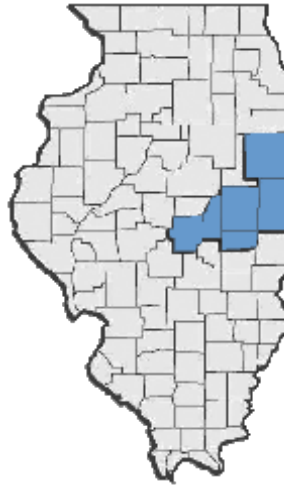


Strengths and Challenges of Latino Families in Central Illinois



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Finally, we owe a special thanks to the immigrant parents who participated in the study.

For More Information About the Project

To learn more about the *Latino Families in Central Illinois* project, contact Angela Wiley or Marcela Raffaelli, Department of Human & Community Development, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 904 W. Nevada St., MC 081, Urbana, IL 60108 (awiley@illinois.edu 217-265-5279 or mraffael@illinois.edu 217-244-5017).

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Latino Families in Central Illinois: Project Overview

Illinois has long attracted immigrants and their families. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, the state saw large influxes of European immigrants. In the latter half of the 20th century, like the rest of the nation, Illinois experienced a dramatic increase in migration from Latin America. There was a 69% increase in the Latino population in Illinois between 1990 and 2000, and nearly 15% of Illinois residents are now Latino. Furthermore, almost half (48%) of the foreign-born population in Illinois is of Latin American (primarily Mexican) origin.

Across the U.S., immigrants from Latin America are increasingly moving to rural areas with predominately European American populations. This is true in Illinois, where the Latino population in non-metropolitan areas grew by 71% between 1990 and 2000. Several rural counties (including some represented in our study) saw more dramatic increases; for example, the Latino population in Champaign county, one of our study sites, nearly doubled from 1990 to 2000. Rural communities are typically ill-prepared to deal with immigrants, many of whom work in low-paying, high-turnover jobs in the agricultural or service sectors. Despite the rapid growth of rural Latino populations, there is little research on the experiences of Latino families in non-urban areas.

The *Latino Families in Central Illinois* project was developed by two University of Illinois professors (Angela Wiley and Marcela Raffaelli). Stage 1 of the project involved conducting a survey of Spanish-speaking parents with a child under age 18. Families lived in five central Illinois counties -- Champaign, Douglas, Iroquois, Macon, and Vermillion. Due to difficulties of recruiting a random sample from small rural areas, respondents were sought through direct solicitation at community and service events, postings of flyers, agency referrals, and participant referrals. They were interviewed at a place of their choosing (usually their home) by bilingual/bicultural interviewers. Parents were asked questions about a variety of individual, social, and contextual factors associated with family well-being. Respondents were paid \$25 and given a list of local resources and referrals. Interviews were conducted with 120 parents; because 112 were mothers, we focus here on female respondents.

In this report, we provide a general overview of life for immigrant families in central Illinois that can be used by service providers and policy makers working to promote the well-being of rural families. We describe the mothers, examine their work and economic situation, discuss social and community resources, and explore child care preferences and use. Each chapter includes a narrative summary of key findings, followed by figures and data. In closing, we present a set of conclusions and initial recommendations. Ultimately, information from this study will be used to develop programs, materials, and best-practices models to benefit immigrant Latino families.

Chapter 1

Characteristics of the Respondents

This first chapter describes the Latina mothers who took part in the study. We present information on basic demographics, migration history, language use, and household characteristics. These characteristics provide a picture of the women, their life experiences, and current situation.

Age and National Origin of Respondents

The respondents were 112 mothers with at least one child under the age of 18. Either they or their spouse/partner were immigrants from Latin America. Their average age was 34.5 years, with a range of 19 to 59 years. Most respondents had been born in Mexico (95%); these women were from over a dozen Mexican states.

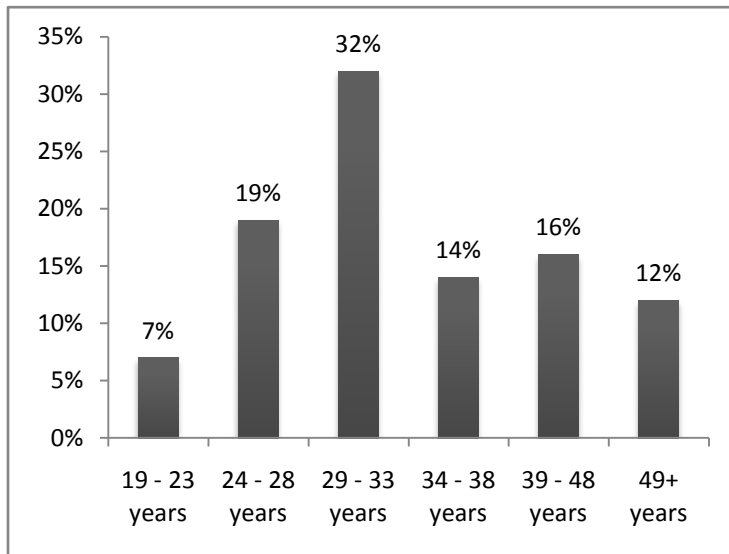
Time in the United States and English Language Fluency

Time in the U.S. may be associated with the overall quality of life for immigrant families. For example, it may be related to adaptive aspects such as learning the English language. The ability to speak English proficiently allows for increased opportunities to interact and function in the community. On average, respondents had lived in the United States for 12.2 years, but there was a wide range – from 2 to 40 years. About half the respondents (51%) had lived in the United States for 10 or fewer years. Not surprisingly, English language skills improved with time in the U.S. Just one tenth of the respondents who had lived in the U.S. for 10 or fewer years said they could carry on a conversation in English (both understanding and speaking) “pretty well” or “very well”; in contrast, long-term residents were about four times as likely to be fluent in English (37%). This suggests that immigrants are able to better communicate in English as their time in the U.S. increases.

Housing Situation

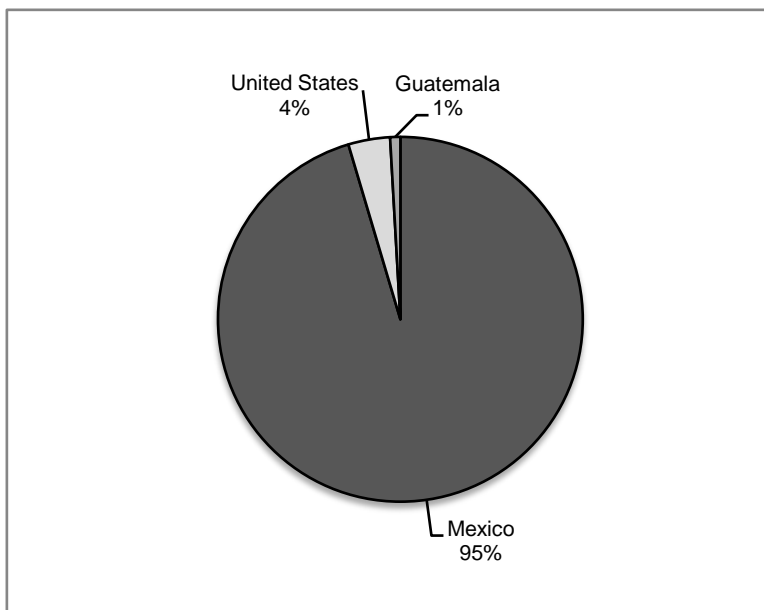
Time in the U.S. was associated with increased rates of homeownership. About half (52%) of long-term residents (more than 10 years in U.S.) owned their house/trailer. In contrast, only 27% of newer immigrants owned a home, with the majority either renting an apartment or house/trailer. In terms of household size, most mothers reported living in households consisting of 4 people (typically two adults and two children under age 18). Just over one in ten (12%) were in households of 6 or more people.

