

Barriers to Public Assistance for Hispanic Immigrants in the United States



Annie Wells/LA Times

“Most [immigrants have] struggled to convey the schizophrenic experience of living in a country that welcomes and profits from the labor of Latino immigrants, yet continually treats them as racial threats and undeserving interlopers within the national community.”

-Alejandra Marchevsky and Jeanne Theoharis

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Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

ADFC: Aid to Families with Dependent Children is a federal program that was in effect from 1935 to 1997. Its successor became TANF.

Child Protection Services: A public-assistance program that responds to and treats child-abuse and neglect.

Child Care Services: A public-assistance program that provides payment for child-care services to qualifying families who are unable to provide child-care for themselves.

Food Stamps: The Food Stamp program is a form of public-assistance that provides food to low-income people living in the United States.

ICE: Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the agency charged with carrying out raids and other forms of immigrant policing and border protection.

IIRIA: A 1996 U.S. law that vastly changed immigration laws, which, among other things, made minor offenses such as shoplifting grounds to deport an immigrant, greatly increased the Border Patrol force, and made immigration/deportation cases no longer subject to many basic criminal codes such as habeas corpus.

Medicaid: Is a public benefit and government health plan for low-income citizens.

PAI: The University of Michigan Law School's Pediatric Advocacy Initiative Law Clinic

Public benefit/public assistance/welfare: Any aid or service provided by the government to low-income individuals.

PRWORA/The Welfare Act: The Personal Work and Responsibility Act is a U.S. federal law passed in 1996 by former president Bill Clinton, which fundamentally changed the method and purpose of public assistance. Its major effect was placing a 5 year time limit on the use of what was then known as welfare or AFDC. After PRWORA, AFDC (or welfare) was replaced by TANF.

Qualified Immigrant: Immigrants who qualify for certain types of public assistance. Please refer to table 2.1 on page 15 for more details on which public assistance qualified immigrants can and cannot receive.

TANF: Temporary Aid to Necessary Families replaced AFDC. TANF provides cash assistance for indigent families up to a maximum of five years. People still often refer to this as "welfare" or "AFDC", even though these latter two programs were technically abolished with the passage of PRWORA in 1996.

Unqualified Immigrant: Any immigrant who cannot qualify to receive certain types of public assistance. Please refer to table 2.1 on page 15 for more exact details.

USA PATRIOT Act: This law provided enough funds to triple the border patrol force; it gave greater investigative power to ICE (e.g. do not need search warrants to detain immigrants); and it granted ICE the ability to detain any immigrant deemed a security risk indefinitely.

W.C. DHS: Washtenaw County Department of Human Services is the county office of the Michigan Department of Human Services. It is in charge of administering public-assistance benefits to residents of the county.

WHP: Washtenaw Health Plan is a health coverage program for low-income Washtenaw County residents without health insurance, and, unlike public benefits from the DHS, applicants do not need a SSN to apply.

WIC: Women and Infant Care Services is public-assistance program for low-income families that provides supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age five who are found to be at nutritional risk.

Abstract

In many parts of the United States, the challenge for policymakers has become how to accommodate the huge influx of Hispanic immigrants, and more specifically, with regards to public assistance.¹ The reality is that the majority of Hispanic immigrants lack the basic provisions for themselves and their families, live below the poverty line, and require some form of “welfare” or public assistance to scrape by – especially when they first arrive to the U.S.

Even though the welfare system has served our country’s lower-classes since the Great Depression, it has and is still undergoing a tremendous transformation that has greatly diminished the number of public assistance options available, especially for immigrants. As a result of the changes soon to be discussed, there has become a great deal of disparity in the care between citizens and non-citizens in this country, and a troubling level of discrimination against non-citizens. While the welfare system is responsible for serving the country’s poor, it has also been designed since 1996 Welfare Reform to reduce the number of people using this help from the state to survive.

This report will attempt to shed light on the pressing concerns that seem to confirm the need to renovate the current welfare system, as well as one of the groups most affected by current public assistance policies, Hispanic immigrants.

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Esta investigación es para cada familia en este país trabajando con toda su fuerza para una vida feliz, cada americano con malos sentimientos hacia los inmigrantes sin saber por qué, y cada persona que todavía cree que algún día los Estados Unidos puede ejemplar la libertad que sermonea.

This report is for every family in America working tirelessly towards a life that they can enjoy, every American who harbors a prejudice towards immigrants without having ever asked why, and every person who still believes that the U.S. can one day practice the freedoms of its preach.²

¹ Please keep in mind that the terms “welfare”, “public benefits”, and “public assistance” will be used interchangeably in this paper. Welfare was technically ended in 1996, but it is still used today to refer to the various forms of public assistance, such as food stamps, Medicaid, child-care, etc. To see a list of all public assistance, please see the table 2.1 in Chapter 1.

