

# Well-being of Hispanic Children in the United States

Waldman HB \* / Perlman SP \*\*

*The availability of general information about the economic, health and social well being of Hispanic children in the United States is essential for dental and other health practitioners. Only recently have government and private agencies moved beyond the standard presentation of information by traditional “white, black and other” groupings. The need is to develop an increased awareness of the different factors which affect children in general, and in particular Hispanic children. An overview is carried out to stimulate such an effort.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The Census Bureau projects that by 2050, the U.S. Hispanic population (132.8 million residents) will represent 30 percent of the nation’s population.<sup>1,2</sup> Nevertheless, it is only within the last number of years that demographic studies by government and private agencies have reported results in categories beyond the historic racial categories of “white,” “black” and sometimes “Asian” and “other.”

We now recognize the dramatic population changes in our communities and have expanded reports to categorize individuals of differing single and multiple racial and ethnic groupings (e.g. whites, non-Hispanic whites, blacks, non-Hispanic blacks, differing groups of native Americans, Asians and Pacific Islanders, and Hispanics). However, while many reports provide economic, health and social well-being information by racial/ethnicity at a national level, there are serious limits on the availability of these data beyond the traditional “white, black and other” differentiation at state and local levels.

But dentists and other health practitioners provide services at a local community level. The need is to develop an increased awareness of the different economic and social factors which affect children in general, and in particular youngsters in populations that in the past seldom were included in government and private agency regional and

more local reports – in this instance, the well-being of Hispanic children in the United States.

## National perspective

The 2010 U.S. Census documented a 43 percent increase in the Hispanic population during the past decade. The Census counted 50.5 million Hispanics in the U.S., including over 17.1 million children less than eighteen years (23.1 percent of all children in this age group). “Racial and ethnic minorities accounted for 91.7% of the nation’s growth over the decade; non-Hispanic whites accounted for the remaining 8.3%.”<sup>3</sup> Knowledge of the growing numbers of Hispanic children in the country and the particular constraints they face is essential in any effort to plan and provide for the general and dental health services for this population. For example, in 2010, “More than one in three young (U.S.) families with children were living in poverty ... Some of the highest rates are among black and Hispanic children (including almost two-in-five Hispanic children).”<sup>4</sup>

Census Bureau reports and The Annie E. Casey Foundation’s *2011 Kids Count Data Book* and related Foundation online reports provide detailed comparative national and state profiles of child well-being. They offer insight into the particular issues faced by Hispanic children of all ages in the country. Cases in point:

- Percent of children living in families where no parent has full-time, year round employment (2009): National average 31%, Hispanic average 38%.
- Percent of children in single parent families (2009): National average 34%, Hispanic average 40%.
- Teen birth rate (births per 1,000 females, ages 16–19) (2008): National average 41 births, Hispanic average 78 births.
- Percent of teens not attending school and not working (ages 16–19) (2009): National average 9%, Hispanic average 12%.<sup>5</sup>

\* H. Barry Waldman, DDS, MPH, PhD, Distinguished Teaching Professor, Department of General Dentistry, Stony Brook University.

\*\* Steven P Perlman, DDS, MScD, DHL (Hon), Global Clinical Director, Special Olympics, Special Smiles, Clinical Professor of Pediatric Dentistry, Boston University School of Dental Medicine.

Send all correspondence to: H. Barry Waldman, Department of General Dentistry, Stony Brook University, NY, 11794-8706 USA

E-mail: h.waldman@stonybrook.edu

### State rates for Hispanic children in 2009

The reality, however, is that national averages tend to obscure the wide ranges that exist in the various states. Specifically:

Hispanic children range from 2% of total child population in Maine, Vermont and West Virginia to 50% in California and 55% of the child population in New Mexico. The number of Hispanic children range from 2,800 in Vermont to more than 4.7 million in California.