Age of Study Respondents



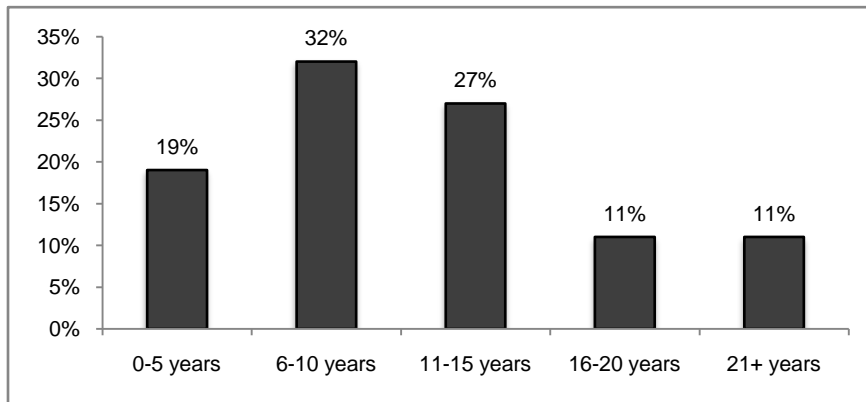
All 112 respondents were female and had at least one child younger than 18 years of age. The average age of the respondents was 34.5 years, with a range from 19 to 54 years.

Respondents' Country of Origin



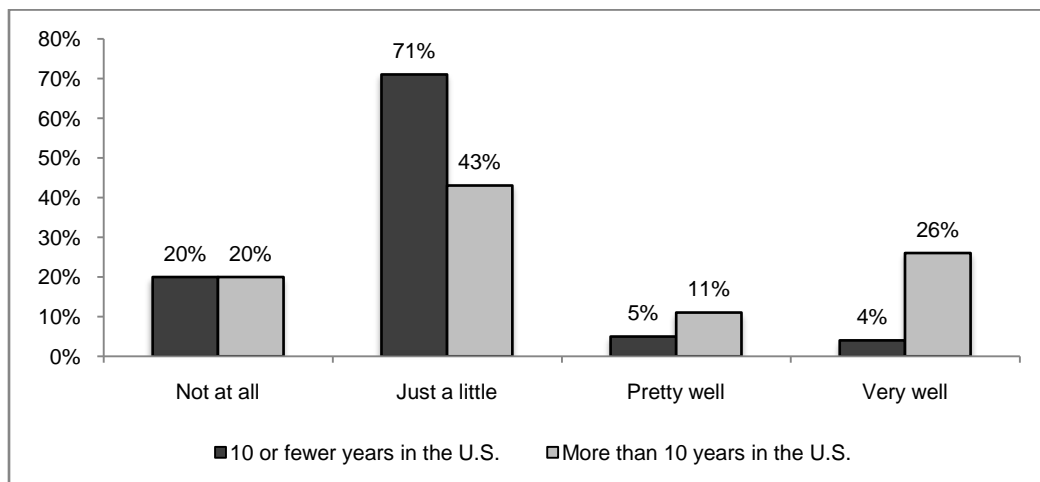
95% of the respondents were born in Mexico, 4% in the United States, and 1% in Guatemala. The Mexican immigrants came from a large variety of states within their home country, with the most common states being *Nuevo León* (24%), *Guanajuato* (14.7%), *México* state (11%), and *Tamaulipas* (9.8%). Those born in the U.S. were partnered with an immigrant.

How Long Have They Lived in the United States?



Respondents had lived in the U.S. between 2-40 years (average 12.2 years). About half (51%) had lived in the U.S. for 10 or fewer years.

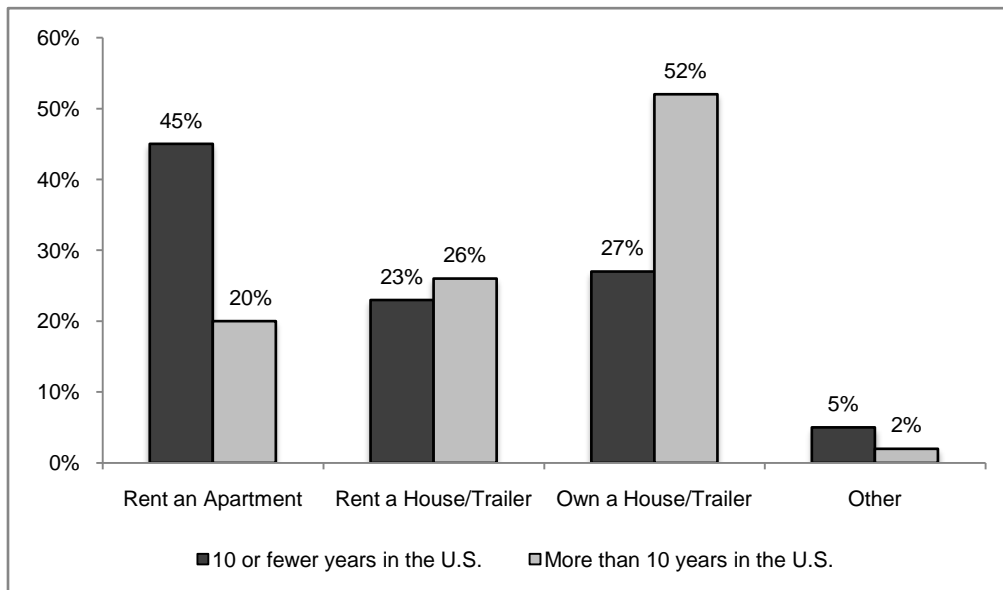
How Well Do They Speak English?



Over three-quarters of the women reported their ability to carry a conversation in English (both understanding and speaking) as “not at all” or “just a little.” Respondents who had lived in the U.S. for more than 10 years reported higher abilities than those who have lived in the U.S. 10 or fewer years.

Only 9% of respondents who had lived in the U.S. for 10 or fewer years reported their ability to carry on a conversation in English as “pretty well” or “very well.” In contrast, 37% of respondents who had lived in the U.S. for more than 10 years said they spoke English “pretty well” or “very well.”

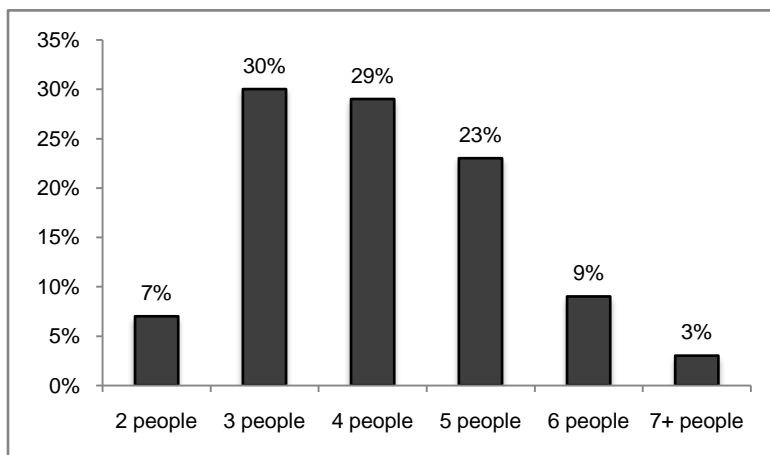
What Are Their Housing Situations?



