

Latino Children in Head Start: Family Characteristics, Parent Involvement and Satisfaction with the Head Start Program

Gabriela Garcia
Abt Associates Inc.

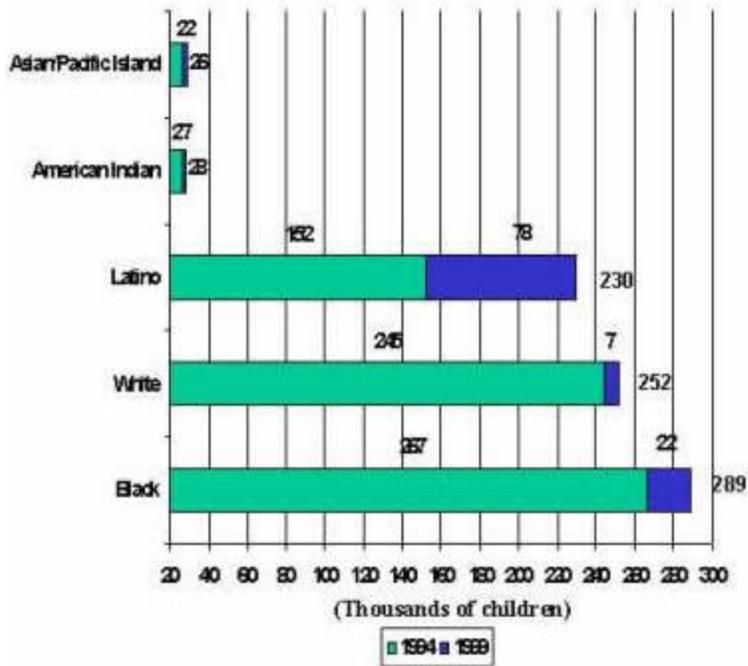
Marjorie Levin
Abt Associates Inc.

Introduction

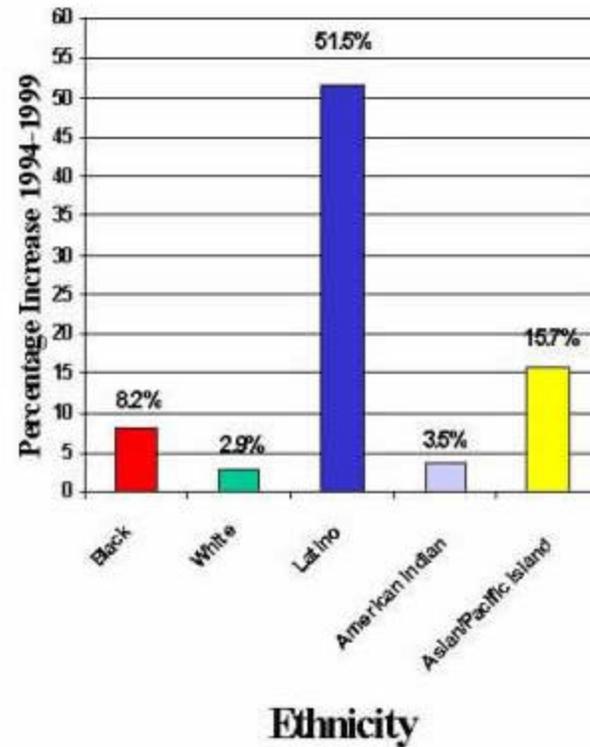
The Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) is a national longitudinal study of the cognitive, social, emotional and physical development of Head Start children; the characteristics, well being and accomplishments of families, the observed quality of Head Start classrooms, and the characteristics and opinions of Head Start teachers and other staff. FACES involves a nationally representative stratified sample of over 3,000 children and families who entered the study in Fall 1997 and were followed throughout the end of first grade.

In Head Start, as in the United States, population growth among people of Hispanic heritage is greater than for any other ethnic group. Since 1994, enrollment of Latino children in Head Start has increased from 21.7% to 27.9% of total enrollment (Source: Head Start Program Information Report).