Hispanic children in poverty (includes 39 states for which data are available) range from 15% in Maryland to between 41% and 44% in South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, Arkansas and Alabama. The number of Hispanic children in poverty range from 8,000 in Hawaii to almost 1.3 million in California.

No Hispanic parent in full-time year round employment (includes 33 states for which data are available) range from 28% in Virginia to 48% in Michigan and 50% in Massachusetts. The number of Hispanic children in this family setting range from 15,000 in Louisiana to almost 1.9 million in California.

Hispanic children in single parent families (includes 34 states for which data are available) range from 30% of Hispanic families in Virginia to over 50% in New York, Connecticut, Pennsylvania and 61% of Hispanic families in Massachusetts. The number of Hispanic children in this setting range from 15,000 in Louisiana to almost 1.7 million in California.

Hispanic teens not attending school and not working (includes 30 states for which data are available) range from 4% in New Hampshire to 18% in Georgia, 19% in North Carolina and 20% in Michigan. The number of Hispanic teens in this category range from 1,000 in Arkansas and Iowa to 103,000 in California.

Hispanic children in foster care range from 1% and 2% in Vermont, Mississippi, Louisiana and West Virginia to 48% in California and 59% in New Mexico.<sup>5</sup>

While the high numeric ranges of Hispanic children in each of these categories are a reflection of the greater overall population in some states, it nevertheless provides a picture of the magnitude of the difficulties to be considered.

### Oral health of Hispanic children

Among Hispanic children there are wide ranges among the states in the use of dental services and a perception of overall dental health.

Hispanic children who did not receive preventive dental care in the past year range from 13% in Hawaii and Rhode Island to approximately 25% in Arkansas, Missouri, Texas, Nevada and 31% in Florida.

Hispanic children whose teeth are not in excellent or very good condition range from 18% in New Hampshire to approximately 35% in Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona, California and 38% in Texas.<sup>5</sup>

### Additional concerns

The 2011 Kids Count Data Book<sup>5</sup> provides an overall ranking of states based upon ten key indicators of child well-being.<sup>5</sup> The key indicators are: percent of low-birth weight babies, infant mortality rate, child death rate, teen death rate, teen birth rate, rate of teenagers not in school and not high school graduates, rate of teens not attending school and not working, percent of children living in families where no parent had full-time employment year round, children in poverty, and children in single-parent families.<sup>5</sup>

Census Bureau Hispanic data are not available for each of these indicators at the state level. Nevertheless, the overall state rankings (1st is best and 50th worst) do provide an overview of the general environment in which Hispanic (and other) children are being raised. For example, almost a half million Hispanic children live in the five states with the lowest overall child well-being rankings (46th to 50th) (New Mexico, Arkansas, Alabama Louisiana, and Mississippi).

### Commentary

Yes, it is important to know that in 2008 and 2009:

- 76 percent of Hispanic U.S. residents spoke Spanish at home.
- 30 percent of Hispanic residents lacked health insurance.
- There were 10.5 million Hispanic family households in the U.S. It is equally important to know that 61 percent of these families included children.
- The median age of the general population was 36.8 years. It is also important to know that the median age of the Hispanic population was younger at 27.4 years.
- There were 9.1 million Hispanics in Texas. So too is it important to know that 97 percent of the population of Starr County Texas was Hispanic and that ten of the U.S. counties with the highest proportion of Hispanics were in Texas.<sup>6</sup>

Broad averages do not define an individual child. Averages do identify the general setting in which an individual youngster is raised and matures. As health practitioners, we bring together the general and particular information about our patients as we gather pertinent and particular histories and plan for needed treatment. The evolving demographic characteristics of our communities require an increased awareness of those individuals in populations that traditionally were overlooked and combined in “and other” groupings. In the case of Hispanic children, as reported in the 2011 Kids Count Data Book, “...on the whole, non-Hispanic white and Asian and Pacific Islander children continue to have better outcomes (on child well-being indicators)... compared with the other large racial and Hispanic origin groups.”<sup>5</sup>

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