Respondents who had lived in the U.S. for 10 or fewer years were more likely to be renting an apartment than respondents who had lived in the U.S. for more than 10 years (45% vs. 20%).

Long-term residents had twice the rate of home ownership than those who had lived in the U.S. for 10 or fewer years (52% vs. 27%).

What are the Sizes of Their Households?



Most respondents (82%) were in households consisting of 3-5 people. The average household had 4.1 people.

The average household had 2.1 people under the age of 18 and 2.0 people over 18.

Chapter 2

Education, Work, and Financial Situation

Being able to find employment that generates adequate income is a primary factor in a family's quality of life. Having steady and sufficient income allows families to fulfill a variety of needs - for housing, food, medical care, clothing, and transportation (among other things). Adequate employment and income also allow families to plan for the future.

Immigrant Parents' Educational Status

Education is a major determinant of both employment and financial situation. About 2 in 5 of the respondents had fewer than 9 years of formal education; the same was true of their spouses or partners (if they had one). Most had completed their education in their native country. In Mexico, where most of the respondents were born, mandatory education involves 6 years of primary (*primária*) and 3 years of lower secondary (*secundária*) schooling. Thus, levels of educational attainment were quite low among the respondents and their spouses or partners.

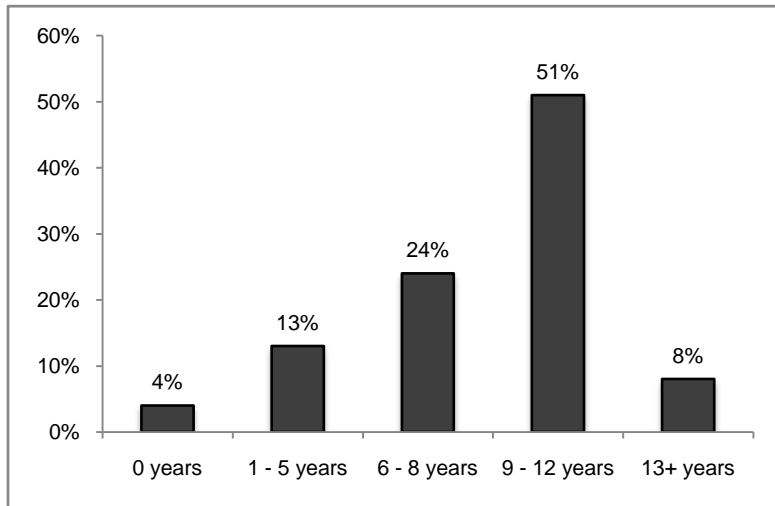
Immigrant Parents' Work Status

Under half of the mothers in the study worked outside the home (either full-time or part time); about a third wanted to work but were unable to find a job and 1 in 5 was not working by choice. In contrast, almost all male partners/spouses were employed full time or part time. Among the fathers, time in the U.S. was not associated with employment status. However, mothers who had been in the U.S. over ten years were more likely to be employed full time or want to work than those who were more recent arrivals. This shift may reflect changes due to acculturation (e.g., language skills), knowledge of how to find employment, and perhaps changing cultural tradition of stay-at-home moms.

Immigrant Families' Financial Situation

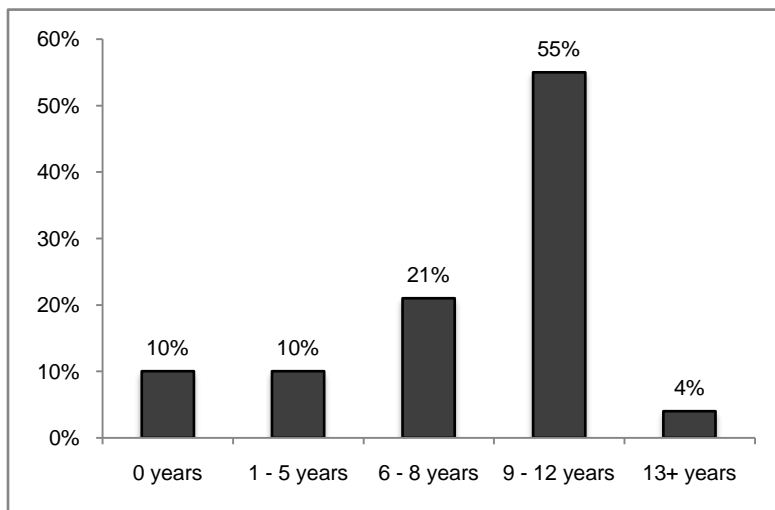
Average family income was between \$20,000 - \$24,999 and varied by time in the U.S. Respondents who had lived in the U.S. more than ten years had a higher family income (although still well below the median income levels in the study counties, which ranged from \$38,036 to \$55,009). This may be why longer-term residents were not better off than newcomers based on other indicators. When asked to select the statement that best described their family's financial situation, most mothers said their families were "meeting only basic needs," with little difference evident by time in the U.S. These analyses indicate that immigrant Latino families experience considerable hardship as they strive to make a new life for themselves in rural Illinois communities.

How Many Years of School Have the Mothers Completed?



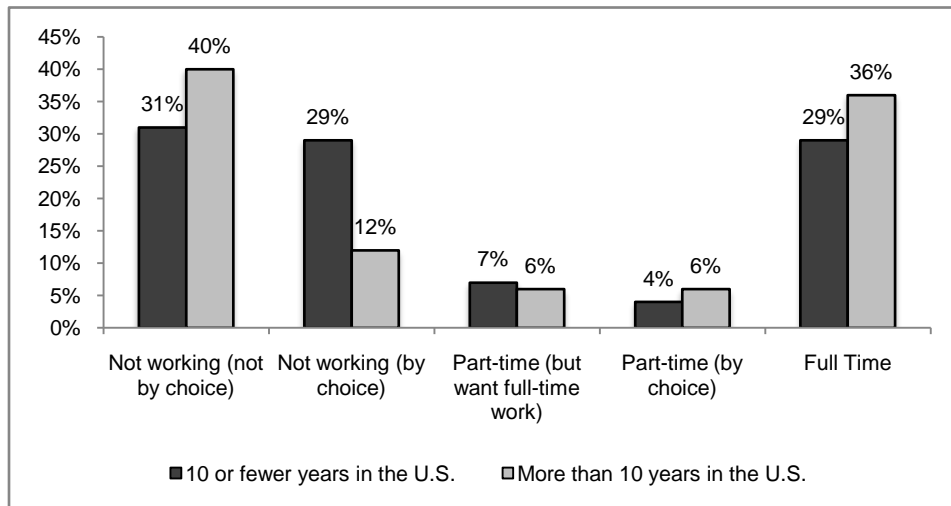
Most of the mothers (95.5%) had attended school, the majority (86%) in their native country. About 40% had fewer than 9 years of education, but the majority had attended high school. Nearly 1 in 10 had completed some college.

How Many Years of School Have Their Spouses/Partners Completed?