Latino enrollment in Head Start increased far more than any other ethnic group between 1994 and 1999



Head Start enrollment growth by Ethnicity: 1994-1999



Ethnicity

The remaining information in this poster is based on interviews with parents and Head Start staff conducted in the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) between fall, 1997 and spring, 1998. FACES interview respondents were primary caregivers for the Head Start child (over 92 percent were parents). Interviews reported in this poster were completed in Fall, 1997 and Spring, 1998.

Latino children enrolled in Head Start may be divided into two distinct groups: Puerto Rican residents and Mainland residents.

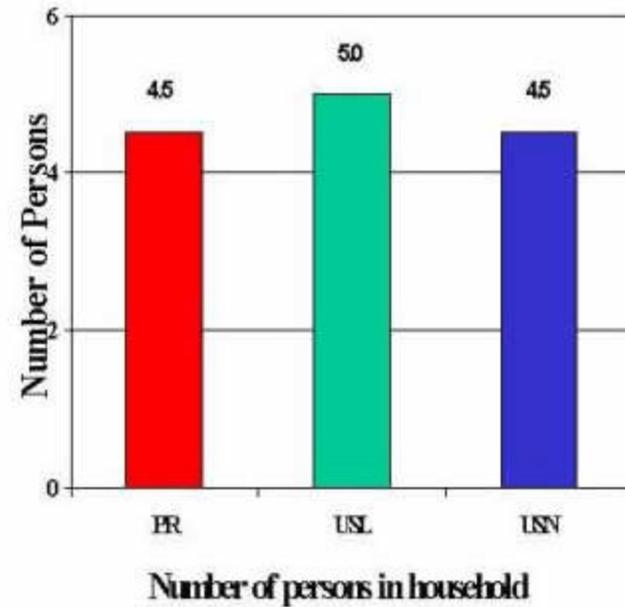
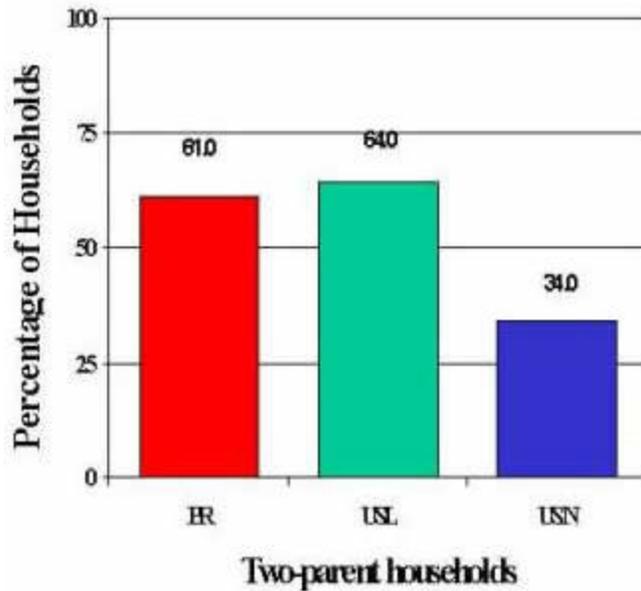
Head Start families residing in Puerto Rico generally speak only Spanish in a society where Spanish is the common language and the culture is primarily Hispanic. Although many mainland Latino families are native English speakers, others live in households where the spoken language is predominantly Spanish while the common language outside the home is English. Further, mainland Latinos include diverse groups of families originating in Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and other nations in Latin America, South America, and the Caribbean. They too are often affected by cultural issues that may or may not have a similar impact on families residing in Puerto Rico.

For the analyses presented in this poster, three groups of FACES respondents were identified:

