



Improving Data Infrastructure to Recognize Hispanic Diversity in the United States

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Why research on low-income Hispanic children and families matters

Hispanic children currently make up roughly one in four of all children in the United States,¹ and by 2050 are projected to make up one in three,² similar to the number of non-Hispanic, white children. Given this, how Hispanic children fare will have a profound and increasing impact on the social and economic well-being of the country as a whole.

Notably, though, two-thirds of Hispanic children live in poverty or near poverty,³ defined as less than two times the federal poverty level.⁴ Despite their high levels of economic need, Hispanics, particularly those in immigrant families, have lower rates of participation in many government support programs when compared with other racial/ethnic minority groups.⁵ High-quality, research-based information on the characteristics, experiences, and diversity of Hispanic children and families is needed to inform programs and policies supporting the sizable population of low-income Hispanic children and families.

Overview

Hispanics are currently the largest racial/ethnic minority group in the United States, making up 17 percent of the U.S. population.⁶ They are also among the nation's most diverse racial/ethnic groups across a wide range of characteristics, including country of origin, U.S. versus foreign nativity, and level of education, among others.⁷ As the Hispanic population continues to grow, this diversity has become increasingly important to understand, both to researchers who study Hispanics and to program administrators and policymakers who seek to improve the social and economic well-being of Hispanic children and families within communities across the country.

One limitation to understanding the diversity of Hispanics is the lack of data that consistently measure critical dimensions of variability within the overall Hispanic population. To begin to address this limitation, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services convened a Hispanic Research Work Group to help identify priorities for research concerning Hispanics. In 2014, this work group developed a research brief, "Survey Data Elements to Unpack Diversity of Hispanic Populations," that outlined 10 high priority data elements to be added to surveys for a "more adequate understanding of the diversity within low-income, Hispanic populations."⁸

These priority data elements are:

1. Hispanic ancestry/heritage subgroup
2. Country of birth (adult or child who is the focus of the survey)
3. Parent country of birth (of focal person)
4. U.S. citizenship
5. Time in U.S.
6. Language(s) spoken at home
7. English speaking proficiency
8. Literacy in any language
9. Highest educational level outside of the U.S.
10. Legal residency



In this brief, we identify which of these recommended data elements are included in currently available nationally representative and large-scale data sets commonly used to examine a range of topics critical to the well-being of children and their families, including self-sufficiency, poverty, economic mobility, early care and education, family formation, and health. We also suggest several steps national surveys can take to improve their description of the characteristics and experiences of Hispanics in the United States.

Method

For this brief, we reviewed data in commonly used, large-scale data sets sponsored by various federal agencies including: the National Center for Education Statistics, the Administration for Children and Families, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Center for Health Statistics, and the Census Bureau. We also reviewed the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research website, which archives data relevant for population studies. We additionally consulted with scholars from various disciplines, including demography, economics, and developmental psychology to identify other relevant data sets. While the datasets included in this brief are not intended to be exhaustive, they represent some of the most commonly used data sets within the social science field.

We identified and reviewed 34 large-scale survey data sets, the vast majority of which are national in scope. For repeated cross-sectional data sets, we reviewed the most recent, publicly available cycle of the survey. We first determined which of the ten data elements recommended by ACF's Hispanic Research Work Group were included in each data set and the specific survey questions that were used to capture the information for each data element.^a We then calculated the proportion of data sets that included each of the data elements.

Table 1: Data elements to unpack the diversity of Hispanic populations

Table 1 presents the 10 data elements that were identified in the brief, "Survey Data Elements to Unpack Diversity of Hispanic Populations," as the highest priority to be included in large-scale surveys. These data elements are proposed for inclusion in addition to standard demographic items already being collected, such as Hispanic ethnicity and race. It is important to note that these data elements refer to the person (adult or child) who is the focus of the survey and not necessarily the respondent. Therefore, if the child is the focus of the survey, country of birth refers to a child's country of birth (even if the parent is responding for the child). Additionally, some of these data elements, including *time in the U.S.*, *highest educational level outside of the U.S.*, and *legal status*, are only relevant to individuals born outside of the United States.

Table 1 lists the underlying constructs that each data element is intended to represent, including cultural background, demographics, and acculturation—their adaptation to U.S. culture—among others. Each data element can represent more than one construct.