² My college-student idealism

Introduction

Disadvantaged groups in this country are finding it harder and harder to provide adequate resources for their families even with the state's support. Although government agencies provide services such as food stamps, child-care subsidies, housing assistance, health-care coverage, and tax credits, the National Center for Children in Poverty estimates that most low-income Americans are not getting their needs met even when they are being provided with assistance from the state.³

Public assistance organizations are required by law to serve anyone eligible for need-based public-assistance, despite the fact that they are constrained by limited resources. As a result, access to public-assistance by families in need is frequently obstructed by the presence of legal, political, or cultural barriers. Most low-income families don't receive the full range of benefits they qualify for financially,⁴ because, simply put, the public organizations providing them the public-assistance are often too difficult to access. The barriers obstructing delivery of public-assistance are many, ranging from structural or policy restraints within the organization, to external linguistic barriers among potential applicants. Due to recent barriers such as state budget-cuts and Welfare Reform, public employees have increasingly faced unmanageable workloads with insufficient resources. Whatever the type, these barriers keep disadvantaged families from obtaining the services that they need and can create a lack of trust between them and state-service providers.

In recent decades, the provision of public assistance has additionally been complicated by the increase in the number of Hispanic⁵ immigrant families who are unable to meet their own basic

³ Making

⁴ Making

⁵ Hispanic: "Hispanic, as used in the United States, is one of several terms used to categorize native and naturalized U.S. citizens, permanent residents and temporary immigrants, whose background hail either from Spain, the Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America or the original settlers of the traditionally Spanish-held Southwestern United States. ..."

needs. The United States is the No. 1 recipient of immigrants, receiving as many as the rest of the world combined.⁶ Mexico is by far the biggest source of immigration to the US and Hispanic groups make up the largest minority in the country.⁷ Whether temporary (migrant) or permanent residents (immigrant), the situation these new Hispanic residents find themselves in is often dire – especially when they then have children that are born here in the United States to care for as well. A large portion of the workers that either migrate or immigrate are illegal citizens and cannot qualify for public services. Their U.S.-born children, however, do qualify and can in fact be helped by public assistance programs, regardless of their parents’ legal status.

Table 8. Top 25 Immigrant Countries of Birth in 2000 and Citizenship Rate (Thsnds.)¹

	Number	Percent of Imm. Pop.	Citizenship Rate	Year of Entry ²				
				Pre-1970	1970-79	1980-89	1990-99	2000-02
1) Mexico	9,659	29.6	19.4	652	1,350	2,389	4,254	1,014
2) China/Taiwan/HK	1,448	4.5	50.7	137	157	368	607	149
3) Philippines	1,429	4.4	84.9	136	293	488	431	81
4) India	1,306	4.0	34.2	30	145	276	608	246
5) Cuba	920	2.8	80.6	344	136	165	213	62
6) El Salvador	869	2.7	24.4	17	102	332	368	60
7) Vietnam	819	2.5	56.5	13	164	264	319	59
8) Korea	757	2.3	42.2	59	157	241	215	85
9) Canada	713	2.2	42.4	305	79	96	178	55
10) Dominican Rep.	653	2.0	36.6	67	119	196	241	31
11) Germany	636	2.0	80.6	370	60	52	120	34
12) Great Britain	606	1.9	49.9	237	93	104	104	67
13) Haiti	569	1.8	31.9	29	73	189	251	47
14) Colombia	539	1.7	34.6	49	74	122	217	77
15) Jamaica	532	1.6	44.7	47	102	161	199	23
16) Russia	507	1.6	53.3	38	49	68	305	47
17) Poland	471	1.5	50.4	116	48	90	177	40
18) Japan	439	1.4	26.0	87	42	49	132	129
19) Guatemala	407	1.3	21.4	11	38	125	165	48
20) Italy	406	1.2	70.6	267	67	21	41	9
21) Ecuador	359	1.1	30.9	44	59	78	147	31
22) Honduras	298	0.9	23.0	14	19	89	134	33
23) Iran	281	0.9	54.8	12	79	88	79	23
24) Ukraine	256	0.8	39.6	31	9	29	152	34
25) Pakistan	248	0.8	37.9	0	30	64	123	31
All Others	7,341	22.6	41.8	997	1,030	1,820	2,679	815
Total	32,454	100	39.9	4,109	4,904	7,962	12,449	3,330

¹ Values have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
² Based on responses to year of entry question in the March 2002 CPS.
Source: Center for Immigration Studies analyses of March 2002 CPS. The Survey does not include persons living in "group quarters" such as prisons and nursing homes.

Figure 1:

Mexico, Cuba, El Salvador, Dominican Republic, Columbia, Guatemala, Ecuador, and Honduras are all Hispanic countries, meaning that 8 of the top 25 countries are Hispanic; furthermore, “Mexico is, of course, the largest sending country, accounting for more than five times as many immigrants as the next largest country, the combined total for China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.”⁸

The difference between noncitizens and citizens is not as easy as “illegal” and “legal” with regards to immigrants. The term “noncitizen” is often associated with meaning “illegal immigrant”.