Among the respondents with a spouse/partner, 90% said the partner had attended school, most (90%) in their native country. About 40% had fewer than 9 years of education, but the majority had attended high school. Few of the fathers had attended college.

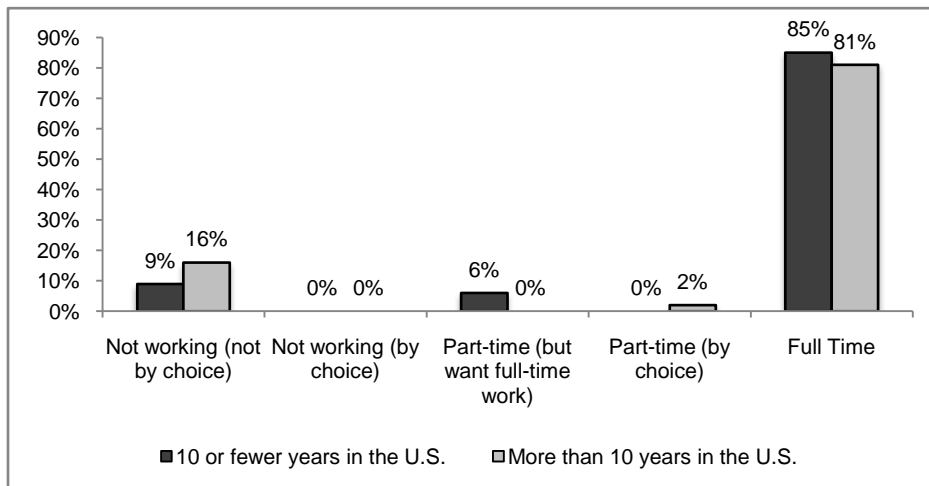
What Are Latina Mothers' Employment Situations?



The mothers reported a variety of employment statuses. Overall, about one third worked full time, and one fifth reported not working by choice.

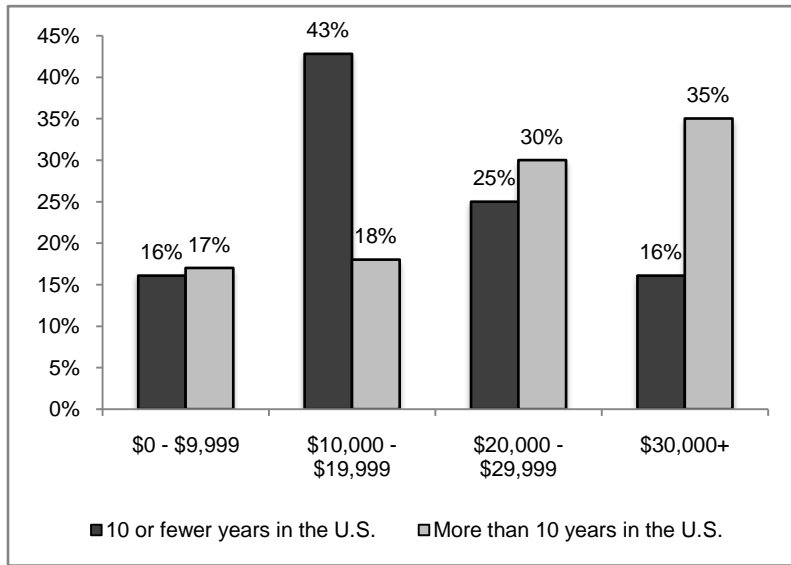
Those who had been in the U.S. more than 10 years were slightly more likely to be employed full-time and to be unwillingly unemployed. One of the more noticeable differences was that respondents who had lived in the U.S. 10 or fewer years were almost three times as likely to report not working by choice.

What Are the Spouses'/Partners' Employment Situations?



Most fathers were working full time, and – with one exception – part time or no employment among fathers was described as “not by choice.”

Family Income

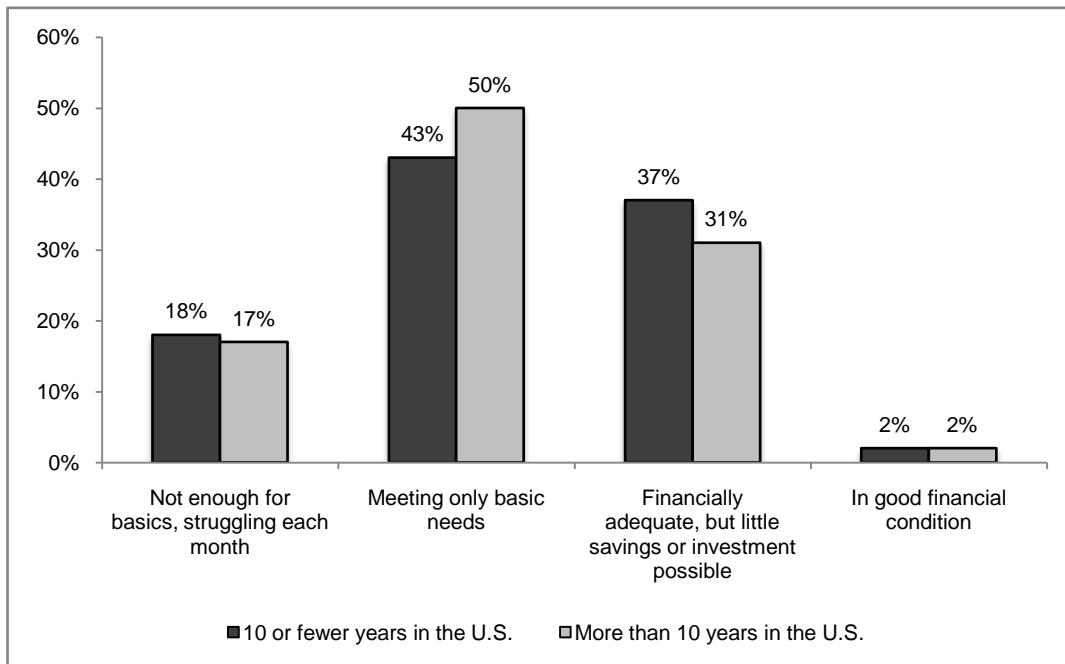


Combined family income averaged \$20,000 - \$24,999.

Relatively few respondents reported family incomes of \$30,000 or more, and nearly 1 in 5 reported incomes of less than \$10,000.

Long-term residents reported higher family incomes than those with less time in the U.S.

How Do Respondents Describe Their Financial Situation?



Mothers were asked to select from four statements the one that best described their family's financial situation. Few respondents said their family was "in good financial condition" and under two fifths said their situation was "financially adequate." Family financial situation did not improve with time in the U.S.

Chapter 3

The Community and the Family

Immigrants do not exist in a social vacuum, and they possess strengths that help them confront the challenges they face. The key elements of social networks are family and friends who can help immigrants adjust to the new community. Family and friends become the bonding social capital that facilitates access for immigrants to community resources and support, and allows them to integrate into their communities. This chapter presents information related to challenges and resources respondents described, including formal and informal networks of support.

Challenges and Resources

Respondents faced a number of challenges as they built their new life in Central Illinois. Language was identified as a major challenge for immigrant Latinos, particularly in communities with limited availability of English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Mothers identified personal networks as a major resource for immigrant families, with fewer naming formal sources (e.g., social service agencies). Moreover, when asked what services they had used in the past year, the mothers described using an array of health and food assistance programs but were less likely to have used community support and educational programs. Among non-users, lack of knowledge about what was available appeared to be a greater barrier than lack of availability.

