Exploring Diversity among Head Start Families

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Head Start Families are Diverse in Family Structure

The range of well-represented family types included:

- **Dual-parent families,**
- **Single-parent families where the caregivers were never married,**
- **Single-parent families where the caregiver was widowed, divorced, or separated, and**
- **Families that were blended.**

Head Start Families are Diverse in Family Structure

- Almost one half of all parents were married,
- Less than one half of the children lived with both their mother and father,
- One third of the households were mother-only, and
- Two or more adults were present in just under three quarters of the households.

Grandparents Were an Important Part of the Diversity in Family Structure

- Five percent of the Head Start children had grandparents designated as their primary caregivers,

- Almost one half of the children with grandparents as primary caregivers were African American; less than 10% were Hispanic, and

- Grandparents who served as caregivers had less education than other primary caregivers.

Grandparents Were an Important Part of the Diversity in Family Structure

- Employment was greater among all caregivers than among grandparents who were caregivers.

- The households in which grandparents served as primary caregivers had higher incomes than the overall sample of households.

- A grandmother, grandfather, or both grandparents resided in 14% of all households. In almost two thirds of these three-generational families, a mother and a grandmother were the only adults present.

Head Start Families are Diverse in Educational Attainment

- Almost three fourths of the parents had attained at least a high school diploma or GED,
- Almost 90% of the households contained at least one individual with a high school diploma or GED,
- About one third of the parents had attended some college or received an AA degree, but less than 3% had earned a college degree, and
- One fourth of all parents reported that they were working toward a degree, certificate, or license.

Head Start Families are Diverse in Employment Status

- Over one half of the parents were employed at baseline,
- Of those who were employed, one third had full-time jobs,
- More than one fifth of the parents reported having no employed household members, and
- Most parents experienced changes in their employment status two or more times over the course of the study.

Head Start Families are Diverse Across Ethnicity and Culture

The ethnic distribution of the children primarily fell across three categories:

- **African American – 29%**
- **White – 31%**
- **Hispanic – 28%**
- **Asian – 1%**
- **Native American – 2%**
- **Other – 9%**

Head Start Families are Diverse <u>Within</u> Ethnic Groups

The Hispanic children primarily fell into three groups:

- **Families Living in Puerto Rico – 17%**
- **Spanish-Speaking Families, Living on the Mainland – 25%**
- **English-Speaking Families, Living on the Mainland – 58%**

Diversity Within Ethnic Groups: Families Living in Puerto Rico

Compared with other Hispanic families, families living in Puerto Rico:

- **Were more likely to have parents with high school diplomas or GEDs or who had attended college,**

- **Were more likely to be unemployed and living in households with incomes below the Federal Poverty Level, and**

- **Were less likely to experience multiple family risks associated with negative outcomes for children. Just over one out of ten families reported having four or more family risks (out of 6).**

Diversity Within Ethnic Groups:
English-Speaking Mainland Hispanic Families

Compared with other Hispanic families, English-Speaking mainland Hispanic families:

- **Had more single parent households,**
- **Were more similar to non-Hispanic families than to other Hispanic families in areas such as employment and income, and**
- **Were more likely to have multiple family risks, as over one fifth of these families reported having four or more family risks.**

Diversity Within Ethnic Groups:
Spanish-Speaking Mainland Hispanic Families

Compared with other Hispanic parents, Spanish-Speaking mainland Hispanic families:

- **Were less likely to have parents with high school diplomas or GEDs or who had attended college,**
- **Were more likely to include both parents, and**
- **Had fewer multiple family risks associated with negative outcomes for children than English-Speaking mainland families, but had more risks than families living in Puerto Rico.**

Head Start Families Experience Risks to Child Development

Using an approach to investigating family risk borrowed from the Kids Count Data Book, six particular family characteristics were tabulated for a measure of cumulative family risk. These six risk factors were:

- **The child was not living with two parents;**
- **The household head was a high school dropout;**
- **The family income was below the poverty line;**
- **The child was living with parent(s) who did not have steady, full-time employment;**
- **The family was receiving welfare benefits; and**
- **The child did not have health insurance.**

Family Risk Factors Vary by Urbanicity and Ethnicity

Risk Factors	All	Urbanicity		Ethnicity		
		Urban	Rural	African American	White	Hispanic
Single parent household	53%	53%	53%	68%	53%	40%
Mother did not finish high school	29%	31%	27%	28%	21%	42%
Household income below the FPL	65%	67%	61%	74%	55%	70%
No household parent with a job	26%	27%	23%	35%	22%	21%
Family receives welfare	30%	34%	22%	47%	23%	23%
Child not covered by Medicaid or health insurance	18%	16%	22%	12%	17%	25%

Cumulative Family Risk Factors Vary by Urbanicity and Ethnicity

Number of Risk Factors	All	Urbanicity		Ethnicity		
		Urban	Rural	African American	White	Hispanic
Family has one risk factor	24%	22%	28%	18%	29%	24%
Family has two risk factors	26%	25%	27%	23%	25%	30%
Family has three risk factors	19%	21%	16%	21%	16%	20%
Family has four or more risk factors	21%	22%	18%	31%	15%	17%

Summary

- Diversity was evident across individual child and family characteristics.
- Diversity was also noted within groups, as evidenced by the differences across the three groups of Hispanic families.
- The number and types of risks families encountered varied, but investigating the cumulative effects of multiple risk factors was a useful strategy for investigating the effects of family characteristics on child outcomes.