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Responsible Fatherhood Spotlight

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Immigrant Fathers

In 2006, there were almost 36 million immigrants in the U.S., representing over 12 percent of the population.¹ Immigrant parents represent a diverse group from across the globe, and the population of immigrant fathers has varied characteristics. Immigrant fathers are less likely than native-born fathers to have a high school education—a factor associated with lower income—but immigrant fathers are also more likely to reside with their children-- due to marriage or cohabitation.

Definition: Who is an immigrant father?

The U.S. Census considers the term 'foreign-born' to refer to anyone who is not a U.S. citizen at birth, including:

- naturalized U.S. citizens,
- lawful permanent residents (i.e., immigrants or "green card" holders),
- temporary migrants (e.g., foreign students),
- humanitarian migrants (e.g., refugees), and
- people illegally present in the United States.²

Although the term 'immigrant' is considered a distinct category, for the purposes of this brief immigrant and foreign-born are both used to include all the categories above. The term 'immigrant father' refers to any father in the population of study who was born outside the United States.

Implications of Immigrant Fathers' Diversity-

The current large wave consists mostly of immigrants from Latin American and Asia, while earlier waves brought mostly Europeans.³ The result has been an increase in cultural diversity which introduces varying views of fatherhood and roles that challenge ideas of fatherhood;⁴ however, this is not to say that these views cannot change as immigrant fathers acculturate.

Implications for Fathers. Immigration is commonly perceived as a source of stress due to changing cultural, social, and economic contexts.⁵ Fathers who are new immigrants face a variety of inter-related stressors, including underemployment, unemployment, poverty, an inability to communicate in English, social isolation and loss of self-esteem.⁶

- Immigration sparks a process of major changes and adaptations in most domains of a parent's life. The status of immigrant fathers in the household may be threatened by their children's rapid integration and wives' incorporation into the labor force.⁷ Declines in self-esteem associated with unemployment, poverty, and loss of social status have been linked to higher rates of depression, isolation and marginalization, and increased alcohol intake.⁸
- Although their labor force participation is relatively high, foreign-born men are more likely than native-born men to be in agriculture, construction, manufacturing and service occupations.⁹ Immigrants comprise almost a quarter of all low-wage workers and almost half of all workers without high school degrees.¹⁰ Limited English proficiency, lack of educational attainment, and legal status constitute barriers to better opportunities for low-wage immigrant workers, many of whom are fathers.¹⁰

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- Along with limited resources, immigrant fathers face additional barriers with regard to accessing services, reflecting language barriers, a lack of information about services and a fear of stigmatization or deportation.⁶
- The fatherhood role is recognized across all cultures. How that role is constructed however, varied across customs. It is not unusual for immigrants to the United States to bring their home country's idea of fatherhood to the U.S. For example, some cultures may not limit father roles to the biological father but also share the father role with other men in the household, such as uncles and grandfathers.¹¹

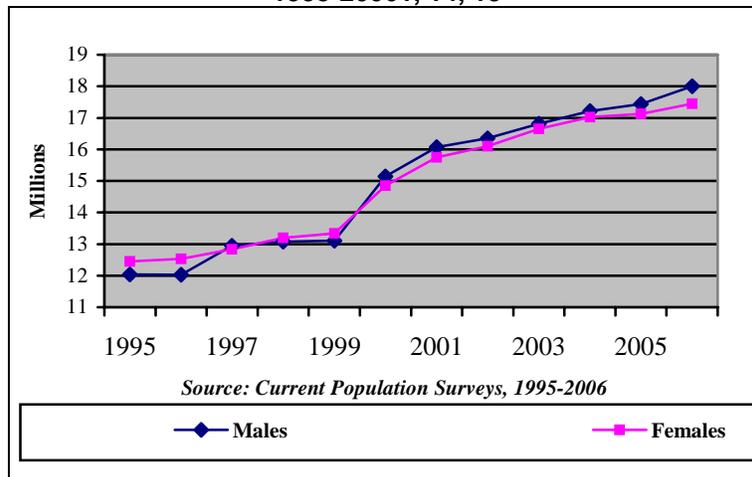
Implications for Involvement with Children. Children in immigrant families are the fastest growing component of the child population in the United States.¹²

- Poverty rates are higher (and rising) among the children of immigrants, because of lower wages earned by their immigrant parents, and in some cases because the father is the sole working parent.¹² Immigrant families' lower incomes are associated with food insecurity, health problems, inadequate living conditions, and lack of health insurance coverage.¹³ Low-income children in immigrant families are less likely to receive government aid such as food stamps or cash welfare because many low-wage immigrant parents are not citizens and are ineligible for federal assistance.^{13 1}
- Children of immigrants face many risks associated with poor school performance including parents' lack of formal education, their parents' or their own limited English proficiency, and fewer parent-child interactions such as parents reading to their children or parent-child outings.¹³ Children of immigrants are also less likely to be enrolled in formal child care programs outside the home than are children of native-born parents.

