



One in Seven Adults in Immigrant Families Reported Avoiding Public Benefit Programs in 2018

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Immigration policy has been at the center of public debate for many years, but the debate has intensified since the 2016 presidential election. In October 2018, after months of anticipation, the administration published a proposed rule altering “public charge” determinations that would make it harder for immigrants to get a green card (i.e., establish permanent residency). After a public comment period that closed in December, the rule is being finalized. If implemented, the rule would make it more difficult for immigrants to get green cards if they have received certain noncash public benefits or have low incomes or other characteristics considered to increase their likelihood of using benefits in the future. Beyond reducing future immigration numbers, there is widespread concern this revised public charge rule would have “chilling effects” on low-income immigrant families by discouraging them from applying for and receiving public benefits for which they are eligible, for fear of risking future green card status.¹ This chilling effect could spill over to many people, including US citizen children.

So far, evidence on this chilling effect has largely been based on anecdotal reports from service providers.² In this brief, we use unique data from a nationally representative, internet-based survey conducted in December 2018 to provide the first systematic evidence on the extent of chilling effects among immigrant families before release of a final public charge rule.³ The survey included nearly 2,000 nonelderly adults who are foreign born or live with one or more foreign-born family members (hereafter called “adults in immigrant families”), who make up about one-quarter of all nonelderly adults in the US, according to the 2017 American Community Survey. We provide here the first estimates of self-

reported chilling effects on participation in public benefit programs associated with the proposed public charge rule. These findings complement projections that other researchers have developed to model expected chilling that will follow a final rule (Artiga, Damico, and Garfield et al. 2018; Artiga, Garfield, and Damico 2018; Batalova, Fix, and Greenberg 2018; Fiscal Policy Institute 2018; Kenney, Haley, and Wang 2018; Laird et al. 2019; Zallman and Finnegan 2018).⁴

We find the following:

- About one in seven adults in immigrant families (13.7 percent) reported “chilling effects,” in which the respondent or a family member did not participate in a noncash government benefit program in 2018 for fear of risking future green card status. This figure was even higher, 20.7 percent, among adults in low-income immigrant families.
- Though the proposed rule would only directly affect adults who do not yet have a green card (i.e., lawful permanent residence), we observed chilling effects in families with various mixes of immigration and citizenship statuses, including 14.7 percent of adults in families where all noncitizen members had green cards and 9.3 percent of those in families where all foreign-born members were naturalized citizens.
- Hispanic adults in immigrant families were more than twice as likely (20.6 percent) as non-Hispanic white and non-Hispanic nonwhite adults in immigrant families (8.5 percent and 6.0 percent, respectively) to report chilling effects in their families.
- Though the proposed rule would only directly apply to adults, many households with children experienced chilling effects. Adults in immigrant families living with children under age 19 were more likely to report chilling effects (17.4 percent) than adults without children in the household (8.9 percent).
- Most adults in immigrant families reported awareness of the public charge rule (62.9 percent). Adults who had heard “a lot” about the proposed rule were the most likely to report chilling effects in their families (31.1 percent).

Background on Public Charge

The administration has advanced sweeping changes to federal immigration policy, including heightened immigration enforcement, termination of temporary protections against deportation, and cuts to refugee and asylee admissions. In 2018, the administration also proposed expanding the criteria used in “public charge” determinations, in which immigration officials may deny applications for permanent residency (green cards) or temporary visas to immigrants who are deemed “likely to become a public charge.”⁵

The new approach would make it more difficult for immigrants to get green cards or temporary visas if they received or are deemed likely to receive cash and noncash public benefits. Departing from past practice where only primary reliance on cash benefits or long-term medical institutionalization were considered in public charge determinations, under the proposed rule, officials would consider an

applicant's use of either cash or noncash benefits as "negative factors," as well as several personal characteristics, including income level, age, English proficiency, educational attainment, employment status, family size, health status, credit score, and other financial resources. The proposed rule, posted for public comment in October 2018, expanded the list of benefits to be considered in future public charge determinations to include the Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps), Medicaid, Section 8 housing assistance, public housing, and subsidies for drug benefits under Medicare Part D.

The proposed rule would affect applicants adjusting from another immigration status who already live in the US and people applying from abroad through family sponsorship or other pathways (Capps et al. 2018). The rule specifically excludes certain groups, such as refugees and other humanitarian entrants, and clarifies that benefits received by eligible children will not be considered in adults' future immigration applications. However, there remains confusion about when and how the final rule will be implemented and what aspects of the proposed rule will carry over to the final version. In the meantime, a parallel change to the public charge test in the Foreign Affairs Manual, used by consular officials considering visa applications filed abroad, was implemented in January 2018, and recent data show that admissions decisions have already been affected; refusals of applications on public charge grounds quadrupled to 13,500 during the 2018 fiscal year.⁶ News outlets have also recently reported that the Department of Justice is preparing to publish a rule on deporting green card holders on public charge grounds.⁷

The proposed rule could have pervasive effects for immigrant families, given the complicated nature of the regulation and widespread uncertainty about how or when it will go into effect. Already many immigrant families are reportedly avoiding interaction with public authorities and dropping out of or being reluctant to enroll themselves or their children in critical safety net programs like Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), SNAP, or the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, even though the latter is not on the list of benefits in the proposed rule.⁸ Immigrant-serving organizations are reporting heightened reluctance and fear in immigrant communities to receive public benefits for which adults and children are eligible, including programs that would not be considered in public charge determinations (Greenberg, Feierstine, and Voltolini 2019). There is also evidence of far-reaching fear and insecurity among immigrant families in the context of the administration's immigration policy changes and rhetoric; for example, psychological effects are widespread not only for undocumented people or temporary visa holders but among naturalized US citizens (Cervantes, Ullrich, and Matthews 2018; Roche et al. 2018).