⁶ Moody, 162-163

⁷ Moody, 159: “Most of this is economic migration, but a good deal of it originates in the chaos created by the US military interventions of the last four decades in Central America.”

⁸ Camarota

However, “noncitizen” can also refer to Green Card holders, Temporary Permanent Residents (TPR’s), Refugees, Visa holders, or more generally, various classifications of immigrants legally residing in the U.S. who are not yet citizens.

Making matters more complicated, since Welfare Reform, the government has used the terms “qualified” and “unqualified” to refer to immigrants’ eligibility for public-assistance. Examples of unqualified immigrants, who cannot receive public benefits, are illegal immigrants, expired visa holders, and nearly all immigrants during their first five years in the U.S.⁹ What’s important to understand is that these labels by the federal government are very misleading. One would assume that a “qualified” immigrant is eligible for public benefits, and one who is “not qualified” is ineligible. In fact, the Welfare Act of 1996 (also known as Welfare Reform) makes many “qualified” immigrants ineligible for a range of public benefits, whereas “unqualified” immigrants remain eligible for others. For practical purposes, in this report, the terms noncitizen and unqualified will be used to describe those immigrants that are ineligible to receive public benefits for a given period of time, keeping in mind that there are certain exceptions.

Regardless of their denomination in the welfare system, the lives of all immigrants in need of public assistance were complicated by Welfare Reform in 1996. Former President Clinton’s Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA, also know as The Welfare Reform Act) first stripped the right to many public benefits from all immigrants. While this was later amended to return public benefits to a portion of the immigrant population,¹⁰ overall, PRWORA dramatically reduced legal immigrants’ eligibility to receive public benefits in their first five years of residency – which is often when they are most in need of assistance.

The mounting pressure to reduce public assistance for immigrants in the 1990’s likely stems

⁹ This technicality is explained in table 2.1 and the discussion of welfare reform in Chapter 1.

¹⁰ For example, immigrants who’d lived in the country for at least five years or legal immigrant children under the age of 18

from three separate movements. The first two were without question the “anti-welfare” and the “anti-immigrant” movements, which grew in popularity throughout the second half of the 20th century. This report will only focus on how the anti-welfare and anti-immigrant movements have affected Hispanic immigrants,¹¹ but it is important to note that they have very different origins¹² and that they have negatively impacted other underprivileged groups that will not be discussed.

What the two movements have shared is a public sentiment that welfare is shameful and for corrupt individuals, while clearly ignoring “the reasons that immigrants need public assistance.” Since the 1990’s, both groups have closely associated immigrants with sky-rocketing taxes and welfare dependency, all the while shifting the focus away from such factors as declining real-wages, full-time employment, unionized employment, and job benefits for low-wage sectors of the economy that prevent immigrants from becoming self-sufficient. Making matters worse, the policymakers advocating “on behalf of” immigrants have commonly argued that “most immigrants are not on welfare.” This is equally detrimental, since it implies that those who use welfare are deviant or bad, while those who do not, are somehow good. In sum, the current political climate “bolsters, however unintentionally, the construction of welfare as a behavioral problem – not a by-product of economic inequality.”¹³

The third force behind the diminishment of public-assistance for immigrants has been the tendency to view immigrants as a continuous source of cheap labor in the United States’ new global economy. It’s obvious to note that immigrants, upon first arriving, are going to need public assistance most while they adapt to the community, establish credit, and find reliable employment.

¹¹ Since the 1960’s, anti-welfare, has sensationalized stories of welfare abuse by mainly African-Americans, coining the well-known label “welfare queen” for poor African-American mothers. In the second-half of the 20th century, anti-immigrant movement groups similarly labeled Hispanic immigrants as foreign-invaders who stole American jobs and didn’t belong.

¹² The “anti-welfare” movement, for example, did not arise in response to large numbers of illegal immigrants, as the “anti-immigrant” movement did. It has historically targeted African-Americans.

¹³ Marchevsky, 25

Nonetheless, the line of thinking that Welfare Reform supporters have used in their consideration of the issue not only ignores these predicaments, but goes as far as classifying the immigrant as nothing more than an economic good. As the influential Harvard economist, George Borjas, explains: “the growing wage gap between immigrants and the native born [Americans] is largely due to the low-skill level and low productivity of recent cohorts of U.S. immigrants.”¹⁴ Borjas furthermore argues that immigrants have only come to the U.S. because the government has provided incentives in the form of public assistance, which he deems a wasteful system that “obstructs the rational operation of market dynamics by subsidizing unproductive workers.”¹⁵ Consequently, much of the discussion on immigrants has focused on them as an economic commodity, and less as equitable members of American society with specific needs.

The primary concern of this report will thus be to examine how Welfare Reform, anti-immigrant and anti-welfare movements, and the focus on immigrants as economic goods have combined to produce a very negative impact on the everyday lives of Hispanic immigrants and their ability to make ends meet here in the U.S.