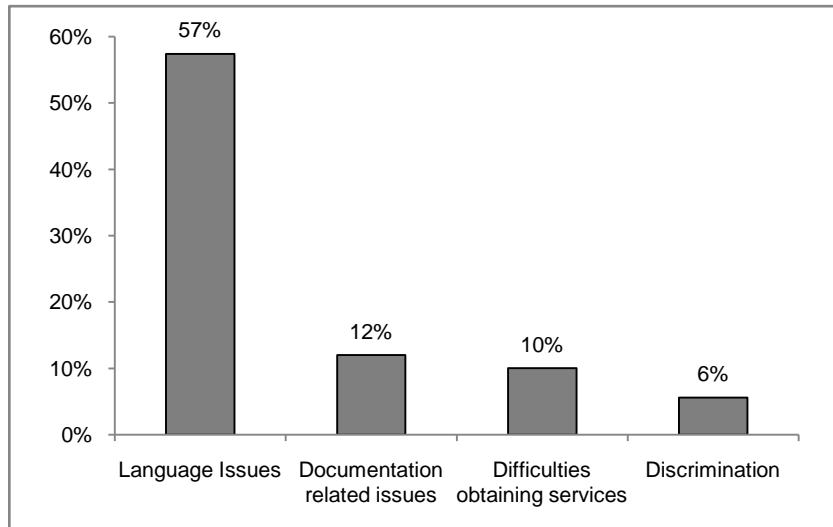
Social Networks and Cultural Interaction

When asked to describe their own social networks, more than half of the mothers said they had 2 to 5 people who provided them various forms of support. On average, mothers knew 7 adults in their neighborhood. Personal support networks did not differ by time in the U.S. In addition, most respondents spoke to friends and family in their country of origin on a regular basis. Support from family members and people from the new community may play an important role in compensating for the loss of support from family and friends left in their country of origin.

Life Satisfaction

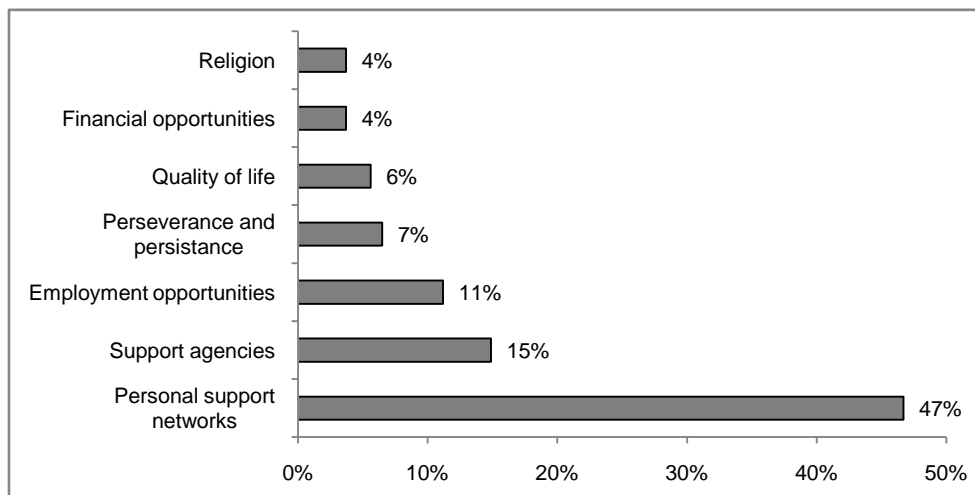
Despite the various challenges these mothers described, they reported high life satisfaction, with between half and four fifths positively endorsing items such as "my life is close to my ideal." Life satisfaction is high because immigrants have more work-related opportunities and better quality of life in the United States than in their country of origin. They compare what they have here with what they left in their place of origin, so despite experiencing many challenges and stresses in their adopted country, the comparison with what they left affords them some satisfaction.

Challenges For Latino Families in Central Illinois



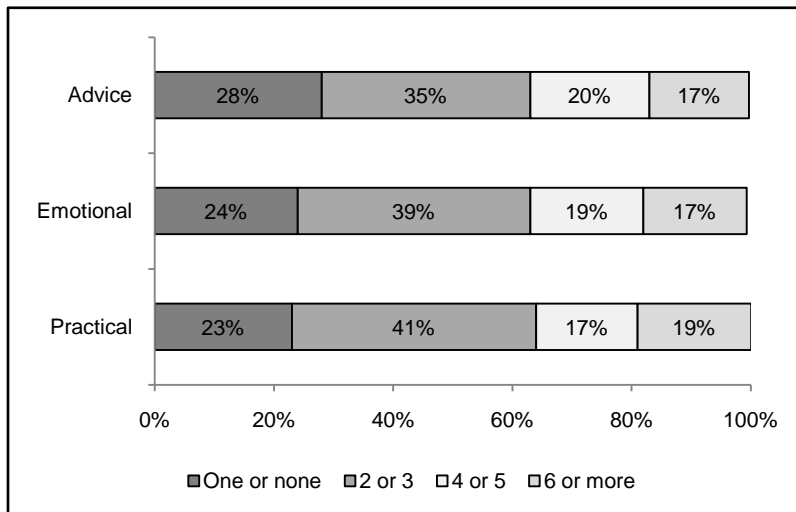
When asked to identify the greatest challenge for Latino families in their community, over half of the respondents identified language issues, such as “learning how to speak and write the language”; “Can’t find any good jobs because of language”; and the unavailability of ESL classes.

Resources Latino Families Have



When asked about resources that Latino families use to confront the challenges they face, most respondents identified personal support networks (e.g., social connections, family cohesion, unity in the Latino community, and emotional and instrumental support provided by network members). Formal sources of support (such as community agencies) were less frequently identified. Some respondents (6.5%) said there was a lack of resources (e.g., “there are no resources”; “nobody helps”).

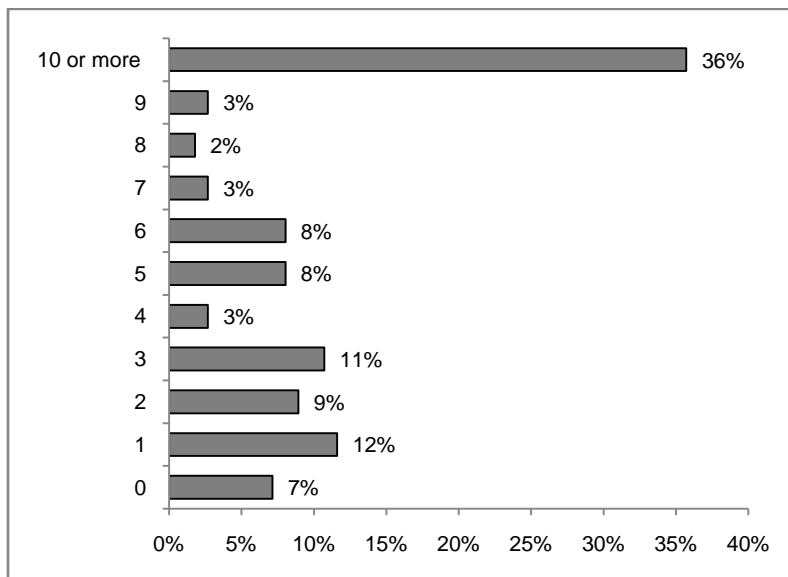
Number of Persons Who Give Them Support



Respondents reported an average of 2 to 5 people provided various forms of support, with no differences by time in the U.S.