Though these reports help clarify the impact of the broader immigration climate, there is no information yet on systematic changes to participation in safety net programs among immigrant families in the context of the debate around the proposed public charge rule. This brief provides new insight into the extent to which immigrant families avoided participating in these programs because of concerns about future green card status in 2018, as this proposed rule was debated. This includes both people who would be directly affected by the rule and have not yet applied for a green card and would receive

the revised public charge test in the future, as well as others who perceive potential risk despite the rule not directly applying to them.

Data and Methods

Data and Sample

We draw on data from the December 2018 round of the Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey (WBNS), a nationally representative survey of adults ages 18 to 64 launched in December 2017. This analysis is based on the WBNS core sample and an oversample of noncitizens. For each round of the WBNS, the core sample is a stratified random sample drawn from Ipsos' KnowledgePanel, a probability-based online panel recruited primarily from an address-based sampling frame, and includes a large oversample of adults in low-income households.⁹ In December 2018, the survey also included an oversample of noncitizens to support analyses of current policy issues affecting immigrant families. The panel includes only respondents who can complete surveys that are administered in English or Spanish, and adults without internet access are provided laptops and free internet access to facilitate participation.

To assess chilling effects and other immigration policy issues, we constructed a set of weights for analysis of the population of nonelderly adults who are foreign born or living with a foreign-born relative in their household. The weights are based on the probability of selection from the KnowledgePanel and benchmarks from the American Community Survey for nonelderly adults in immigrant families who are English proficient or primarily speak Spanish.¹⁰ The language criterion is used in the weighting to reflect the nature of the survey sample, because the survey is only administered in English or Spanish.

Our final analytic sample consists of 1,950 adults in immigrant families. When assessing the types of programs for which respondents reported chilling, we limit the sample to the 314 adults in immigrant families who reported any chilling effect on participation in public programs.

Measures

SELF-REPORTED CHILLING EFFECTS WITHIN A FAMILY

Our main outcome is self-reported chilling effects on participation in public programs *within a family*. We define these chilling effects as either not applying for or stopping participation in a noncash government benefit program, such as Medicaid/CHIP, SNAP, or housing subsidies, within the previous 12 months because of concerns that the respondent or a family member could be disqualified from obtaining a green card.¹¹ For this measure, a respondent could have defined family as both their immediate family and other relatives who may be living with them or in another household; we have learned from some initial qualitative follow-up work that some respondents took into account family members living in other households when they reported chilling effects. Respondents may also have reported chilling for a program for which they themselves may not have been eligible. For instance,

some parents may have reported chilling effects on the program participation of a citizen child, or a higher-income respondent may have reported chilling affecting a relative with lower income.

AWARENESS OF PROPOSED PUBLIC CHARGE RULE

To assess awareness of the proposed public charge rule published in October 2018, we asked respondents to report how familiar they were with a proposed rule that would make it harder for immigrants to enter the United States or become permanent residents of the US if they have low incomes or use public benefits such as Medicaid, SNAP, or housing subsidies. Respondents could make one selection from the options “a lot,” “some,” “only a little,” or “nothing at all.”¹²

Limitations

One limitation of the WBNS is its low response rate, which is comparable to other panel surveys that account for nonresponse at each stage of recruitment. However, studies assessing recruitment for the KnowledgePanel have found little evidence of nonresponse bias for core demographic and socioeconomic measures (Garrett, Dennis, and DiSogra 2010; Heeren et al. 2008), and WBNS estimates are generally consistent with benchmarks from federal surveys (Karpman, Zuckerman, and Gonzalez 2018). WBNS survey weights reduce, but do not eliminate, the potential error associated with sample coverage and nonresponse, and this is likely to be larger for the subgroup of adults in immigrant families. Though the weights are designed to produce nationally representative estimates for adults in immigrant families, the survey’s design implies that our analytic sample of 1,950 adults in immigrant families has precision comparable to a simple random sample of approximately 800 adults, increasing the sampling error around our estimates. We only report differences across subgroups of adults in immigrant families that are statistically significant at the 0.05 level or lower.

In addition, because the WBNS is only administered in English and Spanish, our analytic sample does not describe the experiences of the full spectrum of adults in immigrant families. Our study excludes adults with limited English proficiency whose primary language is not Spanish. We estimate that the excluded adults who do not speak English or Spanish represent between 5 and 15 percent of all nonelderly adults in immigrant households as defined for this brief; according to the 2017 American Community Survey, 5 percent of this group speaks English less than “well”¹³ and speaks a primary language other than Spanish.

Some measurement error is likely for questions related to citizenship statuses of respondents and relatives in the household, particularly among adults who are undocumented or have been in the US for a short time (Van Hook and Bachmeier 2012). It is also possible that respondents conflated awareness of the public charge rule with overall awareness of an increasingly hostile political climate toward immigrants, which may have resulted in overreported awareness of the proposed public charge rule. Moreover, follow-up qualitative interviews with respondents for a related project suggested that some respondents did not understand the distinction between two separate survey items: “not applying for a program” versus “stopping participating in a program.” Consequently, we have opted to combine

responses to report on the questions in combination: either not applying for or dropping out of a noncash assistance program.