Table 1 also lists an illustrative question that might be used to measure each data element. For example, *Hispanic ancestry/heritage* can be assessed by asking, "What is your ancestry or ethnic origin?" This data element is meant to specify whether a respondent identifies as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, Colombian, or any other specific ancestry or ethnicity, regardless of their place of birth. Without this information, it is more difficult to examine potential differences in outcomes and experiences among different groups of Hispanics when respondents are third generation or higher.

The far-right column of Table 1 lists which of the 34 data sets reviewed include some measure of each data element in at least one wave of its data collection.

Table 2: Data elements to unpack diversity of Hispanic populations, by data set

Table 2 shows which data elements are included in each of the 34 data sets reviewed. Responses indicate whether the question/s available captured each element (*yes*), did not capture it (*no*), or partially captured it (*partial*). A partially measured data element could occur for three reasons. First, measures were identified as *partial* if they were incomplete. For example, a partial measure of country of birth is one that asks whether a respondent is U.S.-born or foreign-born, but not the specific country of birth for the foreign-born. Similarly, a partial measure of literacy may only ask about English or may ask about speaking and reading/writing ability—in any language—but not distinguish between the two. Second,

a. Some of the data sets are cross-sectional while others are longitudinal. In some longitudinal data sets, data elements were included at multiple waves, while other data sets only included them at one wave.

measures were identified as *partial* if they were only assessed for a subsample of the Hispanic survey respondents (e.g., only for English language learners). Third, a label of *partial* was assigned when the data element could only be assessed indirectly, through a measure not directly designed to measure the data element. For example, a number of surveys did not include a direct measure of home language, but did identify the language in which the interview took place, which could be used as a proxy for home language.

As an example of how to read this table, the first row of Table 2 shows that the American Community Survey (ACS)—the largest of all the data sources reviewed—includes six of the 10 data elements: Hispanic ancestry/heritage, country of birth (for the person who is the focus of the survey), U.S. citizenship, time in the U.S., language spoken at home, and English speaking proficiency. The ACS does not include parent country of birth,^b literacy in any language (i.e., reading ability), educational attainment outside the U.S., or legal residency.

Table 3: Percentage of data sets that include information on each data element

Table 3 shows what percentage of the data elements were included in the 34 data sets reviewed, as a whole. Notably, none of the data sets reviewed included all 10 recommended data elements. However, some elements were included—either fully or partially—in almost all data sets. For example, 71 percent of the data sets included a measure of parental country of birth, 76 percent included a measure of Hispanic heritage/ancestry, 82 percent included a measure about time in the U.S., and 88 percent included a measure of the country of birth for the survey participant and the language spoken at home.

Fewer data sets asked about English speaking proficiency (68 percent), citizenship status (50 percent), literacy in any language (35 percent), or education attained outside the U.S. (26 percent). Only 12 percent of data sets (four data sets) included a measure of legal residency status.



b. The ACS does allow one to determine the country of birth of the respondent and the respondent's child (if the child is in the household). Therefore, when using children as the unit of analysis, it is possible (for children with parents in their household) to get the parent country of birth. However, the ACS does not provide the county of birth of the respondent's parent (unless that person is in the household).

Discussion and implications

The Hispanic population in the United States is extremely diverse. Fortunately, many of the data sets reviewed here already include at least some subset of the recommended data elements. In fact, at least 70 percent of the data sets include five of the 10 recommended elements. Still, as the field works toward improving the data infrastructure to better capture the diversity of the U.S. population, there are a number of steps that can be taken:

1. All future data collection efforts should work to include as many of the 10 data elements as possible, to more fully measure the diversity within the Hispanic population.^c The health and well-being of Hispanics differ so substantially across these dimensions of diversity that not including them can lead to inaccurate information about some of the subgroups that exist within the overall Hispanic population. For example, although Hispanics have one of the highest teen birth rates in the United States, there is large variability by country of origin; Hispanic teens of Mexican origin have birth rates that are three times higher than teen women of Cuban origin (48 versus 16 births per 1,000 teen women aged 15-19, respectively, in 2011). Additionally, because Hispanics of Mexican origin make up roughly two-thirds of all Hispanics in the United States,⁹ many summary statistics on Hispanics are disproportionately impacted by those of Mexican origin. While some of the data sets reviewed here may not be fielded again, country of birth and Hispanic heritage—two of the most commonly assessed measures in the data sets reviewed—may be the easiest to add to future data collection efforts and would enable a more thorough and accurate description of Hispanics in the United States.
2. Data collection efforts that are only partially capturing any of the 10 data elements can further improve their measures to more fully assess the specific characteristics of interest. For example, although most data sets contain a measure of Hispanic subgroup heritage, in many cases the possible