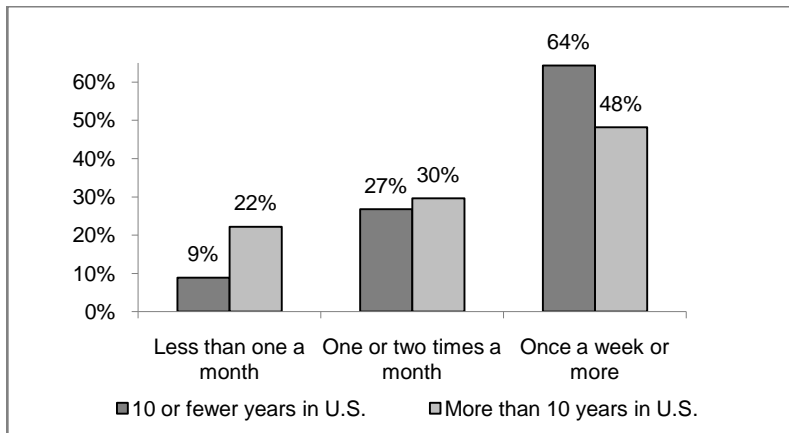
About 25% of the mothers had 0 or 1 person who provided each type of support; at the other extreme, 20% had 6 or more people.

Number of Non-Related Adults Known in Neighborhood (Within Walking Distance)



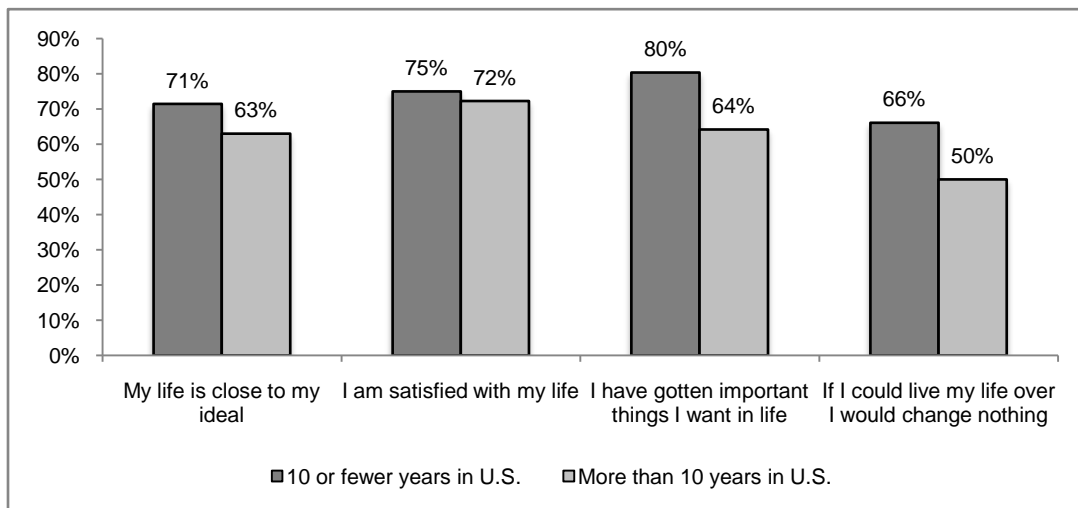
On average, respondents knew over 7 non-related adults nearby. One third (36%) knew 10 or more adults. Again, there was no difference by time in the U.S.

Frequency of Talking to Family/Friends in Country of Origin



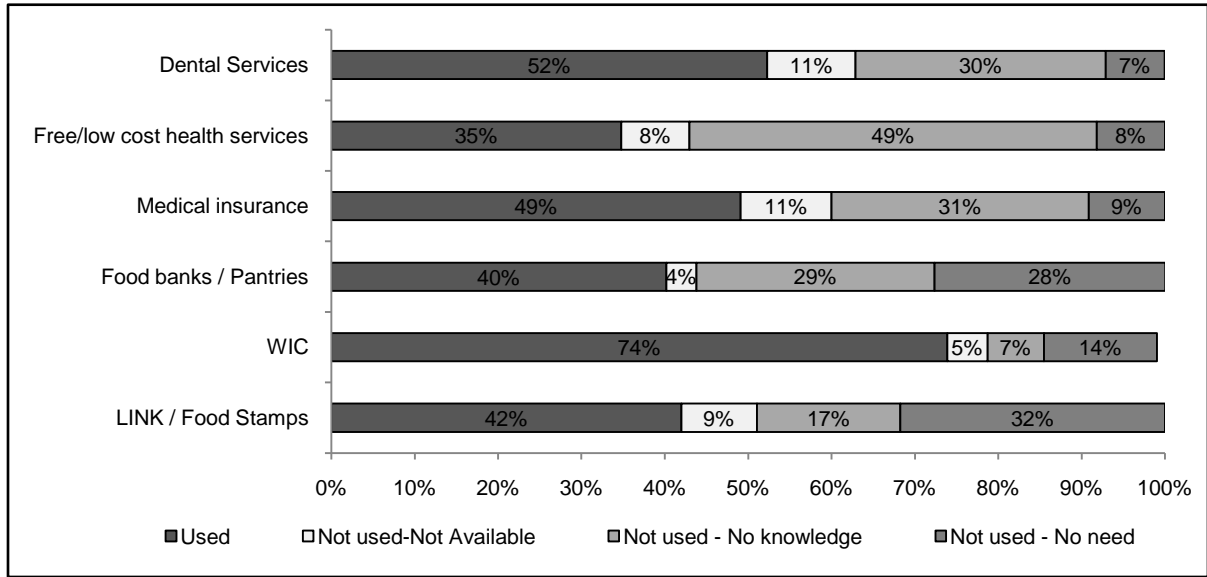
Most respondents spoke regularly to someone in their country of origin. Those living in the United States for less than 10 years communicated more often with family or friends in their country of origin than longer-term residents.

Life Satisfaction (Percent who agree with each item)



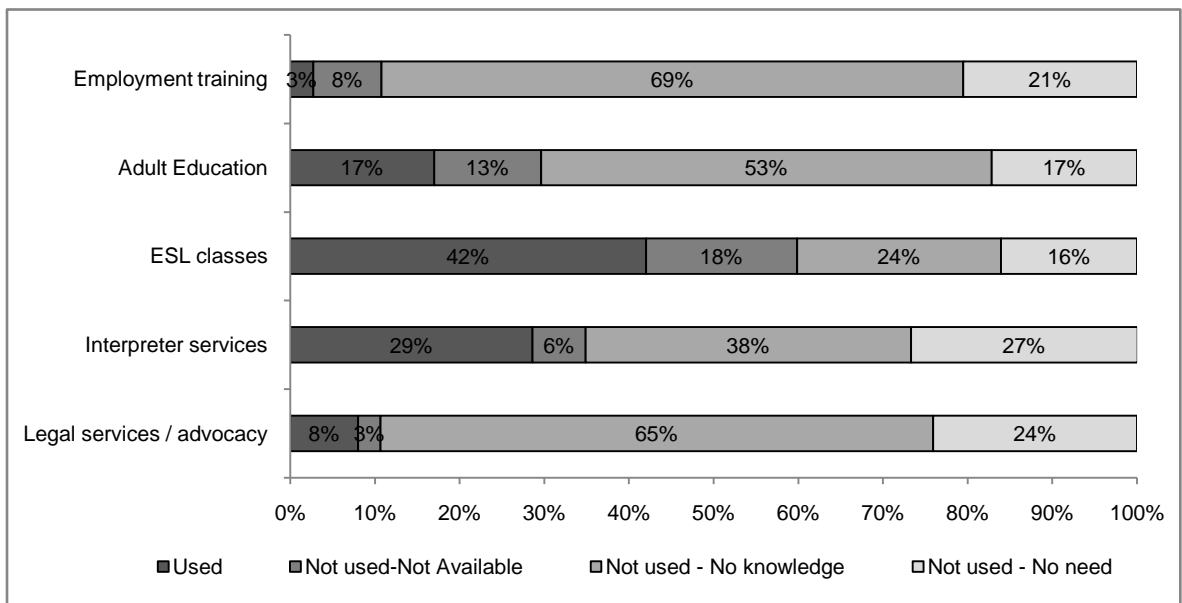
Most respondents agreed with statements measuring their overall life satisfaction. There was some indication that life satisfaction was lower among long-term residents than among those who had arrived more recently in the U.S.