Analysis

We assess chilling effects within a family, overall and by the following characteristics: annual family income as a percentage of the 2018 federal poverty level, citizenship and immigration status of family members living in the household, race and ethnicity of the respondent, presence of children under age 19 in the household, and respondents' awareness of the proposed public charge rule. We impute missing responses for family income, marital status, and number of children in the household using a multiple-imputation regression approach. We allocate missing citizenship status data for respondents using their responses to the Ipsos panel profile question on citizenship; absent that information, we impute respondent citizenship status. All estimates are weighted to be representative of the national population of nonelderly adults in immigrant families (as described above) and account for the complex survey design.

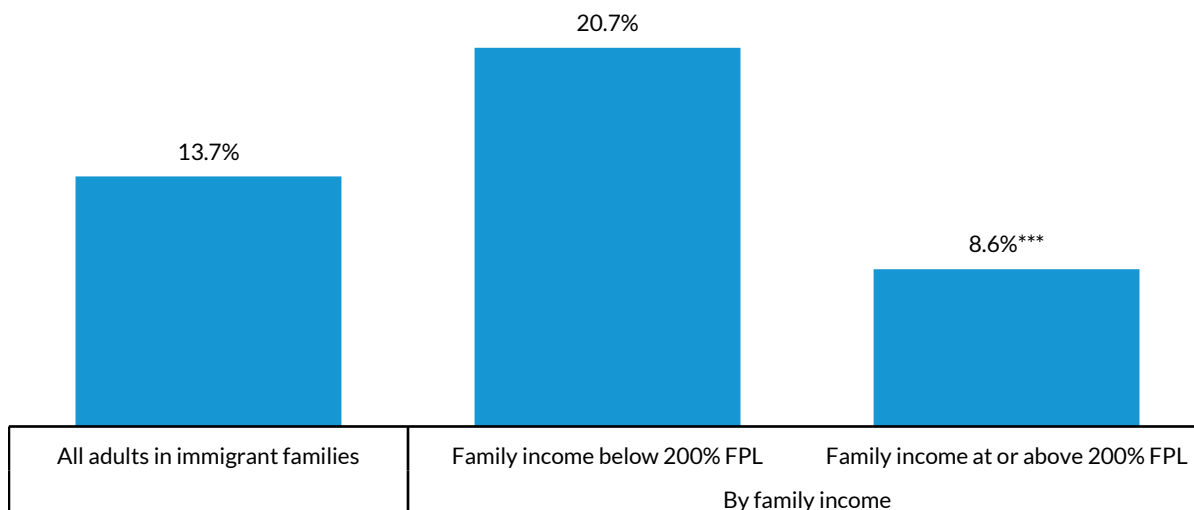
Findings

About one in seven adults in immigrant families (13.7 percent) reported “chilling effects,” in which the respondent or a family member did not participate in a noncash government benefit program in 2018 for fear of risking future green card status. This figure was even higher, 20.7 percent, among adults in low-income immigrant families.

Adults in immigrant families across the income distribution reported chilling effects on their participation in noncash public benefit programs for fear of disqualification from obtaining a green card. Overall, one in seven (13.7 percent) reported chilling effects in his or her family (figure 1). Among adults in low-income immigrant families (i.e., those with family incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level), over one in five (20.7 percent) reported chilling, compared with 8.6 percent of adults in immigrant families with higher incomes.

FIGURE 1

Share of Adults in Immigrant Families That Avoided Noncash Public Benefits in the Past Year Because of Green Card Concerns, Overall and by Family Income, December 2018



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Source: Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey, December 2018.

Notes: FPL = federal poverty level. Adults are ages 18 to 64. Respondents reported that either they or someone in their family did not apply for or stopped participating in noncash public benefits because they worried it would disqualify them or a family member from obtaining a green card.

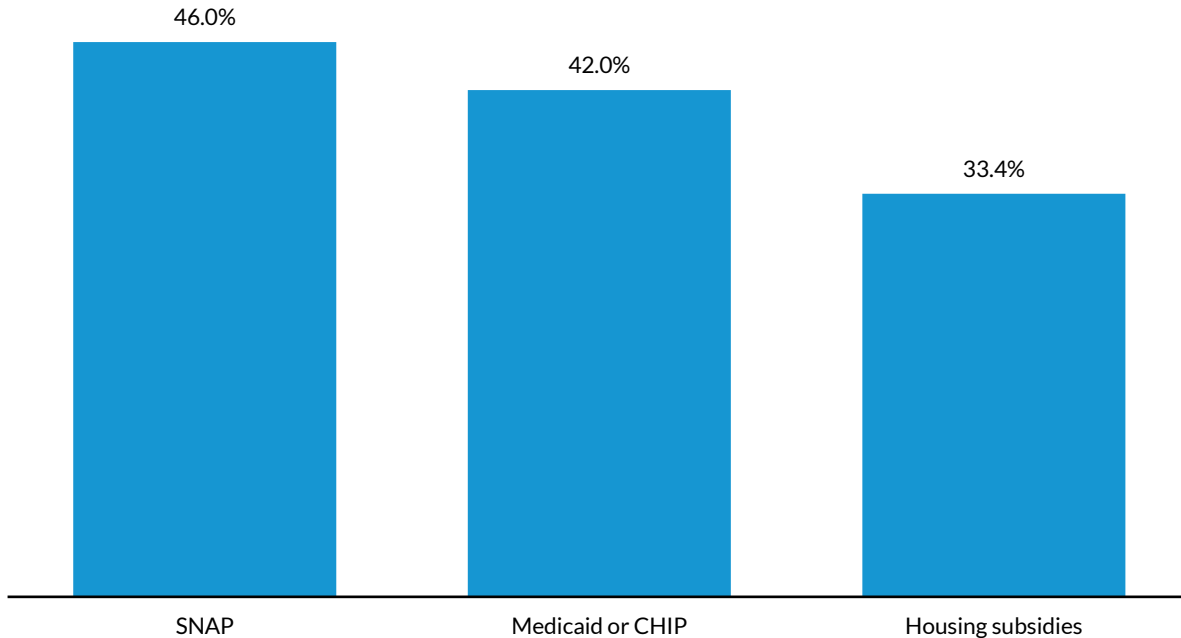
*** Estimate differs significantly from adults in immigrant families with family incomes below 200 percent of FPL at the 0.01 level, using two-tailed tests.