response categories are limited to Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, and “other Hispanic.” These categories do capture some of the largest groups of Hispanics in the United States. However, recent immigrants are increasingly from Central and South America. Salvadorans, for example, now make up the third largest Hispanic group in the country. Additionally, there are more than one million Dominicans, one million Guatemalans, and one million Colombians currently in the United States.⁹

3. Data collection efforts should work to incorporate some of the other data elements reviewed here—elements that are less often measured, but that capture the diversity of the Hispanic population in important ways. For example, it is well-established that social position in a number of spheres (e.g., culturally, educationally, financially, legally, linguistically) impacts accessibility to financial resources and economic mobility, and vice versa. Surveys designed to examine these topics may be better positioned to help portray these experiences among Hispanic immigrants if they collect data about English proficiency, citizenship and legal residency status, and educational attainment outside the United States in addition to other standard measures (e.g., occupation). Given the high costs associated with adding new measures, those involved in data collection efforts may want to prioritize data elements based on the primary use of the survey.

Ultimately, the greater the extent to which federal and national surveys include comparable data elements to measure the diversity within the Hispanic population, the greater the potential to harness this information across data sets and domains—such as health and education—to form a more comprehensive picture of the characteristics and well-being of Hispanics in this country. These data elements may also provide important insights into issues such as which Hispanic families apply for assistance, in order to inform efforts to improve service access and delivery.

References

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- 2 America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2012, Tables POP1 and POP3,
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c. Many of these data elements could capture diversity across other racial/ethnic and/or immigrant groups in addition to Hispanics.

Table 1. Data elements to unpack diversity of the Hispanic population

Data element	Underlying construct	Illustrative survey item	Data sets using similar questions
Hispanic ancestry/ heritage	Cultural background, demographics	What is your ancestry or ethnic origin?	ACS, Add Health, BRFSS, CPS, CHIS, ECLS-B, ECLS-K, ESHRE, ELS, FACES-2009, FFCWS, HSIS, HSLs, LNS, NAAL, NAEP, NAWS, NELs, NHIS, NSAF, NSFG, NSFH, PSID-Latino, SHM, SIPP, Three-City Study
Country of birth (COB)	Demographics, cultural, contextual	Where were you born?	ACS, Add Health, BSF, CPS, CHIS, ECLS-B, ECLS-K, ESHRE, ELS, FACES-2009, FFCWS, HSIS, HSLs, LNS, NAAL, NAWS, NELs, NHANES, NHES, NHIS, NLSY79, NSAF, NSECE, NSCH, NSFG, NSFH, PSID-Latino, SHM, SIPP, Three-City Study
Parental countries of birth	Cultural background, institutional access	In what country was your mother/ father born?	Add Health, CPS, CHIS, ECLS-B, ECLS-K, ELS, FACES-2009, FFCWS, HSIS, HSLs, LNS, NAAL, NAWS, NELs, NHANES, NHIS, NLSY79, NSAF, NSECE, NSCH, PSID-Latino, SIPP, Three-City Study
U.S. citizenship status	Social position, resources, institutional access	Are you a citizen of the United States?	ACS, Add Health, CPS, CHIS, ECLS-B, ECLS-K, FFCWS, LNS, NAAL, NAWS, NHANES, NHIS, NLSY79, NSAF, PSID-Latino, SIPP, Three-City Study
Time in U.S.	Acculturation, institutional access, proxy for legal residency status	When did you come to live in the U.S.?	ACS, Add Health, BSF, CPS, CHIS, ECLS-B, ECLS-L, ELS, FACES-2009, FFCWS, HSIS, HSLs, LNS, NAAL, NAWS, NELs, NHANES, NHES, NHIS, NSAF, NSECE, NSCH, NSFG, NSFH, PSID-Latino, SHM, SIPP, Three-City Study
Language spoken at home	Language proficiency, acculturation, institutional access	Do you speak a language other than English at home?	ACS, Add Health, BSF, CHIS, ECLS-B, ECLS-K, EHSRE, ELS, FACES-2009, FFCWS, HSIS, HSLs, NAAL, NAEP, NAWS, NELs, NHANES, NHES, NHIS, NIS, NLSY79, NSAF, NSECE, NSCH, NSFG, NSFH, PSID-Latino, SHM, SIPP, Three-City Study
English speaking proficiency	Acculturation, institutional access	How well do you speak English?	ACS, BSF, CHIS, ECLS-B, ECLS-K, EHSRE, ELS, FACES-2009, HSIS, HSLs, LNS, NAAL, NAWS, NELs, NHES, NHIS, NSCH, NSFG, NSFH, PSID-Latino, SHM, SIPP, Three-City Study
Literacy in any language	Acculturation, social position	Which language did you learn first? How well do you read/write your first language?	Add Health, ECLS-B, ECLS-K, EHSRE, ELS, FACES-2009, NAAL, NAEP, NAWS, NELs, PSID-Latino, Three-City Study
Highest educational level attained outside the U.S.	Demographics, cultural, contextual	How many years of education have you completed outside the U.S.?	ECLS-K, ELS, HSLs, LNS, NAAL, NAWS, NELs, NHES, PSID-Latino
Legal residency status	Institutional access, social position, household stability	Are you a permanent resident with a green card?	CHIS, NAWS, NLSY79, SIPP

