



Children of Immigrants Show Slight Reductions in Poverty, Hardship

by Randy Capps, Michael Fix, and Jane Reardon-Anderson

No. 13

The share of U.S. children under age 18 with an immigrant parent or parents increased between 1999 and 2002. Poverty among these children fell slightly during the same period, and the shares with health insurance and access to a usual source of health care rose. However, most other measures of economic well-being did not change significantly between 1999 and 2002, and children of immigrants continued to face greater hardship than children of native parents.

This Snapshot examines the well-being of children of immigrants using new data from the 2002 National Survey of America's Families (NSAF) and updates a previous study using the 1999 NSAF (Capps 2001). Children of immigrants are those with at least one parent born outside the United States, including children born in the United States and children who are immigrants themselves. Children of native parents have no parents born outside the United States.

Children of immigrants grew both in absolute numbers (from 11.8 million to 13.5 million, or almost 15 percent) and as a proportion of the nation's children (from 16.4 percent to 18.7 percent) between 1999 and 2002. Children of native parents decreased in number during that period, from 60.1 to 59.0 million, a drop of almost 2 percent.

More than half of immigrants' children were in families with low incomes (below 200 percent of the federal poverty thresholds). The number of low-income immigrants' children rose from 6.2 million in 1999 to 7.0 million in 2002. Moreover, these children made up a rising share of all low-income children—from 21.6 percent in 1999 to 26.2 percent in 2002.

Economic Well-Being Improves Modestly

Children of immigrants and children of natives both experienced economic improvement between 1998 and 2001 (table 1).¹ By at least one measure, the improvement was greater for natives' children, who saw a 4.1 percentage point decline in the likelihood of being low-income—a significantly greater decline than the 0.9 percentage point

drop for children of immigrants. In 2001, over half of immigrants' children had low family incomes, compared with one-third of natives' children. Children of immigrants were also more likely to be poor than children of native parents—21.5 percent versus 13.5 percent.

Despite general economic improvement, there was no significant change in the share of children in either immigrant or native families that worried about or encountered difficulty affording food. Rates remained higher among children of immigrants, however, with 39.2 percent in families worried about or encountering difficulty affording food in 2002, compared with 27.0 percent of children of native parents.

Housing hardship declined slightly among children of immigrants, but their families still fared far worse overall than native families. Although the share of immigrants' children living in crowded housing fell almost 3 percentage points between 1999 and 2002, these children remained four times as likely as children of native parents to live in crowded conditions. Immigrants' children were twice as likely to live in families that spent more than half their income on rent or mortgage payments. The share of children facing this hardship did not change significantly between 1999 and 2002. The share of children in immigrant families with difficulty paying rent, mortgage, or utilities also remained unchanged. This measure is not significantly different for children of immigrants and children of native parents.

Health Insurance Coverage Improves

Substantial gains in insurance coverage were made between 1999 and 2002, reflecting improved public coverage through Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (Capps, Kenney, and Fix 2003). Uninsurance fell from 22.6 to 18.0 percent among children of immigrants and from 10.4 to 7.5 percent for children of native parents (table 1). Nonetheless, children of immigrants remained more than twice as likely as children of natives to be uninsured in 2002.

DATA AT A GLANCE

THE SHARE OF LOW-INCOME CHILDREN WHO ARE CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS INCREASED FROM 22 PERCENT IN 1999 TO 26 PERCENT IN 2002.

THE POVERTY RATE FOR CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS FELL FROM 24 TO 22 PERCENT.



Table 1. Economic Well-Being of Children of Immigrants and Children of Native Parents

Measure	Children of Immigrants (%)		Children of Native Parents (%)	
	1999	2002	1999	2002
Family Income and Poverty				
Below 100% of federal poverty thresholds	23.9*	21.5**	15.1	13.5~
Below 200% of federal poverty thresholds	52.3*	51.4*	37.2	33.1~
Food Concerns and Affordability				
Family worried about or encountered difficulty affording food	36.9*	39.2*	27.9	27.0
Housing Affordability and Crowding				
Living in crowded housing (over 2 people per bedroom)	29.4*	26.8**	7.3	6.4~
Paying at least half of income for rent or mortgage	15.8*	13.8*	7.2	6.5~
Problems paying rent, mortgage, or utilities	17.3	16.2	16.6	17.1
Health Insurance, Access, and Health Status				
Uninsured	22.6*	18.0**	10.4	7.5~
No usual source of care	14.7*	12.4**	4.1	3.7
In fair or poor health	9.0*	9.2*	3.7	3.7

Sources: 1999 and 2002 National Survey of America's Families

Note: Poverty status is derived from income in the year before the survey.

~ Decrease between 1999 and 2002 is significant at the 0.10 level.

* Estimate for children of immigrants is significantly different from estimate for children of native parents at the 0.10 level.

Access to a usual source of health care also improved among children of immigrants. In 2002, 12.4 percent of these children lacked a usual source of care (a doctor's office, clinic, hospital, or other provider), down from 14.7 percent in 1999. Yet that rate was over three times the rate for children of native parents.

Despite gains in insurance coverage and access for both groups of children, the share reported to be in fair or poor health by the survey respondent did not change significantly. In 2002, 9.2 percent of children of immigrants were reported to be in fair or poor health, compared with 3.7 percent of children of native parents.

Conclusion

Despite modest economic progress between 1999 and 2002, hardship persists among children of immigrants, a population that is growing in absolute numbers and as a proportion of the nation's child population. As a result, the overall number of children of immigrants who need services to alleviate poverty and hardship is also growing. Services including food assistance, housing assistance, and health insurance coverage for children could specifically address this hardship.

References

- Capps, Randy. 2001. "Hardship among Children of Immigrants: Findings from the 1999 National Survey of America's Families." Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute. *Assessing the New Federalism Policy Brief B-29*.
- Capps, Randy, Kenney, Genevieve, and Michael Fix. 2003. "Health Insurance Coverage of Children in Mixed-Status Immigrant Families." *Snapshots of America's Families III*, No. 12. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Adam Safir for technical assistance and Ken Finegold, Alan Weil, and Kevin Wang for all their good advice and comments.

Endnote

¹ Poverty is determined by annual income in the year before the survey, so the 2002 NSAF reports poverty for 2001, and the 1999 NSAF reports poverty for 1998.

Randy Capps is a research associate in the Urban Institute's Population Studies Center. Michael Fix directs the Institute's Immigration Studies Program and is a principal research associate in the Population Studies Center. Jane Reardon-Anderson is a research assistant in the Population Studies Center.

Snapshots of America's Families III, No. 13



SNAPSHOTS
of America's Families



Snapshots III presents findings from the 1997, 1999, and 2002 rounds of the National Survey of America's Families (NSAF). Information on more than 100,000 people was gathered from approximately 40,000 representative households in each round. The NSAF is part of the *Assessing the New Federalism* project (ANF). Information on ANF and the NSAF can be obtained at <http://www.urban.org/anf>.

The *Assessing the New Federalism* project is currently supported by The Annie E. Casey Foundation, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, The Ford Foundation, and The David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

Alan Weil is the director of *Assessing the New Federalism*. Kenneth Finegold is the editor of *Snapshots III*. Design is by Bremmer & Goris Communications.



An Urban Institute
Program to Assess
Changing Social Policies

Copyright © October 2003. Permission is granted to reproduce this document with attribution to the Urban Institute. The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Urban Institute, its board, its sponsors, or other authors in the series.