Among adults in immigrant families reporting any chilling effects, nearly half (46.0 percent) reported that someone in their family did not apply for or stopped participating in SNAP, making it the most common program for which chilling was reported among the programs assessed in this survey (figure 2). Medicaid or CHIP was second, with a share of 42.0 percent among adults in immigrant families who reported chilling. One in three (33.4 percent) adults reporting chilling within his or her family reported not applying for or stopping participation in housing subsidies. A smaller share of adults in immigrant families (8.6 percent) experiencing chilling reported stopping participation or not applying for other programs, offering responses such as federal Marketplace subsidies for health insurance and energy bill assistance programs (data not shown).

One in six (16.7 percent) adults who reported chilling effects indicated that the implicated program was specifically Medicaid or CHIP benefits for a child in their family (data not shown). Though this detail is not available for the other noncash programs, we know that SNAP and housing subsidies affect the entire household, and we found chilling effects disproportionately among households with children.

FIGURE 2

Share of Adults in Immigrant Families in Which Someone Did Not Participate in SNAP, Medicaid/CHIP, or Housing Subsidies, among Those That Avoided Noncash Public Benefits in the Past Year Because of Green Card Concerns, December 2018



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Source: Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey, December 2018.

Notes: SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. CHIP = Children's Health Insurance Program. Adults are ages 18 to 64. Because respondents could report multiple programs, the program categories displayed are not mutually exclusive. Respondents reported that either they or someone in their family did not apply for or stopped participating in noncash public benefits because they worried it would disqualify them or a family member from obtaining a green card.

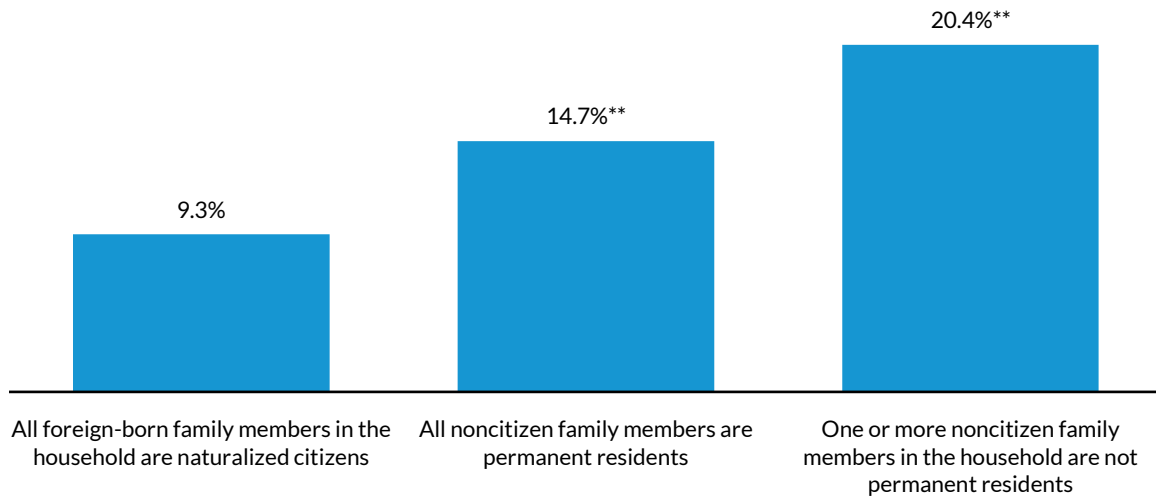
Though the proposed rule would only directly affect adults who do not yet have a green card (i.e., lawful permanent residence), we observed chilling effects in families with various mixes of immigration and citizenship statuses, including 14.7 percent of adults in families where all noncitizen members had green cards and 9.3 percent of those in families where all foreign-born members were naturalized citizens.

Immigrant families often include a wide range of citizenship and immigration statuses, including US-born citizens, naturalized US citizens, green card holders, and foreign-born people without permanent residence. Among households where one or more noncitizen family members was not a permanent resident, 20.4 percent of adults reported chilling effects (figure 3). The share was slightly lower but still substantial (14.7 percent) for respondents in households where all noncitizen relatives were permanent residents.

Some respondents living in what should be the least vulnerable households, in which all foreign-born family members are naturalized US citizens, also seem to be affected, with 9.3 percent of these adults reporting chilling effects within their family in the previous year. This suggests spillover effects

on people who will not be subject to future public charge determinations but may be confused about the rule and who it applies to, or fear it could impair their ability to sponsor other family members for green cards.

FIGURE 3
Share of Adults in Immigrant Families That Avoided Noncash Public Benefits in the Past Year Because of Green Card Concerns, by Household Citizenship and Immigration Status, December 2018



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Source: Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey, December 2018.