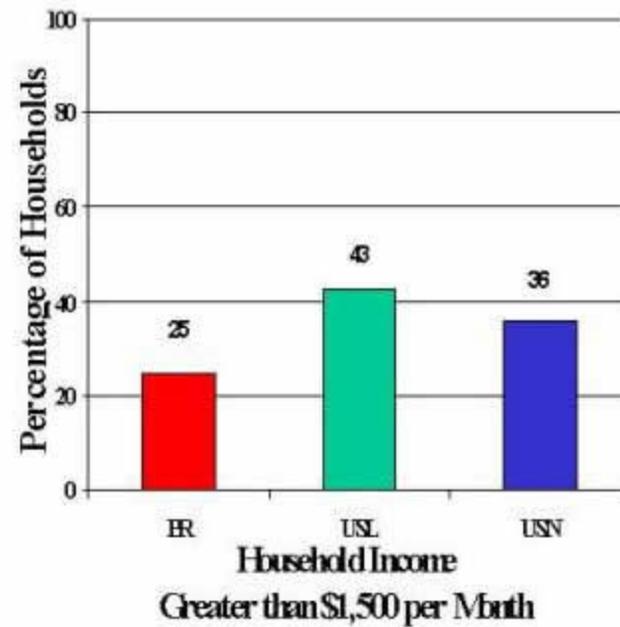
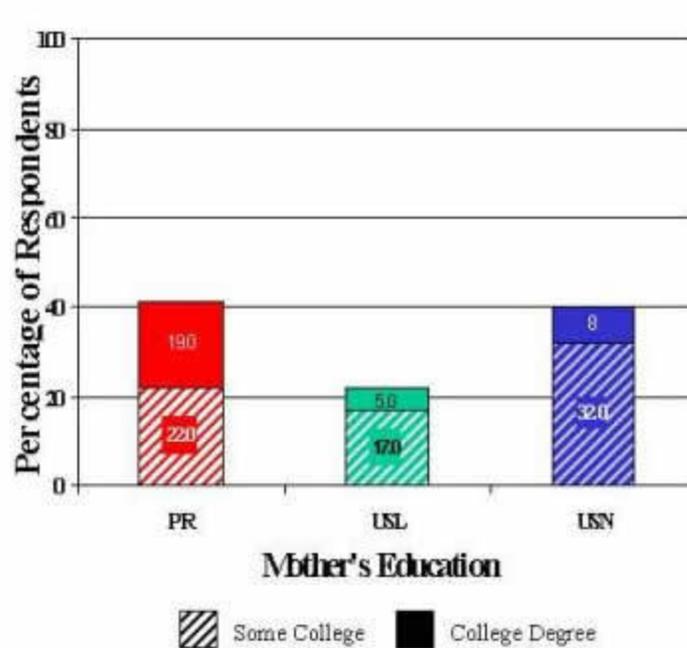
- PR Puerto Rican residents (n=118);
- USL Latinos who are mainland residents; this group includes families whose home language could be either Spanish or English (N=549); and
- USN Non-Latino residents in the United States (N=2002).

Characteristics of Latino families in Head Start

Latino children enrolled in Head Start are far more likely to live with both parents ($p<.01$). Latino Head Start families in the United States reported living in larger households than either Puerto Rico or non-Latino families ($p<.01$).



Mothers of PR Head Start children are more likely to have a college degree than either group of mothers residing on the mainland ($p < .01$). Yet, Puerto Rican families report lower household income than USL or USN households ($p < .05$).