Health and Food Assistance Programs Used in the Last Year



Respondents were asked about services they had used in the past year. As shown above, use of government assistance programs (e.g., LINK, WIC), dental services, and medical insurance was quite high. However, as shown below, less than 10% used legal and employment services. In addition, despite naming language issues as a barrier, just 42% of the mothers took ESL classes in the last year. For most categories of services, lack of knowledge was the main reason for non-use.

Support and Educational Programs Used in the Last Year



Chapter 4

Child Care Patterns Among Latinos in Central Illinois

Childcare services are critical supports to parental employment stability and family economic well-being. The education and care of young children is also important for their futures. High-quality child care is beneficial for children and families. Several past studies of mostly urban populations have documented that many immigrant Latino families do not use formal child care arrangements and instead rely on spouse or relative care. This project examined patterns of rural Latino child care use and underlying beliefs in Central Illinois.

Preference Patterns

The vast majority of the respondents (9 out of 10) said they preferred informal care for their children (includes spouse/partner, relatives, friends or neighbors). The spouse/partner was most often named as the preferred provider (74%). When asked about the worst choice for child care, nearly two thirds (64%) chose formal child care (either center-based care or home-based child care with several unrelated children). The latter was most commonly named as the worst choice (17%).

Use Patterns

There are disparities between preferred and actual patterns of child care. For example, although nearly three-quarters of the respondents preferred their spouse/partner for child care, only about half (49%) were able to achieve that goal in reality. The opposite pattern held for having child care in the home of a friend or neighbor in that person's home: 9% had that arrangement while less than 1% preferred it.

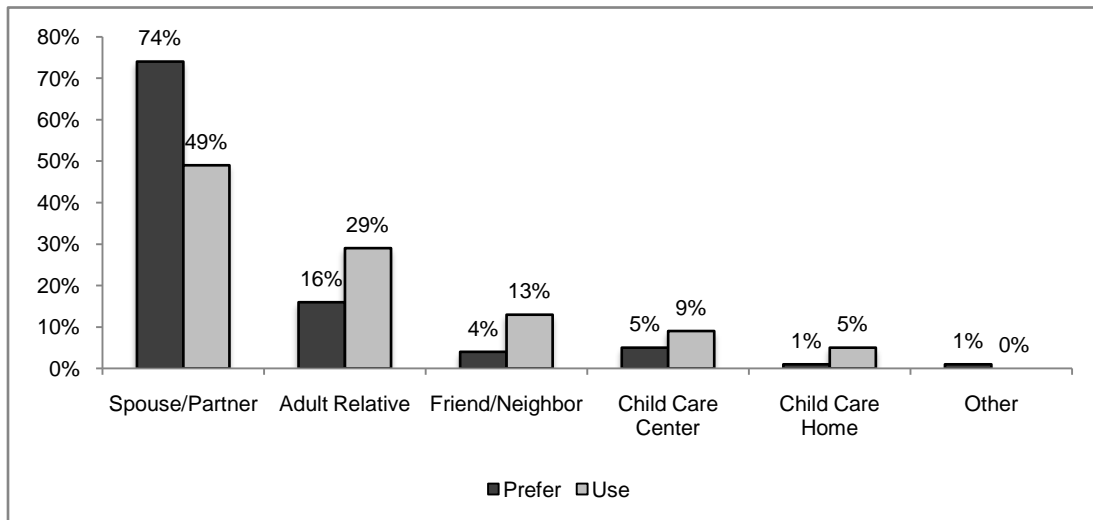
Barriers to Child Care

The two most commonly selected barriers were transportation/distance and cost. Nearly one quarter also indicated a lack of trust of providers and a fear for their child's safety in child care settings. Language and cultural differences were also barriers for many. Most of these mothers did not know of acceptable, accessible, and affordable child care options.

Payment for Child Care

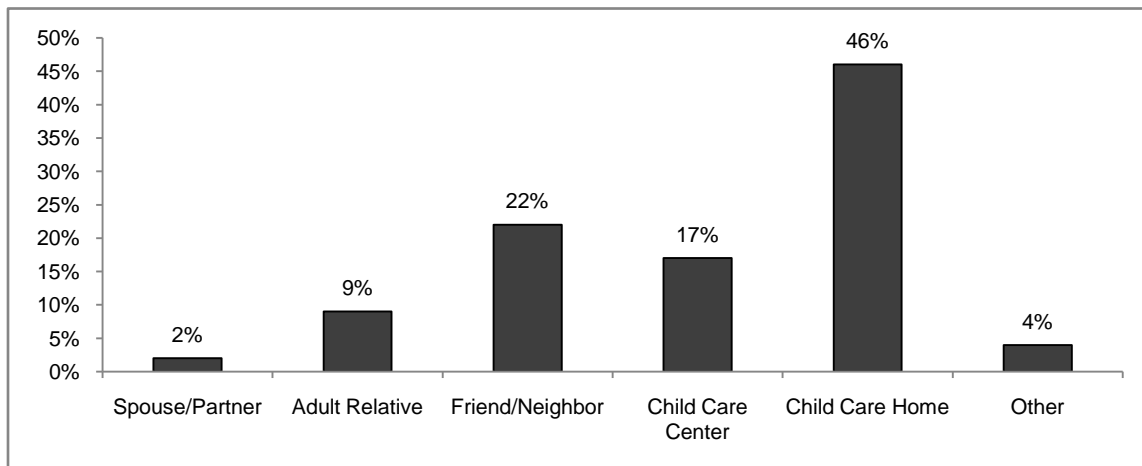
Most respondents paid for child care themselves or had their spouse/partner pay. Only 10% received subsidies although most were eligible and a significant number listed money as a barrier to using child care.