Notes: Adults are ages 18 to 64. Categories are constructed around the citizenship and immigration status of the foreign-born family members in the household, but each group may contain US-born family members (including the respondent). Respondents reported that either they or someone in their family did not apply for or stopped participating in noncash public benefits because they worried it would disqualify them or a family member from obtaining a green card.

** Estimate differs significantly from adults in households where all foreign-born family members are naturalized citizens at the 0.05 level, using two-tailed tests.

Hispanic adults in immigrant families were more than twice as likely (20.6 percent) as non-Hispanic white and non-Hispanic nonwhite adults in immigrant families (8.5 percent and 6.0 percent, respectively) to report chilling effects in their families.

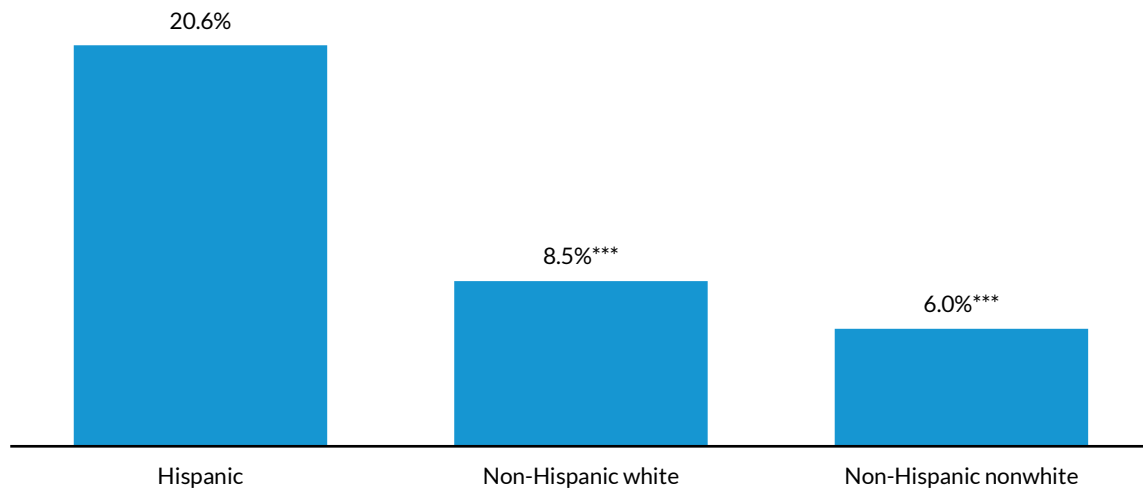
About 1 in 5 Hispanic adults in immigrant families (20.6 percent) reported chilling effects within his or her family, compared with fewer than 1 in 10 non-Hispanic white adults in immigrant families (8.5 percent; figure 4). Hispanic adults also reported chilling effects at a higher rate than non-Hispanic nonwhite respondents, of whom only 6.0 percent reported that they or a family member experienced chilling effects on their use of noncash public benefits because of concern over future green card status.

However, we may underestimate reported chilling effects among non-Hispanic nonwhite adults because WBNS respondents do not include adults who do not speak Spanish or English well enough to

complete the survey. This means we cannot observe chilling effects that may have occurred within this group.

FIGURE 4

Share of Adults in Immigrant Families That Avoided Noncash Public Benefits in the Past Year Because of to Green Card Concerns, by Race and Ethnicity, December 2018



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Source: Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey, December 2018.

Notes: Adults are ages 18 to 64. The non-Hispanic nonwhite category includes non-Hispanic respondents who either do not identify as white or identify as more than one race. Respondents reported that either they or someone in their family did not apply for or stopped participating in noncash public benefits because they worried it would disqualify them or a family member from obtaining a green card.

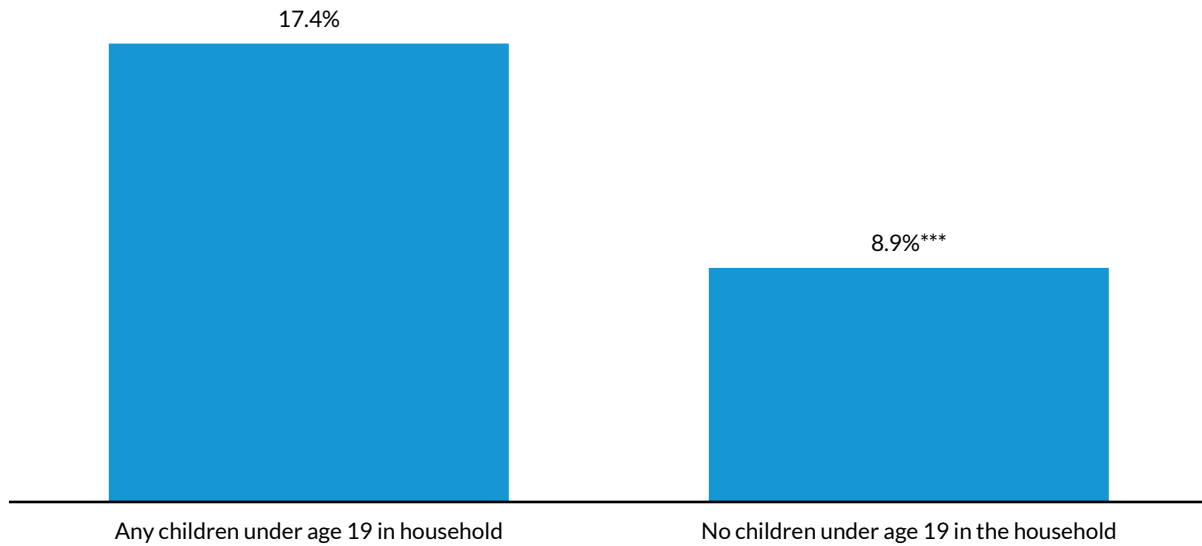
*** Estimate differs significantly from Hispanic adults at the 0.01 level, using two-tailed tests.