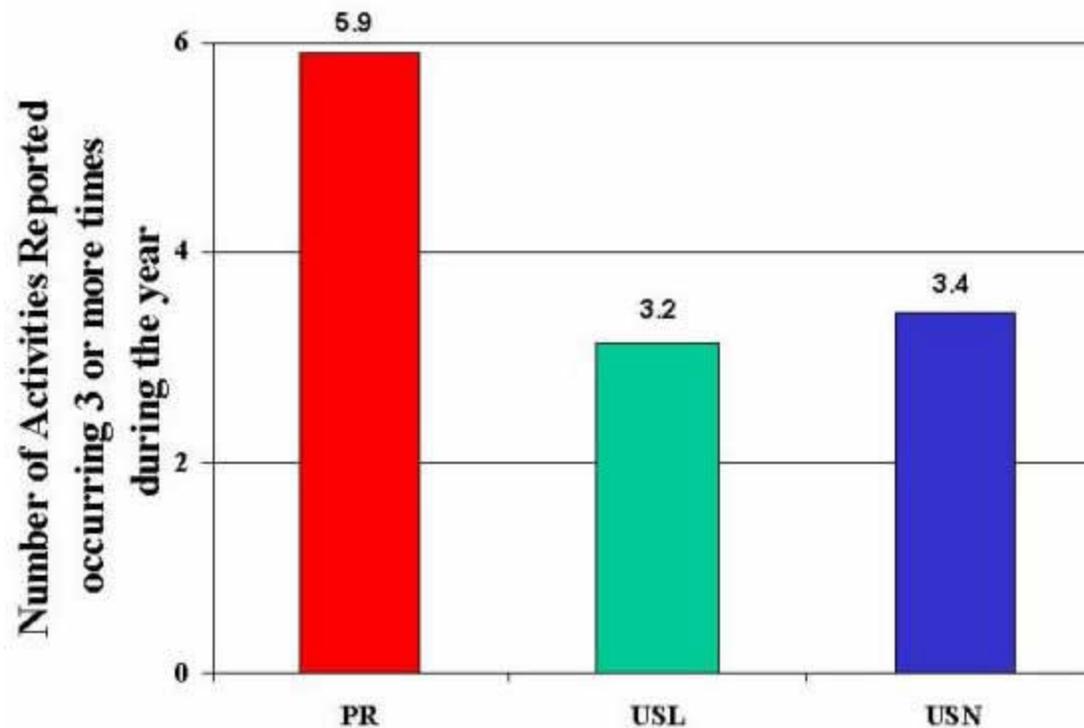


Involvement in Activities at Head Start

Head Start encourages all families to be actively involved in a variety of program activities. Caregivers were asked about how often they had participated in 14 different activities. Items included such activities as volunteering in the child's classroom; observing in the classroom; helping with field trips; preparing food/materials for use in

the classroom; attending parent/teacher conferences, workshops and social events; participating in the Policy Council; and raising funds for the program.

Puerto Rican caregivers reported intensive involvement in a greater number of activities at Head Start than all US parents ($p < .01$).



Latino caregivers reported the highest involvement in Head Start activities in classroom where teachers reported having higher levels of education and greater total amounts of training sponsored by Head Start.

Correlations of total respondent activity levels and classroom teacher characteristics were similar and statistically significant for Latinos but not for non-Latinos. Latino caregivers participated in higher levels of Head Start activities when teachers were more educated ($r = .32, p < .01$), and where Head Start teachers reported more total hours of training provided by Head Start ($r = .28, p < .05$).

Barriers to Participation Affecting Head Start Involvement for Latino parents

Some parents have difficulty participating in Head Start activities. Respondents were asked about 13 different potential barriers that might limit involvement, including such items as a need for child care; work or school schedule; transportation, health problems, concern for safety; support from family, comfort in the Head Start environment; and language/cultural differences.

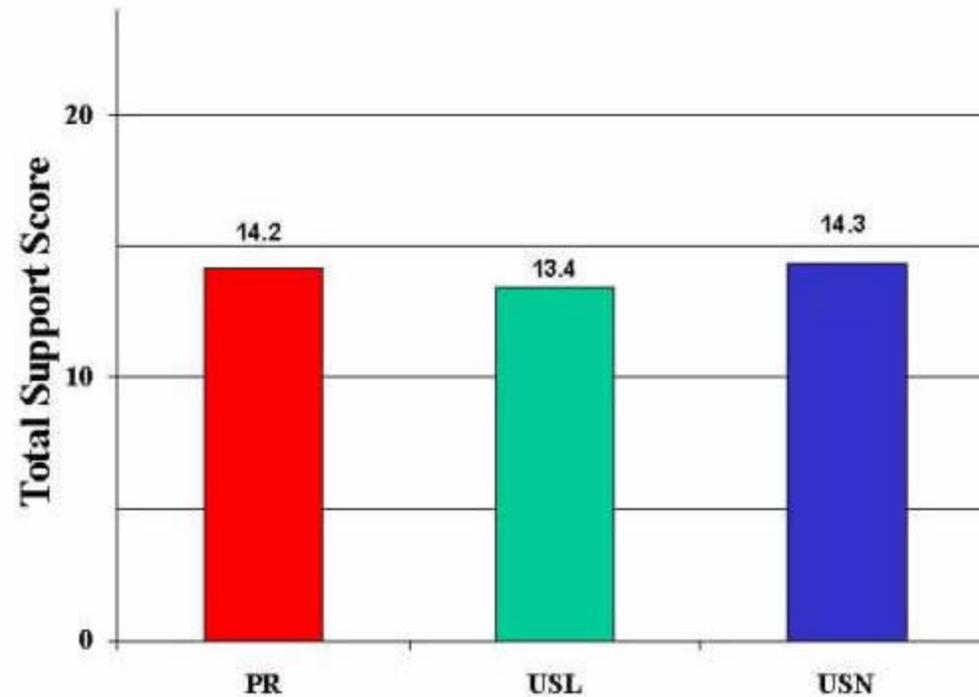
Overall, US Latino caregivers reported more barriers to Head Start participation than either other US parents or Puerto Rican parents ($p < .05$).