Beginning with a review of the major legislative acts that have paved the way for this current welfare¹⁶ system, Chapter 1 will examine more thoroughly the effects legislative changes have had on Hispanic immigrant families.

Then, taking this analysis of Hispanic immigrant communities one-step further, Chapter 2 will discuss the results of my survey study findings on Hispanic immigrants in Washtenaw County. In this survey, 37 Hispanic immigrants were interviewed to learn more about their experiences trying to obtain public benefits from the Washtenaw County Department of Human Services (W.C. DHS), which is the government agency responsible for delivering public benefits to the greater Ann

¹⁴ Kretsedemas, 7

¹⁵ Kretsedemas, 7

Arbor and Ypsilanti areas. Additionally, I interviewed several nonprofit workers to better understand the nature of the problem from their perspectives, as they work with Hispanic immigrants and the public-assistance system on a daily basis. At the end of the chapter, I will review several of the study's limitations.

Finally, chapter 3 will discuss my survey study's implications in the context of PRWORA and the current immigration debate nationwide.

Using multiple perspectives that draw from nonprofit workers, academics, and Hispanic immigrants themselves, this report will attempt to illustrate the everyday hardships that the current welfare system is unfairly placing upon Hispanic immigrants. As the largest minority in the country and one of the poorest, critical changes in the delivery of public benefits will be essential to ensure the health and well-being of this growing segment of the American population.

In doing so, I hope to provide an analysis that offers new insights that can be used in developing community programs, advocacy efforts, and policy changes that support the transitions of Latino immigrants and their families to the United States.

Chapter 1: Previous Research and Theoretical Considerations

Proposition 187 in California

By the time that the Clinton administration had arrived at the White House in 1993, anti-immigrant and anti-welfare forces had already been mobilized in support of Proposition 187 in California. This grassroots political campaign, in turn, would go on to pave the way for the passage of the most important act with regards to public assistance to this date: PRWORA (The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act). The importance of this monumental act of legislation can first be understood by studying the events that preceded its ratification, starting with the success of Proposition 187 in California.

In brief, Proposition 187 was a movement in California around 1994 designed to terminate social services, including education and public health, for 1.5 million undocumented immigrants – the majority of whom were Hispanic.¹⁷ Its popularity sparked a number of similar propositions in Illinois, Florida, New York, and Texas. These undocumented immigrants, according to anti-immigrant legislators and California Governor, Pete Wilson, were those to blame for the state's economic recession. The governor, along with the media, thus began an ambitious smear campaign to convince the public that Latina women used welfare 23% more than other women, that Hispanic immigrants were “free-loaders of the system”, and that welfare encouraged their cross-border immigration. As PRWORA would do in the near future, Proposition 187 and its supporters in California chose “the immigrant” as its scapegoat to slash public spending as a response to the state deficit, by purposely blurring the lines between legal and illegal immigrants,¹⁸ and by spreading an

¹⁷ Marchevsky, 54

¹⁸ Singer, 3

imprecise and defamatory image of immigrants in the process. Its solution to the alleged problem of undocumented immigrants was not surprising: to increase border security and terminate the little public assistance that existed for undocumented immigrants.

What these allegations ignored was quite troubling. 70% of Latinas in Governor Pete Wilson's state were U.S. citizens, which means that they had the right to use any public assistance for which they qualified. What's more, undocumented immigrants are for the most part *not eligible* to receive any service provided by the state, except for emergency Medicaid, which is only available when persons are being treated in an emergency room situation.¹⁹ Secondly, as anti-immigrant forces laid claim to undocumented immigrants' damaging effect on the state's economy, they hurriedly overlooked the fact that immigrants were the ones enabling California to keep its wages low enough to compete in the global economy,²⁰ and that due to their large presence in the sectors of the economy that pay the least, they were one of the groups that needed the help of the state the most. Perhaps their most common argument was that illegal immigrants did not deserve public benefits, because they unjustly robbed public dollars without paying taxes. Again, this was purely a political statement meant to galvanize people and stir up strong emotional backlash. In L.A. County alone, a county where illegal immigrants use more public assistance than any other part of the United States, illegal immigrants cost the state 2.5 billion dollars between 1980 and 1992, while they paid 4.3 in taxes (a difference of +1.8).²¹ All illegal immigrants pay sales taxes on goods they purchase, and many have social security, state, and federal taxes deducted from their pay checks, even though the likelihood is very small that they will ever receive a public benefit or

¹⁹ Marchevsky, 54

²⁰See Maria Patricia Fernandez-Kelly *For We Are Sold, I and My People: Women and Industry in Mexican's Frontier*; Sylvia Pedraza *Women and Migration: The Social Consequences of Gender*; and Hondagneu-Sotelo *Gender and Contemporary US Immigration* (American Behavior Scientist 2, January 1999)

²¹ Ramos, 12

social-security check in their lives.²² In a study done by the National Academy of Sciences, it was found that immigrants add nearly \$10 billion each year to the U.S. economy and on the average pay an estimated \$80,000 more in taxes than they will receive in local, state, or federal benefits over their lifetime.²³ Nevertheless, by taking the focus away from their own neoliberal restructuring of the economy or economic globalization, the state was able to accuse immigrants of robbing tax dollars and as being the unjust cause of their state deficit.