Though the proposed rule would only directly apply to adults, many households with children experienced chilling effects. Adults in immigrant families living with children under age 19 were more likely to report chilling effects than adults without children in the household.

As shown in figure 5, about one in six (17.4 percent) adults in immigrant families living with children under age 19 reported chilling effects within his or her family, a share about twice as high as that of adults without children in the household (8.9 percent).¹⁴

FIGURE 5

Share of Adults in Immigrant Families That Avoided Noncash Public Benefits in the Past Year Because of Green Card Concerns, by Presence of Children in the Household, December 2018



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey, December 2018.

Notes: Adults are ages 18 to 64. Respondents reported that either they or someone in their family did not apply for or stopped participating in noncash public benefits because they worried it would disqualify them or a family member from obtaining a green card.

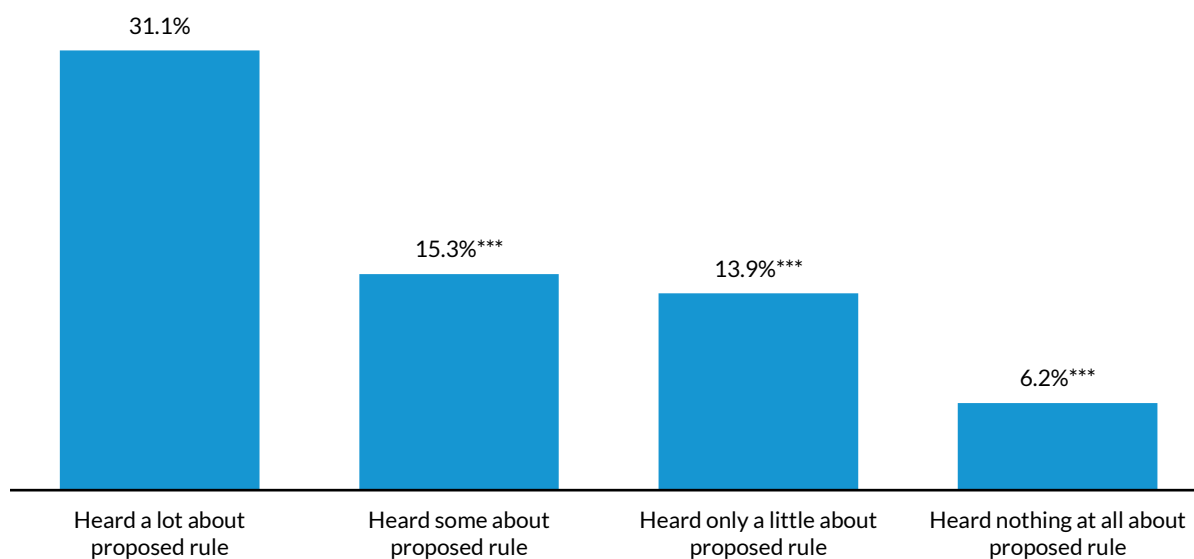
*** Estimate differs significantly from adults with any children under age 19 in the household at the 0.01 level, using two-tailed tests.

Most adults in immigrant families reported awareness of the public charge rule (62.9 percent). Adults who had heard “a lot” about the proposed rule were the most likely to report chilling effects in their families (31.1 percent).

Most adults in immigrant families reported awareness of the public charge rule, with 62.9 percent having heard at least “a little” about the rule (data not shown). Adults reporting greater awareness of the proposed rule were about five times more likely to report chilling effects on family members’ use of public benefits than adults reporting no awareness. Among the adults in immigrant families who had heard a lot about the proposed rule, nearly one-third (31.1 percent) reported chilling, compared with only 6.2 percent among those who had heard nothing at all about the proposed policy. This suggests that more publicity about the rule when it becomes final could further increase chilling effects and avoidance of public benefits by immigrant families, including those not directly affected by the rule.

FIGURE 6

Share of Adults in Immigrant Families That Avoided Noncash Public Benefits in the Past Year Because of Green Card Concerns, by Awareness of the 2018 Proposed Public Charge Rule, December 2018



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey, December 2018.

Notes: Adults are ages 18 to 64. Respondents reported that either they or someone in their family did not apply for or stopped participating in noncash public benefits because they worried it would disqualify them or a family member from obtaining a green card.

*** Estimate differs significantly from adults who heard “a lot” about the proposed rule at the 0.01 level, using two-tailed tests.