Overall Trends in Immigration

Figure 1 and Table 1 show the foreign-born population between 1995 and 2006. There are slightly higher numbers of immigrant males than females living in the U.S. in 2000-2006.

Figure 1. Numbers (in millions) of immigrants living in the United States by gender, 1995-2006¹, 14, 15



¹ Although non-U.S. citizen parents are ineligible for federal assistance, their children born in the U.S. are eligible.

Table 1. Number (in millions) of immigrants living in the United States by gender, 1995-2006^{1, 14, 15}

Year	Males	Females
1995	12.0	12.5
1996	12.0	12.5
1997	12.9	12.8
1998	13.1	13.2
1999	13.1	13.3
2000	15.1	14.8
2001	16.1	15.7
2002	16.4	16.1
2003	16.8	16.7
2004	17.2	17.0
2005	17.4	17.1
2006	18.0	17.5

Source: Current Population Surveys, 1995-2006

Children of Immigrant Fathers: Differences by Subgroup

The data in Table 2 are based on data from the March 2001, Current Population Survey. The data in Tables 3-8 are based on data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (ECLS-B) 9-month interview. The ECLS-B is a nationally representative sample of young children born in the United States in 2001. The information provided in the following tables are about the characteristics of young U.S.-born children with immigrant fathers.² The ECLS-B, 9 month interview estimated 21 percent of young children with a resident or non-resident immigrant father.

Differences by Age

Table 2 shows that the age distribution of native-born males is slightly younger but generally similar to immigrant males in 2001. A slight majority (52%) of native-born males are aged 34 years or younger while only 46 percent of immigrant males are aged 34 years or younger.

Table 2. Male age distribution by nativity, 2001

	Age				
	Less than 20	20-24	25-34	35-44	45+
Foreign-Born Males	13%	10%	24%	22%	32%
Native-Born Males	32%	7%	13%	15%	33%

Source: Current Population Survey, 2001

Table 3 shows that the age distribution of immigrant fathers is slightly younger but generally similar to native-born fathers. The majority of young children with an immigrant biological father as well as young children with a native-born biological father have a father who is aged 34 years or younger, 72 percent and 75 percent respectively.

² Some older children in immigrant families are foreign-born themselves, but over 90 percent of children under age 6 in immigrant families are born inside the United States (Capps et al. 2004).

Table 3. Father's age distribution for U.S.-born infants by father's nativity*

	Age				
	Less than 20	20-24	25-34	35-44	45+
Children with Foreign-Born Fathers	2%	16%	54%	26%	3%
Children with Native-Born Fathers	4%	18%	53%	23%	2%

Source: Child Trends analyses of ECLS-B, 9-month data

*Note: Analyses are based on a sample of 6,881 fathers who reported nativity out of a total sample of 6,988 fathers identified; 1.4% of fathers did not report on their nativity. Fathers included in this table are limited to biological, resident and non-resident fathers.

Differences by Socioeconomic Status

Table 4 indicates that infants with immigrant fathers live in poorer households than infants with native fathers. A substantially larger percentage (65%) of young children with immigrant fathers live in households with incomes below \$35,000 than children with native fathers (41%).

Table 4. Fathers' household income distribution for U.S.-born infants by father's nativity*

	Household Income					
	Less than 10,000	10,001-20,000	20,001-35,000	35,001-50,000	50,001-75,000	over 75,000
Children with Foreign-Born Fathers	9%	22%	34%	12%	9%	14%
Children with Native-Born Fathers	8%	12%	21%	16%	18%	24%

Source: Child Trends analyses of ECLS-B, 9-month data

*Note: Analyses are based on a sample of 6,881 fathers who reported nativity out of a total sample of 6,988 fathers identified; 1.4% of fathers did not report on their nativity. Fathers included in this table are limited to biological and non-biological, resident fathers.

Differences by educational attainment

Table 5 shows that immigrant fathers are about three times as likely as native-born fathers to lack a high school education. Almost half (47 percent) of infants with immigrant fathers had fathers without high school educations; for infants with native fathers this proportion was just 17 percent.

Table 5. Father's educational attainment distribution for U.S.-born infants by father's nativity*

	Education			
	Less than high school	High school	Vocational/Some college	College and more
Children with Foreign-Born Fathers	47%	16%	17%	21%
Children with Native-Born Fathers	17%	27%	29%	28%

Source: Child Trends analyses of ECLS-B, 9-month data

*Note: Analyses are based on a sample of 6,881 fathers who reported nativity out of a total sample of 6,988 fathers identified; 1.4% of fathers did not report on their nativity. Fathers included in this table are limited to biological and non-biological, resident and non-resident fathers.

Differences by Residential status and Marital Status

Table 6 shows that immigrant fathers are only about half as likely to be non-resident fathers as native fathers with infant children (6 versus 11 percent). Most of this difference is due to the fact that the proportion cohabitating for immigrant biological fathers is almost twice as high as that for native biological fathers (20 versus 13 percent, **Table 7**). The proportion married of immigrant and native biological fathers, however, are virtually the same.