Proposition 187, in fact, marked a shift in anti-immigrant tactics. Whereas in the past, their rhetoric had centered on “stealing American jobs” and immigrants as “foreign invaders,” during Proposition 187, anti-immigrant groups evolved to take on many of the same arguments successfully being used by anti-welfare groups against African-Americans. This new approach framed immigrants as a drain on the state budget and as unproductive sycophants of the system trying to receive a “free-ride” from the state. This aspect, in particular, would foreshadow the tone and approach of anti-immigrant groups during Welfare Reform, which will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

In the end, the proposition won with 59% of the vote in the state legislature, but was immediately appealed by Hispanic human rights groups, and later overturned by the Supreme Court. The incident nonetheless demonstrated the capacity of the country’s citizenry and politicians to think of the immigrant, no longer as a part of our diversity or multi-ethnic culture, but as an invader and a thief – a view that would manifest itself soon, but at the federal level, alongside the most devastating blow yet to the Hispanic immigrant community: PRWORA.

²² Remember that if they are illegal immigrants, they cannot receive public benefits and will not receive social-security when they finish working. They would need to become citizens and with higher fees and waiting times to do so, the chances are increasingly small that, unless comprehensive welfare reform is achieved, illegal immigrants will become citizens.

²³ Kretsedemas, 69: This information was provided by a 1997 report by the National Research Council, National Academy of Sciences titled “*New Americans: Economic, Demographic, and Fiscal Effects of Immigration*.” In 1997 alone, immigrant households in the U.S. paid an estimated \$133 billion in direct taxes.

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act

At the beginning of the 1990's, Congress focused its attention on the idea of eliminating public spending to reduce the federal deficit by restricting public benefits. One of the groups that they targeted was noncitizens, or immigrants. Following the success of Proposition 187 in 1994, there was already bipartisan support for welfare system reform. The national campaign, like in California before it, played off of the image of the stereotypical welfare user: "lazy, undisciplined and an unnecessary public charge."²⁴ The language and the tone of these sentiments centered on morality,²⁵ or the lack thereof among the nation's poor.²⁶ As Advocates of PRWORA demanded "personal reform" by means of employment and liberation from welfare,²⁷ they also ignored the structural conditions in society that made this impossible for most lower class and middle-lower class individuals. The table on the following page lists briefly²⁸ how each class of immigrants was affected by the reform.²⁹

²⁴ Kretsedemas 10: "Despite a mountain of evidence painting a more complex picture, legislation approved in 1996 was nevertheless based on the *idea* of the welfare mother as an economic sycophant and cultural pariah in need of 'help' and discipline. As sociologist Sharon Hays notes, Americans overwhelmingly supported welfare reform not because they believed that AFDC was costing taxpayers too much money, but because they believed that welfare encouraged people to 'adopt the wrong lifestyle' and that people were 'overly dependent.'"

²⁵ Kretsedemas, 5

²⁶ While legislators said "poor", they were indirectly speaking about the two groups most targeted in this aggressive welfare reform: African Americans and immigrants, who were largely represented by the image of Hispanic immigrants

²⁷ Kretsedemas, 5

²⁸ For a complete review of the restrictions and eligibility of immigrants with regards to public assistance, see pages 759-782 in the Immigration & Nationality Law Handbook on "'Immigrant Eligibility for Public Benefits'" by Tonya Broder, listed in the bibliography.

²⁹ Kretsedemas, 24

TABLE 2.1
Noncitizen Benefit Eligibility under PRWORA

Qualified Immigrants arriving on or before August 22, 1996 (preenactment)						
		SSI¹	Food Stamps	Medicaid	TANF²	State/Local Public Benefits
Qualified Immigrants		Eligible ³	Eligible ³	State option	State option	State option
Exempted Groups	With 40 quarters of work	Eligible	Eligible	Eligible	Eligible	Eligible
	Military personnel and their families	Eligible	Eligible	Eligible	Eligible	Eligible
	Refugees/Asylees	Eligible for first 7 years	Eligible	Eligible for first 7 years; state option afterward	Eligible for first 5 years; state option afterward	Eligible for first 5 years; state option afterward
Qualified Immigrants arriving after August 22, 1996 (postenactment)						
		SSI	Food Stamps	Medicaid	TANF	State/Local Public Benefits
Qualified Immigrants		Ineligible	Barred for first 5 years (except children and persons receiving disability benefits)	Barred for first 5 years; state option afterward	Barred for first 5 years; state option afterward	State option
Exempted Groups	With 40 quarters of work	Barred for first 5 years; eligible afterward	Barred for first 5 years;	Barred for first 5 years	Barred for first 5 years	Eligible
	Military personnel and their families	Eligible	Eligible	Eligible	Eligible	Eligible
	Refugees/Asylees	Eligible for first 7 years	Eligible for first 7 years	Eligible for first 7 years; state option afterward	Eligible for first 5 years; state option afterward	Eligible for first 5 years; state option afterward
Unqualified Immigrants						
		SSI	Food Stamps	Medicaid	TANF	State/Local Public Benefits
Unqualified Immigrants		Ineligible ^{4,5}	Ineligible ⁵	Eligible for emergency services only ⁴	Ineligible	Ineligible ⁵

