

Study Warns of Hunger Among Hispanics

The Washington Post

December 20, 2006 Wednesday, Final Edition

Copyright 2006 The Washington Post



Section: A Section; A04

Length: 507 words

Byline: N.C. Aizenman, Washington Post Staff Writer

Body

Nearly one in five **Hispanics** lacks sufficient access to nutritious food and one in 20 regularly goes hungry, posing serious health and economic risks to the nation's largest and fastest-growing minority group, according to a new **study**.

The National Council of La Raza, a Latino advocacy group, noted in its **study** that the "food insecurity" rate of **Hispanics** is nearly as high as that of non-Hispanic blacks and substantially greater than that of non-Hispanic whites, of whom only about 5 percent suffer from limited access to nutritious food, according to U.S. government statistics.

"Yet the Latino community is practically invisible when it comes to this issue," said co-author Jennifer Ng'andu. "Folks notice the presence of Latinos in their area, but they are not connecting it to the need for food assistance."

As with African Americans, poverty appears to be the main factor limiting Latinos' access to nutritious food. About 22 percent of Latinos and 25 percent of non-Hispanic blacks are poor, compared with 8 percent of non-Hispanic whites.

Latinos, about 40 percent of whom are foreign-born, also often face linguistic, cultural and legal barriers to enrolling in federal **hunger** programs.

In 1996, Congress disqualified legal immigrants from nearly all forms of government assistance. Although a 2002 law restored access to certain programs for many categories of immigrants, including all otherwise eligible immigrant children, many Latinos appear unaware of the change. For instance, slightly more than half of eligible Latinos participate in the national food stamp program, compared with more than 70 percent of eligible blacks.

"For a lot of our immigrant families, there's either a lack of understanding of the system or fear, due to their immigration status," of approaching authorities, said Beatriz Otero, director of CentroNía, a nonprofit child-care center in the District that has helped many Latino parents apply for federal assistance.

The problem extends to immigrants' children who are U.S. citizens. Only about half of such children participate in the food stamp program, compared with more than 80 percent of eligible children who are U.S. citizens but whose parents are also U.S. citizens.

Study Warns of Hunger Among Hispanics

Just as daunting to many immigrant Latinos are the complex requirements and paperwork involved in signing up for many federal programs, Ng'andu said. By contrast, she noted, the government's nutrition program for low-income pregnant or post-partum mothers has a simpler enrollment process and a high rate of Latino participation.

Ng'andu argued that other federal food assistance programs need to follow suit by undertaking aggressive outreach in the Latino community and training their staff to better understand the eligibility rules affecting immigrants.

Otherwise, she cautioned, the consequences could be telling: Children who lack sufficient nutritional food have more difficulty concentrating in school as well as higher levels of anxiety, depression and obesity and its attendant health complications.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Subject: IMMIGRATION (90%); RACE & ETHNICITY (90%); NUTRITION (90%); HISPANIC AMERICANS (90%); CAUCASIAN AMERICANS (90%); FOOD CHARITIES (90%); FOOD SECURITY (90%); FOOD ASSISTANCE (89%); FOOD STAMPS (89%); WELFARE BENEFITS (88%); PREGNANCY & CHILDBIRTH (87%); IMMIGRATION LAW (87%); CHILDREN (86%); NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS (78%); FAMILY (78%); AFRICAN AMERICANS (77%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (75%); LOW INCOME PERSONS (73%); MINORITY GROUPS (73%); INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE (73%); POVERTY & HOMELESSNESS (73%); RESEARCH REPORTS (72%); STATISTICS (71%); CHILD CARE (64%)

Organization: NATIONAL COUNCIL OF LA RAZA (58%)

Geographic: UNITED STATES (94%)

Load-Date: December 20, 2006