Note. ACS = American Community Survey, Add Health = The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health, BRFSS = Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, BSF = Building Strong Families, CHIS = California Health Interview Survey, CPS = Current Population Survey, ECLS-B = Early Childhood Longitudinal Study - Birth Cohort, ECLS-K = Early Childhood Longitudinal Study- Kindergarten Cohort, EHSRE = Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project, ELS = Education Longitudinal Study, FACES-2009 = Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey, FFCWS = Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, HSIS = Head Start Impact Study, HSLs = High School Longitudinal Study, LNS = Latino National Survey, NAAL = National Assessment of Adult Literacy, NAEP = National Assessment of Educational Progress, NAWS = National Agricultural Workers Survey, NELs = National Education Longitudinal Survey, NHANES = National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, NHES = National Household Education Survey, NHIS = National Health Interview Survey, NIS = National Immunization Survey, NLSY79 = National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, NSAF = National Survey of America's Families, NSECE = National Survey of Early Care and Education, NSCH = National Survey of Children's Health, NSFG = National Survey of Family Growth, NSFH = National Survey of Families and Households, PSID- Latino = Panel Study of Income Dynamics-Latino Subsample, SHM = Supporting Healthy Marriage, SIPP = Survey of Income and Program Participation, Three City Study = Welfare, Children, & Families: A Three City Study, YRBS = Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Table 2. Data elements to unpack diversity of Hispanic populations, by data set

Data Source	Data Elements of Interest									
	Hispanic ancestry/heritage	Country of birth (COB)	Parent COB	U.S. citizen	Time in U.S.	Home language	English speaking proficiency	Literacy in any language	Educational attainment outside the U.S.	Legal status
ACS (2013)	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO
Add Health (1994-2008)	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	PARTIAL ^c	PARTIAL ^c	NO	NO
BRFSS(2013)	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
BSF (2005-2008)	NO	PARTIAL	NO	NO	YES	YES	PARTIAL	NO	NO	NO
CPS (2013)	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
CHIS (2011-2012)	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES
ECLS-B	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	PARTIAL	NO	NO
ECLS-K (1998-1999)	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	PARTIAL	YES	NO
EHSRE (1996-2010)	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO
ELS (2012)	YES	PARTIAL	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	PARTIAL	YES	NO
FACES-2009	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO
FFCWS	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	PARTIAL	NO	NO	NO	NO
HSIS (2002-2006)	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	PARTIAL	NO	NO	NO
HSLs (2009)	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	PARTIAL	NO	YES	NO
LNS (2006)	YES	YES	PARTIAL	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
NAAL (2003)	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
NAEP (2014)	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	PARTIAL	NO	PARTIAL	NO	NO
NAWS (2011-2012)	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	PARTIAL	YES
NELS	YES	PARTIAL	PARTIAL	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO

Table 2. Data elements to unpack diversity of Hispanic populations, by data set, continued

Data Source	Data Elements of Interest									
	Hispanic ancestry/ heritage	Country of birth (COB)	Parent COB	U.S. citizen	Time in U.S.	Home language	English speaking proficiency	Literacy in any language	Educational attainment outside the U.S.	Legal status
NHANES (2013-2014)	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO
NHES (2005)	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	PARTIAL ^a	NO	YES	NO
NHIS (2014)	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	PARTIAL	YES	NO	NO	NO
NIS (2012)	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	PARTIAL	NO	NO	NO	NO
NLSY79	NO	PARTIAL	PARTIAL	YES	NO	PARTIAL	NO	NO	NO	YES
NSAF (2002)	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	PARTIAL	NO	NO	NO	NO
NSECE (2010-2014)	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO
NSCH (2011-2012)	NO	PARTIAL	PARTIAL	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO
NSFG (2011-2013)	YES	PARTIAL	NO	NO	YES	YES	PARTIAL ^b	NO	NO	NO
NSFH	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES	PARTIAL	PARTIAL	NO	NO	NO
PSID-Latino	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	PARTIAL	PARTIAL	YES	NO
SHM	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO
SIPP (2008)	YES	PARTIAL	PARTIAL	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES
Three-City Study	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	PARTIAL	YES	PARTIAL	NO	NO
YRBS (2015)	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO

Note. PARTIAL = Only some information is ascertained on the data element (e.g., country of birth does not ask for specific country of birth, just whether the respondent is U.S.- or foreign-born).

a The NHES only asks whether the respondent can read and write in English, and does not assess speaking ability.

b The NSFG added a question on English Proficiency in the 2013 survey and will continue to include this measure in future cycles.

c Add Health assesses how well each respondent speaks or reads in English, but does not distinguish between speaking proficiency and literacy.

ACS = American Community Survey, Add Health = The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health, BRFS = Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, BSF = Building Strong Families, CHIS = California Health Interview Survey, CPS = Current Population Survey, ECLS-B = Early Childhood Longitudinal Study - Birth Cohort, ECLS-K = Early Childhood Longitudinal Study - Kindergarten Cohort, EHSRE = Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project, ELS = Education Longitudinal Study, FACES-2009 = Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey, FFCWS = Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, HSIS = Head Start Impact Study, HSLS = High School Longitudinal Study, LNS = Latino National Survey NAAL = National Assessment of Adult Literacy, YRBS = Youth Risk Behavior Survey, NAEP = National Assessment of Educational Progress, NAWs = National Agricultural Workers Survey, NELs = National Education Longitudinal Survey, NHANES = National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, NHES = National Household Education Survey, NHIS = National Health Interview Survey, NIS = National Immunization Survey, NLSY79 = National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, NSAF = National Survey of America's Families, NSECE = National Survey of Early Care and Education, NSCH = National Survey of Children's Health, NSFG = National Survey of Family Growth, NSFH = National Survey of Families and Households, PSID- Latino = Panel Study of Income Dynamics-Latino Subsample, SHM = Supporting Healthy Marriage, SIPP = Survey of Income and Program Participation, Three City Study = Welfare, Children, & Families: A Three City Study, YRBS = Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Table 3. Percent of Data Sets that Include Information on Each Data Element

	Data Elements of Interest									
	Hispanic ancestry/ heritage	Country of birth (child or adult focal respondent)	Parent country of birth	U.S. citizen	Time in U.S.	Home language	English proficiency	Literacy in any language	Education attained outside the U.S.	Legal status
% yes	76	68	56	50	82	65	44	15	24	12
% partial	0	21	15	0	0	24	24	21	3	0
% no	24	12	29	50	18	12	32	65	74	88
% partial + % yes	76	88	71	50	82	88	68	35	26	12

Note. Only some information is ascertained on the data element (e.g., country of birth does not ask for specific country of birth, just whether the respondent is U.S. or foreign born).

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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, health 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 within the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to Child Trends in partnership with Abt Associates and New York University, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and University of Maryland, College Park.

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