USL caregivers, although they engaged in similar levels of participation in program activities as non-Latinos, reported a larger number of barriers that limited their participation in Head Start. USL caregivers were more likely to report that child care needs, language/ cultural differences, concern for safety, and a lack of support from their spouse/partner (all $p < .01$) were barriers to program involvement. In contrast, USN caregivers cited interference by a work schedule or health problems (both $p < .01$) more frequently.

Support for Childrearing

Many people and groups can be helpful to a family raising a young child. Caregivers were asked how helpful (“not helpful”, “somewhat helpful”, “very helpful”) various individuals or groups had been over the previous 3 to 6 months, including the child’s father (or mother if the respondent was not the mother); grandparents or other relatives; friends; co-workers; professional helpgivers; Head Start staff; other child care staff; and religious/social group members. Item scores (1-3) were added together for a total score (maximum=24).

Overall, USL caregivers reported lower levels of social support ($p < .01$) than either PR or USN caregivers ($p < .01$).



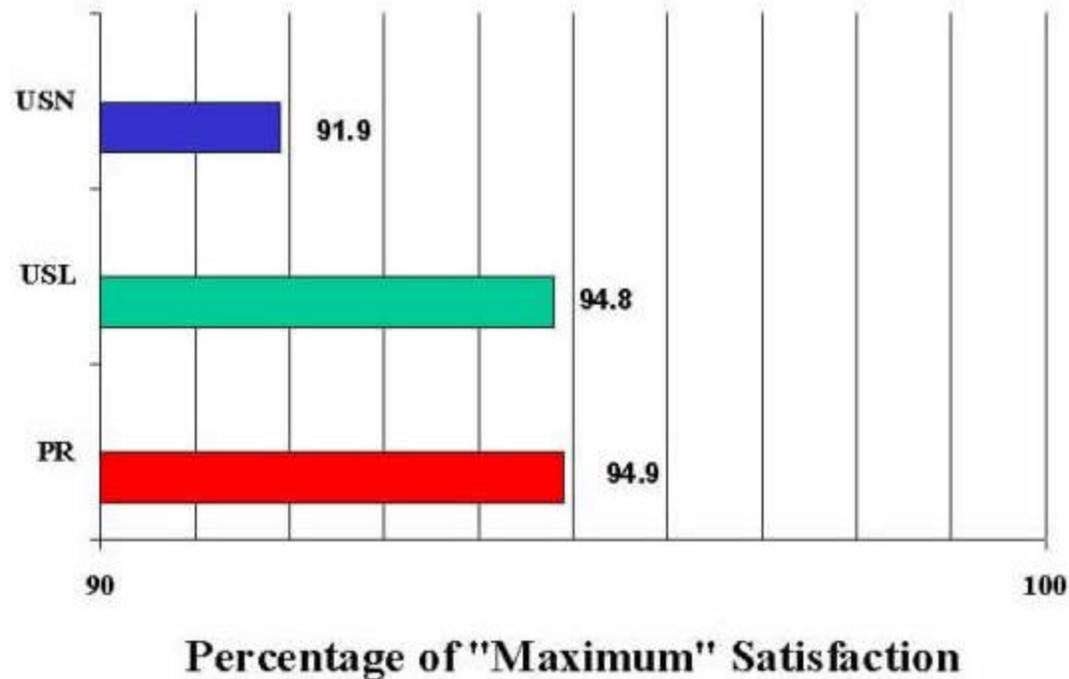
- Latino caregivers (both PR and USL) reported higher levels of social support from their spouse and from Head Start staff than USN caregivers ($p < .01$).