Notes:

¹ SSI = Supplemental Security Income

² TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

³ Qualified immigrants receiving SSI on August 22, 1996, are eligible. All qualified immigrants

(continued)

In effect, the supporters of the welfare reform were proclaiming that all poverty (not just immigrant poverty), low salaries, and lack of job benefits were all the fault of the individual and deserved no help from the state in return. Rather, in the words of Alejandra Marchevsky and Jeanne Theoharis, PRWORA implied that:

“Welfare was no longer a social safety net but a temporary program designed to encourage marriage and other ‘family values’ among the nation’s poor and to move welfare recipients as quickly as possible into the workforce.”³⁰

This discourse, however, of individualism, meritocracy, and intolerance of dependence was rife with hypocrisies. During The Great Depression or after World War II,³¹ Americans, many of whom were immigrants, received millions of dollars and jobs to start anew, adapt themselves to the changed economic climate, surely just as any immigrant in the 1990’s needed when first coming to this country.

These claims that the United States was not built upon principles of dependency were groundless and preposterous indeed, for they also failed to take into consideration that the U.S. economy had been built in such a way that no longer permitted a lower-class family or lower middle-class family to provide for itself sufficiently. In effect, dependency on the state was labeled as immoral or bad, even though the changing face of the economy had been making it increasingly difficult for the disadvantaged to achieve independence on their own. According to one study, a family with two children and a father earning the minimum wage lived above the poverty line in the 1970’s, and that same family today, with a father working a minimum wage job with two children, doesn’t even come close to living at or above the poverty line.³² Advocates of PRWORA were

³⁰ Marchevsky, 5

³¹ Marchevsky, 40

³² Welfare, 93: Ethnographic findings show a minimum wage worker with two children in the 1970’s lived above the poverty line, and that same family in the 1990’s, was far below the poverty line.

claiming that “the responsibility of economic security [no longer rested] on charity, employers and the state, but with autonomous individuals taking charge of their lives” when this was, in fact, no longer possible for lower and lower-middle class individuals in most parts of the country.³³

PRWORA dismantled the public assistance system, but it maintained in tact the structural conditions – such as declining “real wages”³⁴, eroding worker protections, racism, the dismantling of civil rights, unaffordable and inadequate child-care, under-funded public-schools, diminished access to higher education, etc. – that were responsible for the reproduction of poverty and inequality in U.S. society.³⁵ Rather than addressing the barriers outside the control of an individual, advocates of PRWORA instead created a social-political climate in which “dependency was treated as a social pathology and an individual failing.”³⁶

In place of the public-assistance safety-net, legislators and advocates of PRWORA implemented “Welfare to Work” (better known as “Workfare”) programs that would guide “corrupt” welfare recipients towards “rectitude”. With a slogan of “any job is better than no job and at whatever salary,” Workfare promoted submission among workers, creating an illusion that the decision to accept any job at all, albeit with a “low salary”, was an act of self-improvement.³⁷ While no one doubted that the program’s purpose meant well, to steer individuals towards self-sufficiency, the problem was that it neither prepared nor educated recipients sufficiently enough for them to earn a decent salary. It taught only “the soft job skills” that did not put a welfare recipient in any better position to obtain a job above a minimum-wage salary. As it was already said, the minimum-wage is still not sufficient for the average family to support itself. The tendency with Workfare was again to frame the need of the poor to use welfare as an individual problem, rather

³³ Katz, 31

³⁴ Wages adjusted for inflation.

³⁵ Marcheysky, 10

³⁶ Marchevsky, vii

³⁷ Marchevsky, 27-29

than as a product of structural conditions. Workfare was heralded as a solution to welfare dependency, but in reality, it proved to be nothing more than a continuation of what was occurring before, back when people could still receive public assistance to offset the inadequacy of their minimum-wage jobs.

