Hispanic families reported no contact with SNAP whatsoever, compared with 26% of black families and 15% of white families. Hispanic families reporting no SNAP contact cited concerns about citizenship and inconvenience as their primary reasons for avoiding the program. It is possible that Hispanic families find SNAP inconvenient more often than others because they are more likely to be working, and many SNAP offices are open only during regular work hours. Lower SNAP participation rates could also show less awareness within Hispanic communities of program eligibility, benefits, and guidelines. Because Hispanic families are less likely to access benefits through SNAP, the cornerstone of the federal nutrition safety net, the emergency food assistance network takes on even greater importance in addressing the nutritional needs of low-income, Hispanic children.



Potential Implications

Reviewed together, the studies provide a clear illustration that Hispanic families comprise a significant portion of food assistance clients and rely heavily on these resources when compared to other racial/ethnic groups to meet their nutritional needs. The broad use of food banks and pantries among low-income families with children confirms that the federal nutrition safety net alone is not enough to improve food security. In addition, the importance of emergency food assistance in the lives of low-income Hispanic families indicates a growing need for culturally-competent services. While many food assistance providers are already delivering targeted resources, other providers may find that this research suggests a framework for enhancing services to Latino families. Organizations may consider implementing culturally-appropriate food acquisition practices, increasing Spanish-language web presence, hiring bilingual staff persons, or developing and distributing multi-lingual resource materials. Depending on state or local SNAP eligibility processes, organizations may also consider increasing Spanish-language SNAP outreach or targeting outreach to geographic regions with predominately Hispanic populations. For organizations located in states or localities with significant barriers to SNAP eligibility, this data may guide policy discussions regarding local office hours, documentation requirements, or cultivating culturally-competent SNAP local offices. At whatever level appropriate, recognizing and responding to the unique and significant needs of Hispanic families served by the Feeding America network will greatly impact the lives of food assistance recipients.

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