Discussion

This report provides the first national data on the scope of chilling effects related to the public charge policy debate in 2018, as the proposed rule was being developed, published, and commented on. The data were collected before the rule was finalized, and it is reasonable to expect that chilling effects will likely expand further if the rule is implemented. It is notable that even these early results show strong evidence of chilling effects, aligning with the on-the-ground perspectives reported by organizations working with immigrant families across the country (Greenberg, Feierstine, and Voltolini 2019) and new state-level data documenting increased reluctance to engage safety net resources (O’Rourke 2019). We find that one in seven nonelderly adults in immigrant families reported “chilling effects,” in which the respondent or a family member did not participate in one or more noncash government benefit programs in 2018 for fear of risking future green card status. These decisions were more common among families most in need of safety net support, with one in five adults with family incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level reporting chilling effects. Though most research projections of potential chilling have assumed several scenarios, with drops in program participation of 15, 25, or 35 percent, those estimates project chilling rates after implementation of a final rule (Artiga, Damico, and

Garfield 2018; Artiga, Garfield, and Damico 2018; Batalova, Fix, and Greenberg 2018; Fiscal Policy Institute 2018; Kenney, Haley, and Wang 2018; Laird et al. 2019; Zallman and Finnegan 2018).¹⁵ The evidence we collected showing high chilling rates even before release of the final rule suggests that rates could be even larger following implementation.¹⁶

The confusion and fear around when and how the proposed public charge rule could be finalized and who it would affect appear to be leading to spillover, extending beyond people directly affected by the rule, who have not yet applied for green cards and will receive the revised public charge test when they do. Immigrant households often include people with a variety of immigration, residency, and citizenship statuses, and the survey results show chilling effects in families including US-born citizens, naturalized US citizens, green card holders, and people who lack permanent residence.¹⁷ Though chilling effects were highest in families where one or more noncitizen family members were not permanent residents (20.4 percent), rates were also high in less vulnerable families: 14.7 percent in families where all noncitizen members had green cards and 9.3 percent where all foreign-born members were naturalized citizens. Many people live in households with complex combinations of status and belong to family networks extending across households. These family interconnections are critical for understanding the impacts of the revised public charge rule and other restrictive immigration policy measures on the well-being of families across the US.

In December 2018, most adults in immigrant families reported awareness of the public charge rule (62.9 percent). And the survey results show that people with greater awareness were more likely to report chilling effects, reflecting the fear and confusion around the rule that advocates and service providers have observed. Reports from the field suggest widespread confusion about actual details of the rule (Greenberg, Feierstine, and Voltolini 2019). Under the previous public charge regulations, service providers could convey a clear message, because all noncash benefits were excluded from consideration in public charge determinations. The proposed regulation poses new challenges of understanding and communication, both for the public and legal and other service providers.

Providing families accurate information and guidance as the debate on the proposed public charge rule continues could help mitigate further chilling effects. Investing in educating service providers who may interact with immigrant families could also combat misconceptions and ensure families receive the information they need to make informed choices on their and their children's behalves. This applies to government social services staff and practitioners in community-based organizations, as well as to staff at schools and early childhood education providers, faith leaders, employers, and other sites where families who are afraid of interacting with government authorities may be reached. Initiatives to support advocacy efforts and educate providers face the challenge of accessing vulnerable and hard-to-reach families on a national scale. Education through innovative channels, such as social media, faith-based institutions, and schools, may help reach scale.

Though these survey results provide new insight into the potential scope of chilling effects under the proposed public charge rule, a forthcoming brief drawing on interviews with adults in families that experienced chilling will provide additional qualitative information on the mechanisms and context in which these decisions were made. In addition, such self-reported evidence of chilling should be verified

in administrative data sources, if possible. Local and state government agencies could shed light on changing program participation numbers by examining their own data. Community-based organizations encountering immigrant families could also monitor family experiences. This real-time evidence on the impacts of anticipated and implemented policy changes on the ground is critical to inform policymakers and practitioners developing effective strategies to reduce harm.

Losing access to programs can affect not only adults but children in the household, many of whom are US citizens. Discouraging families from using benefits for which they are eligible will likely increase the risk of material hardship, which can have negative long-term effects on health and well-being, particularly among children.

Our evidence suggests that even without a final rule, chilling effects have already occurred, both in families who would be directly affected by the revised rule and in spillover to immigrant families more broadly. Potential consequences for health and well-being will be important to monitor. Educating service providers and immigrant families is one key strategy to combat misinformation and mitigate harm.

Notes

- ¹ Hamutal Bernstein and Archana Pyati, “Expanding the ‘Public Charge’ Rule Jeopardizes the Well-Being of Immigrants and Citizens,” *Urban Wire* (blog), Urban Institute, October 3, 2018, <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/expanding-public-charge-rule-jeopardizes-well-being-immigrants-and-citizens>.
- ² Emily Baumgaertner, “Spooked by Trump Proposals, Immigrants Abandon Public Nutrition Services,” *New York Times*, March 6, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/06/us/politics/trump-immigrants-public-nutrition-services.html>; Caitlin Dewey, “Immigrants Are Going Hungry So Trump Won’t Deport Them,” *Washington Post*, March 16, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/03/16/immigrants-are-now-canceling-their-food-stamps-for-fear-that-trump-will-deport-them/?utm_term=.6cc2529d5e00; Helena Bottemiller Evich, “Immigrants, Fearing Trump Crackdown, Drop out of Nutrition Programs,” *Politico*, September 3, 2018, <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/09/03/immigrants-nutrition-food-trump-crackdown-806292>. One exception is recent research by Children’s Health Watch (Bovell-Ammon et al. 2018), which collects data in emergency rooms and primary care clinics in Baltimore, Boston, Little Rock, Minneapolis, and Philadelphia. Their data collection showed reported SNAP receipt declined in the first half of 2018 for immigrant families, especially among recent arrivals. They note limitations in sample size, however, and given the time frame of the drop, from 2017 to the first half of 2018, the connection to the public charge debate is unclear. Some state-level data have also suggested drops in participation or increased reluctance to engage in safety net resources (O’Rourke 2019).
- ³ In forthcoming work, we will analyze results from complementary qualitative data collection through semistructured interviews with a portion of survey respondents who reported chilling effects.
- ⁴ “Potential Effects of Public Charge Changes on California Children,” The Children’s Partnership and KidsData.org, accessed May 15, 2019, <https://www.childrenspartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Potential-Effects-of-Public-Charge-Changes-on-California-Children-Brief.pdf>; “Public Charge Proposed Rule: Potentially Chilled Population Data Dashboard,” Manatt, October 11, 2018, <https://www.manatt.com/Insights/Articles/2018/Public-Charge-Rule-Potentially-Chilled-Population>.
- ⁵ *Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds*, 83 Fed. Reg. 51114 (Oct. 10, 2018).
- ⁶ Yeganeh Torbati and Kristina Cooke, “Denials of US Immigrant Visas Skyrocket after Little-Heralded Rule Change,” *Reuters*, April 15, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-immigration-visas-insight-idUSKCN1RR0UX>.