- Excepting spouses, both PR and US Latino caregivers indicated that Head Start staff were their most helpful source of support;
- USL caregivers reported lower levels of social support ($p < .01$) from their grandparents, friends, co-workers, professional helpgivers, child care providers (other than Head Start), and religious organizations than PR or USN caregivers.

Satisfaction with the Head Start Program

Historically, the great majority of Head Start parents have been highly satisfied with Head Start services. At the end of the Head Start program year, caregivers were asked about their satisfaction with Head Start in 8 different areas, including helping the child grow and develop; being open to the family's ideas and participation; supporting the family's culture and background; identifying and providing services for the child and the family; maintaining a safe program; preparing the child to enter kindergarten; and helping caregivers become more involved in the community. A total satisfaction score was computed ranging up to 100% (if the respondent indicated that (s)he was "very satisfied" in all 8 areas.

Both Puerto Rican and US Latino parents reported a higher degree of satisfaction with the Head Start program than non-Latino parents ($p < .01$).



Overall, Latino parents were particularly likely to report satisfaction with two aspects of Head Start. First, they were more satisfied with how well Head Start prepared their children for kindergarten than were non-Latino parents. This was particularly true for USL compared to USN caregivers ($p < .05$). Second, Latinos believed that Head Start

fostered their involvement in their community organizations to a greater degree than non-Latinos ($p < .01$).

Both PR and US Latino caregivers reported highest satisfaction levels in classrooms where teachers reported higher levels of education and greater frequency of academic activities.

Correlations of parental satisfaction and classroom teacher characteristics were similar and statistically significant for all study groups, but were higher for both groups of Latino caregivers. Caregivers reported greater satisfaction with the Head Start program when teachers were more educated ($r = .29$, $p < .05$), and where teachers reported a higher frequency of academic activities in their classrooms ($r = .34$, $p < .01$).

Family Activities with Children

The interview addressed a number of activities that children were likely to experience with their families. These included items such as telling stories, playing games, learning letters or numbers, doing errands or chores, visiting libraries, museums, parks, or malls, etc. Similar levels of activities with children were reported by all groups of parents both in fall and spring. All groups increased the number and frequency of activities with the child during the course of the Head Start year. PR parents reported the highest levels of talking with the child about HS, songs/music, playing with toys and games indoors, watching TV or videos, attending live shows or concerts, and visiting a mall. USN parents reported the highest levels of doing errands, working on chores, and visiting a library. A hierarchical linear statistical model for Latino families was developed to examine relationships among family characteristics, teacher characteristics (education, experience, and training), teacher-reported activities in the classrooms, and changes in family-child activities from during the school year.

Both PR and US Latino caregivers reported greater increases in family-child activities from Fall to Spring in classrooms where teachers reported greater frequency of academic activities ($p < .05$).

Summary

Latino children may become the largest ethnic group enrolled in Head Start over the next decade. Overall, Latino households in Head Start are almost twice as likely to include both parents. Those residing in Puerto Rico reported lower income but greater education, and have the advantage of living within a Spanish-language culture. PR families indicated a far higher level of involvement with Head Start activities than any other group, and reported the highest level of satisfaction with the program.

Latino caregivers residing in the United States have a high degree of social support from their spouses, but far less support from other relatives, co-workers, and friends than other Head Start families. Head Start staff provide a needed and important source of support for these families. Despite possible linguistic and cultural barriers, USL caregivers are equally involved in Head Start activities as their non-Latino counterparts and reported a greater level of satisfaction with Head Start than non-Latino caregivers. Future analyses will explore differences that might exist within the mainland Latino group as a function of home language.

Among all Latino families, teacher education and training, as well as academic activities in classrooms, are associated with greater involvement in Head Start program activities, greater satisfaction with the program, and larger increases in family-child activities during the Head Start year. These statistical relationships, although correlational, may reflect the importance of these teacher attributes and an emphasis on academic learning for their children among these families.