Figure 3

	In Poverty		In or Near Poverty ¹		Percent Adult Dropouts ²
	Percent	Number (Thands.)	Percent	Number (Thands.)	
Dominican Republic	26.8%	168	54.9%	358	47.7%
Mexico	24.4%	2,351	61.5%	5,932	64.8%
Pakistan	24.1%	60	39.4%	98	10.6%
Cuba	19.8%	162	49.2%	452	33.3%
Honduras	19.8%	57	52.8%	152	52.7%
Colombia	18.5%	100	40.9%	221	14.9%
Guatemala	18.2%	68	50.7%	207	54.2%
Korea	13.2%	100	32.1%	243	10.6%
Vietnam	12.8%	105	31.4%	257	22.3%
Japan	12.3%	54	26.0%	114	5.0%
Haiti	12.0%	68	47.2%	267	30.3%
El Salvador	12.0%	104	42.0%	394	58.6%
Great Britain	11.7%	71	23.6%	143	7.7%
China	10.6%	154	32.0%	494	14.9%
Italy	10.4%	42	37.0%	150	37.3%
Russia	10.1%	51	25.8%	131	8.5%
Ukraine	9.8%	25	30.7%	78	9.7%
Iran	9.6%	27	31.3%	88	11.2%
Ecuador	8.9%	32	39.8%	143	35.1%
Jamaica	8.3%	44	32.2%	171	25.4%
India	8.2%	107	19.7%	257	8.3%
Germany	7.1%	45	21.3%	135	9.1%
Canada	6.0%	43	18.2%	130	15.1%
Poland	5.1%	24	26.3%	124	19.7%
Philippines	3.8%	54	17.9%	255	8.4%
All Other Immigrants	14.6%	1,074	34.4%	2,517	18.6%
All Immigrants	16.1%	5,208	41.5%	13,452	33.0%
All Natives	11.1%	27,702	28.7%	71,527	13.0%
Immigrants 18 and Over	15.0%	4,388	38.7%	11,673	-
Natives 18 and Over	9.3%	15,775	25.4%	45,605	-
Children (Under 18) of Immigrant Mothers ³	23.3%	3,118	53.2%	7,114	-
Children (Under 18) of Native Mothers ⁴	14.7%	8,619	34.8%	20,385	-
Immigrants and Their U.S.-Born Children (under 18) ⁵	17.8%	7,516	43.9%	18,798	-
Natives Excluding U.S.-Born Children of Immigrants ⁶	10.6%	25,395	27.7%	68,191	-
Total Population	11.7%	32,911	30.2%	84,979	-

¹ Near-poverty is defined as income under 200 percent of the poverty threshold.
² Percentage of persons 21 and older who have not completed 12 years of schooling.
³ Includes all children (under 18) of immigrant mothers, including those born in the United States.
⁴ Includes only the children (under 18) of natives. The U.S.-born children of immigrants are not included.
 Note: Official government poverty statistics do not include unrelated individuals under age 15 (recently foster children) and they are therefore not included in this table.
 Source: Center for Immigration Studies analyses of the March 2002 CPS. The Survey does not include persons living in "group quarters" such as prisons and nursing homes.

Welfare reform affected Hispanic immigrants specifically, because, as shown in the table above, 7 of 12 of the most impoverished groups are of Hispanic origin. They many times held down two or three minimum-wage jobs just to provide for their families due to their prevalence in the low-wage job sectors of the economy. Nonetheless, new restrictions from PRWORA bar legal immigrants (Temporary Permanent Residents, green-card holders, etc.) from receiving public

assistance for their first five years in this country, precisely when they need it most. These restrictions were based on the fallacy that by getting welfare recipients out and working, instead of offering them this public assistance, they'd no longer need the help of the state. In the case of newly arrived immigrants and many of the nation's poor, this was simply not possible, given the inadequacy of the minimum-wage jobs that were the only ones available to them.

Hispanic immigrant mothers in Long Beach, California, for example, who were holding down two or three minimum-wage jobs to provide for their families, under these new restrictions, could not receive public assistance, even though they were still living below the poverty-line and struggling to make ends meet with three jobs.

It is this sort of predicament created by PRWORA that newly arrived immigrants now face and struggle to accept. A harsh reality has been created in which Hispanic immigrants are welcomed for their cheap labor, but promptly slammed in the face by the door of the government when they need any type of compensation in the form of public assistance. There is a clear double standard between what this country has continuously offered Americans in need throughout the latter half of the 20th century and what it is failing to provide at present to all new immigrants, not just Hispanics. The logic behind welfare reform was flawed, hypocritical, and it blatantly disregarded America's recent track-record of providing public-assistance to those in need. With the reform having devastating effects on the new waves of Hispanic immigrants, who make up the largest group of incoming immigrants today, it is essential for Hispanics and all immigrants that these policies be re-examined and repaired.

In the coming chapter, I'll share my findings from a survey study done on Hispanic immigrants in Washtenaw County, MI, to reveal in more detail how welfare reform and current public-assistance policies are negatively affecting them at the local level.