⁷ Yeganeh Torbati, “Exclusive: Trump Administration Proposal Would Make It Easier to Deport Immigrants Who Use Public Benefits,” *Reuters*, May 3, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-immigration-benefits-exclusive/exclusive-trump-administration-proposal-would-make-it-easier-to-deport-immigrants-who-use-public-benefits-idUSKCN1S91UR>.

⁸ Emily Baumgaertner, “Spooked by Trump Proposals, Immigrants Abandon Public Nutrition Services,” *New York Times*; Caitlin Dewey, “Immigrants Are Going Hungry So Trump Won’t Deport Them,” *Washington Post*; Helena Bottemiller Evich, “Immigrants, Fearing Trump Crackdown, Drop out of Nutrition Programs,” *Politico*; Emily Moon, “Why Is Participation in Food Assistance Programs like WIC Declining?” *Pacific Standard*, May 8, 2019, <https://psmag.com/news/why-is-participation-in-food-assistance-programs-like-wic-declining>.

⁹ For additional information on the survey design and weighting in the WBNS, see Karpman, Zuckerman, and Gonzalez (2018).

¹⁰ We define adults with English proficiency as those who speak English at least “well,” as classified in the American Community Survey. Adults with limited English proficiency are those who speak English less than “well.” This is a broader measure than is commonly used to define English proficiency; in most analyses, a person must speak English “very well” to be classified as having English proficiency (Wilson 2014). We use the following measures for weighting: gender, age, race and ethnicity, educational attainment, presence of children under age 18 in the household, census region, homeownership status, family income as a percentage of the federal poverty level, access to the internet, and family composition. We benchmark non-Hispanic “other race” respondents by two categories: (1) other race born in Asia and (2) multiple races or other race not born in Asia.

¹¹ We draw on measures developed by researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles, for an immigrant follow-up survey to the California Health Interview Survey.

The exact wording of the two questions on chilling effects in the WBNS were as follows:

Question A: *Was there a time in the past 12 months when you or someone in your family **decided not to apply** for one or more non-cash government benefits, such as Medicaid or CHIP, SNAP (formerly known as food stamps), or housing subsidies, because you were worried it would disqualify you or a family member or relative from obtaining a green card?* [Response options: yes/no]

Question A1: *Which benefits did you or someone in your family decide not to apply for because you were worried it would disqualify you or a family member or relative from obtaining a green card? Check all that apply.* [Response options: Medicaid or CHIP; SNAP (formerly known as food stamps); Housing subsidies; Other (please specify)]

Question A2: *Did you decide not to apply for Medicaid or CHIP for **your children** because you were worried it would disqualify you or a family member or relative from obtaining a green card?* [Response options: yes/no]

Question B: *Was there a time in the past 12 months when you or someone in your family **stopped participating** in any non-cash government benefits, such as Medicaid or CHIP, SNAP (formerly known as food stamps), or housing subsidies, because you were worried it would disqualify you or a family member or relative from obtaining a green card?* [Response options: yes/no]

Question B1: *Which benefits did you or someone in your family stop participating in because you were worried it would disqualify you or a family member or relative from obtaining a green card? Check all that apply.* [Response options: Medicaid or CHIP; SNAP (formerly known as food stamps); Housing subsidies; Other (please specify)]

Question B2: *Did **your children** stop participating in Medicaid or CHIP because you were worried it would disqualify you or a family member or relative from obtaining a green card?* [Response options: yes/no]

¹² The exact wording for the question on awareness of the proposed public charge rule in the WBNS was as follows:

A proposed rule would make it harder for immigrants to enter the United States or become permanent residents of the United States if they have low income or use public benefits such as Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps), or housing subsidies. How much have you heard about this proposed rule? [Response options: a lot, some, only a little, nothing at all]

This question was asked later in the survey than the questions on chilling effects.

¹³ See endnote 10 for a definition of English proficiency.

- ¹⁴ Though our analysis did not consider the eligibility of individuals or family members for different public programs, we know that in general, adults living in families with children are more likely to have a family member who is eligible for a public program, which increases their exposure to potential chilling effects relative to adults who do not live with children.
- ¹⁵ “Potential Effects of Public Charge Changes on California Children,” The Children’s Partnership and KidsData.org; “Public Charge Proposed Rule: Potentially Chilled Population Data Dashboard,” Manatt.
- ¹⁶ Those estimates drew on lessons from the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Authorization Act, which eliminated access to federal assistance for most immigrants during their first five years of residence (Fix and Passel 2002).
- ¹⁷ In fact, amongst survey respondents, one in five respondents lived in a household where one or more noncitizen family members were not permanent residents (22.9 percent), one in three (33.8 percent) lived in households where all noncitizen family members were permanent residents, and around 43 percent lived with all naturalized US citizen, foreign-born relatives.

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