Table 6. Father's residential status for infants by father's nativity*

	Residential status		
	Resident	Non-Resident	Both a Resident and a Non-Resident
Children with Foreign-Born Fathers	92%	6%	2%
Children with Native-Born Fathers	84%	11%	4%

Source: Child Trends analyses of ECLS-B, 9-month data

*Note: Analyses are based on a sample of 6,881 fathers who reported nativity out of a total sample of 6,988 fathers identified; 1.4% of fathers did not report on their nativity. Fathers included in this table are limited to biological and non-biological, resident and non-resident fathers.

Table 7. Father's marital and cohabitation status for infants by father's nativity*

	Marital and Cohabitation Status		
	Married	Cohabiting	Neither Married or Cohabiting
Children with Foreign-Born Fathers	73%	20%	7%
Children with Native-Born Fathers	72%	13%	15%

Source: Child Trends analyses of ECLS-B, 9-month data

*Note: Analyses are based on a sample of 6,881 fathers who reported nativity out of a total sample of 6,988 fathers identified; 1.4% of fathers did not report on their nativity. Fathers included in this table are limited to biological, resident and non-resident fathers.

Diversity of Immigrant Fathers' Origins

Immigrants to the United States have countries of origin that span the globe; but, in sheer numbers, immigrant fathers mostly come from Mexico and other Latin American countries. **Table 8** shows that about half (49%) of infant children with immigrant fathers have fathers who come from Mexico. The rest of Latin America accounts for another 18 percent of foreign-born fathers, bringing the Latin American total to over two thirds. (The rest of Latin America includes Central America, South America and the Caribbean). Another 17 percent of children with immigrant fathers have Asian fathers, while the shares of fathers from Europe, Africa and the rest of the world are much smaller.

Table 8. Father’s region of origin for U.S.-born infants with immigrant fathers

	Region of Origin				
	<i>Africa & West Indies</i>	<i>Europe, Canada, Australia</i>	<i>Asia</i>	<i>Mexico</i>	<i>Other Latin America</i>
Children with Foreign-Born Fathers	7%	8%	17%	49%	18%

Source: Child Trends analyses of ECLS-B, 9-month data

**Note: Analyses are based on a sample of 6,881 fathers who reported nativity out of a total sample of 6,988 fathers identified; 1.4% of fathers did not report on their nativity. Fathers included in this table are limited to biological and non-biological, resident and non-resident fathers.*

Differences in the measures discussed in this fact sheet across immigrant father origin subgroups are likely. More detailed analysis of the characteristics of immigrant fathers from different backgrounds is a topic for further research.

Definitions of Measures

The data in Figure 1 and Table 1 to 2 were gathered from tables published by the U.S. Census Bureau and based on the U.S. Current Population Surveys, 1995-2006.

The data in Tables 3 to 8 included here show estimates of U.S.-born children with an immigrant father by father’s age, socioeconomic status, educational attainment, marital status, and residential status using ECLS-B, 9-month sample. (The actual range of children’s ages in this sample is from 6 to 22 months.) Estimates of children with an immigrant father by father’s region of origin were also obtained from these analyses. “Immigrant fathers” were defined as any father (resident or nonresident) reporting that he was born outside of the United States. (A small number of people born outside the United States to U.S. citizen parents are considered U.S.-born citizens under immigration laws, but their numbers are too small to affect the analyses described here.) Fathers’ ages were determined using child birth certificate data, and therefore only describe biological fathers. The household income reported here only includes income from household members—residential fathers, mothers and other earners (i.e., non-resident father contributions are not included). Education level is defined using both residential and nonresidential father reports of educational attainment. Marital status was determined using biological mother’s marital or cohabitation status to the biological father at the 9-month interview. Therefore, this marital and cohabitation variable describes only the biological father.

Limitations and Data Issues

The most accurate national birth data are available from the Natality data files from the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). Unfortunately, these data do not include information on father’s nativity. The data used to produce the tables in this report are from The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (ECLS-B) which contains information on resident and non-resident father’s nativity, but this information is limited to those fathers who report a country of origin. These analyses are based on a sample of 6,881 fathers who reported nativity out of a total sample of 6,988 fathers identified; 1.4% of fathers did not report on their nativity.

Data Sources

The data in Figure 1 and Table 1 to 2 were gathered from tables published by the U.S. Census Bureau and based on the U.S. Current Population Surveys, 1995-2006. Until 1994, when the Census Bureau added nativity and citizenship items to the Current Population Survey (CPS), the decennial census was the sole source of population data on immigrants.¹⁶

Tables 3-8 were produced by Child Trends using data from the first wave of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (ECLS-B). The ECLS-B collected information on a nationally

representative of children born in 2001. The ECLS-B 9-month wave sampled 14,000 births and completed 10,688 interviews of parents with children whose ages ranged from 6 to 22 months.¹⁷ Because the ECLS-B sampled a cohort of children born in the United States, all children in the data set are U.S.-born citizens, regardless of whether their fathers undocumented, legal immigrants, naturalized citizens or U.S.-born citizens. Foreign-born children (who make up less than 10 percent of children under age 6) are not included in the sample.

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