Child Care: Preferred vs. Used in Reality



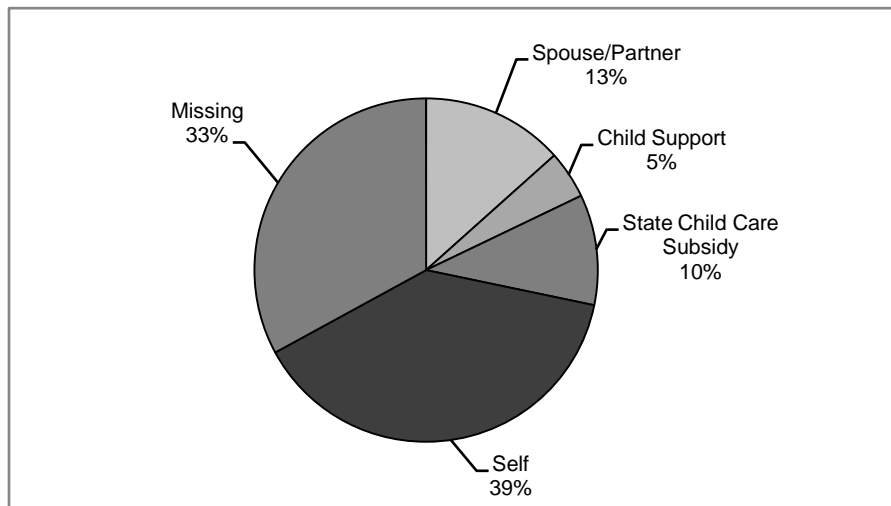
An overwhelming 90% preferred relative care for their children. The spouse was the most preferred provider. There are disparities in preferred patterns and reality. More respondents preferred their spouse to care for children than actually had this arrangement. Many more had babysitters (friend or neighbor) in their home (nearly 9%) than preferred that arrangement (1%). Percentages may exceed 100% as respondents could select more than 1 answer.

Worst Choice for Child Care



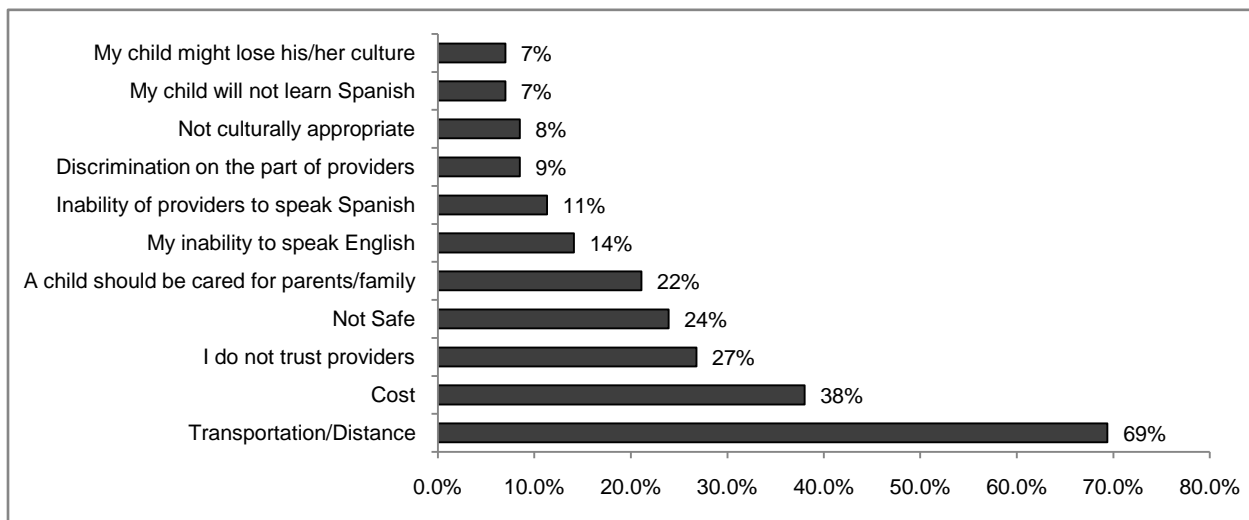
More than 60% of these mothers reported child care in the home of a non-related person to be the least acceptable alternative. This is combining home group care and care in the home of a friend, neighbor, or sitter. Another 17% chose child care centers as the worst choice.

Paying for Child Care



Most mothers who pay for child care fund it themselves; 13% have a spouse pay for it. Only 10% receive a state subsidy although the average income of these respondents would make most eligible.

Barriers to Child Care



The biggest barrier to child care utilization was transportation -- acceptable child care is too far away. Cost was a significant barrier to nearly 40%, presumably not those receiving subsidies but perhaps some who are eligible. More than 25% reported not trusting providers with their children with almost as many believing that child care is not safe. Between 7-11% of mothers said that language or cultural issues were a barrier.

Conclusions and Initial Recommendations

This report identifies critical needs – and important strengths – of Latin American immigrants in predominantly European American rural counties of central Illinois. In discussing the findings, it is important to remember that study respondents were primarily Mexican-born women with limited formal education living in conditions of poverty. It is also important to keep in mind that the sample was not random, and the results do not represent the experiences of all immigrant families. However, the findings offer a foundation to develop programs, materials, and best-practices models.

This study reveals several challenges to the well-being of Latino immigrant families in central Illinois. Although income increased with time in the U.S., even among long-term residents family incomes were well below county averages. Many families operated in a “survival” mode as they attempted to satisfy basic needs on a day-to-day basis. In addition, about a third of the mothers were unemployed. Basic employability and access to higher paying jobs are undoubtedly affected by two key challenges identified in the study - learning English and accessing child care. English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) classes, especially those that move beyond basic knowledge of the language, are typically not available in rural communities. Further, child care options were problematic for the mothers in the study. Without child care, they are not able to work.

On the basis of these initial results, the following recommendations are offered:

- Information about services and resources should be available in Spanish and distributed creatively (e.g., through public schools, WIC offices, and churches).
- Additional services in rural communities are needed, such as classes that teach intermediate/advanced English and skills training for mothers who wish to enter the workforce.
- There is an urgent need for child care that is affordable, accessible, and appropriate.

In the second phase of our project, we collected detailed information about child care use, preferences, and practices from Spanish-speaking community members, English-speaking child care providers, and Child Care Resource and Referral staff. These data will be described in a future report. The final goal is to create educational materials for parents in immigrant families, care resource and referral staff, and English-speaking child care providers. Additionally we will create recruitment and training materials to bring Latinos into the field of child care.

This study sought to amplify the quiet voices of immigrant families in central Illinois who face considerable challenges but bring notable strengths. We hope that these findings can begin a conversation among Spanish-speaking community members, their neighbors, service providers, policy makers, and community planners. As our rural communities struggle to thrive in times of economic unrest, Latino families can be part of strong, vital, and resilient communities.

Suggested Readings

Apple Pie & Enchiladas: Latino Newcomers in the Rural Midwest

by A.V. Millard & J. Chapa (2004).

Crossing the Border: Research from the Mexican Migration Project

by J. Durand & D. Massey (2004).

A place to call home: What immigrants say now about life in America by S. Bittle & J. Rochkind

(2009). Available at <http://www.publicagenda.org/pages/immigrants>

Other Resources

The Illinois Department of Human Services

<http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=27894> (English)

<http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=47847> (Spanish)

1-800-843-6154

University of Illinois Extension

<http://web.extension.illinois.edu/state/index.html> (English)

<http://urbanext.illinois.edu/espanol/> (Spanish)

The Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies

<http://www.inccrra.org/parentsandpublic.aspx?id=393>

(877) 202-4453

Preventing Childhood Obesity

<http://www.inccrra.org/parentsandpublic.aspx?id=393> (English)

<http://www.inccrra.org/overview.aspx?id=5309> (Spanish)