Chapter 2: Survey Study on Barriers to Obtaining Benefits from the State for Hispanic Immigrants in Washtenaw County, MI

Introduction

Although many qualify for state services, the overwhelming majority of Hispanic immigrant families do not take advantage of DHS services, even when they seriously need them. This assessment was made by a group of nonprofit workers in Washtenaw County who have formed the Spanish Health Outreach Collaborative, of which I am a part, and who meets monthly to discuss issues such as the barriers Hispanic immigrants face when applying for public assistance in the county. With nearly 4,000 Hispanic immigrants in Washtenaw County³⁸ and the majority of them living in poverty, understanding why there was under-enrollment among this group of low-income immigrants and what barriers they were facing therefore became the basis of this survey study.

This study is the first of its kind to examine first-generation Hispanic immigrants in Washtenaw County. By uncovering common threads in their subjective experiences through this survey study, the hope is that its results can be used by advocacy groups like SHOC and policymakers to help make culturally relevant policy changes to the welfare system.

Methodology

An extremely diverse group, Latinos include persons of “various racial and socioeconomic backgrounds from more than 20 countries of origin.”³⁹ They differ substantially in terms of the historical and personal circumstances of their arrivals to the United States, their levels of

³⁸ Origins

³⁹ Perreira, 1387

acculturation to the United States, and their experiences with the local communities in which they settle. In spite of this challenge, my goal was to illustrate their experiences using the welfare system in Washtenaw County the best that I could and to document the ongoing problems that they currently face.

From June 2007 to February 2008, I interviewed 37 Hispanic immigrants. My survey's participants were recruited at the Washtenaw County Public Health Center, where many of them were applying for Women and Infant Care Services (WIC) or the Washtenaw Health Plan (WHP). Being that both of these services are for low-income individuals and that they do not require a social security number (unlike most state and federal public assistance), the location proved to be an ideal place for speaking with immigrants about their difficulties in accessing public benefits for themselves and their children.

Almost half of the participants were also recruited through a community organization called the University of Michigan Pediatric Advocacy Initiative Law Clinic (PAI), which frequently helps Hispanic immigrants apply for public benefits and resolves problems with the W.C. DHS. In return for invaluable contacts and access to the immigrant community, I worked with Hispanic immigrants that the PAI was too overloaded to help. When they had cases that they couldn't handle, they'd put me in touch with these individuals, with whom I'd meet at either their house or the W.C DHS to help apply for benefits. After helping them apply, I would then ask if they'd like to participate in my survey. It must be stressed how invaluable this help was in the current political climate. Stepped up efforts and raids by the Immigration and Enforcement Agency (ICE) have made it extremely difficult for Hispanic immigrants to go about their daily lives in public,⁴⁰ and made finding willing participants for this survey all the more challenging for me.

⁴⁰ Preston

Participants were first explained in Spanish the purpose of the project, that their responses would be anonymous, that no personal data linking them to their responses would be used, and that it was entirely their decision to decide if they were comfortable with participating. They were then given the option of either filling out the survey themselves (which was also in Spanish) or, since many had little educational background and could not read or write, having it read to them and filled out by me in Spanish. Qualifying me for this task is that I am a Spanish major and fully fluent in the language. The majority chose the latter option and had me write in their answers for them. As a result, my data collection was characterized by a conversation-like interaction between the participant and myself that established a key amount of trust, which allowed for a better understanding of questions and responses. Had the survey not been done in this way, I believe that many of the participants would not have disclosed as many of their true opinions or felt comfortable sharing their negative experiences. I will explain why so many immigrants felt the need to withhold their true opinions in the results section of this chapter.

Survey Questions

My survey posed a series of questions that attempted to evaluate the difficulty of accessing public benefits in Washtenaw County. Its main goals were to provide an idea of the demographics of most Hispanic immigrants trying to obtain public benefits, the types of benefits they are most often trying to obtain, as well as the challenges with which they are most often faced. Several of the survey's questions dealt with their perceived quality of the customer service provided at the W.C. DHS, the availability of interpreters, whether or not they were treated unfairly, whether they were hassled about their social-security number when applying on behalf of their children (a common, but illegal problem, which will be further explained in the results section of this chapter), and what specific problems, if any, they ran into while at DHS. For a complete list of the survey questions, please see the English version of the survey in the appendix of this report on page 50.

Results

Importance of Results

The data in these surveys helps to tell the stories of these Hispanic immigrants, who for the most part, were all parents trying to make ends meet for their families. Nearly 95% of the participants that I surveyed were parents struggling to provide for their children. Researcher Krista Perreira, in her own study on how Latino parents come to find themselves in a dire situation in America, summed it up best when she said:

“Parents have goals and values for their children that cannot be fulfilled in their home countries because of societal factors such as poverty and war. So they choose to migrate. After migration, the process of becoming an American parent continues, as parents confront a change in social position that includes the loss of social support networks, the loss of social status or class, and the loss of familiar social roles. The change in social position associated with migration leads to levels of economic and social segregation that many immigrant families have not experienced in their home countries. In their new homes, immigrant families encounter economic and racial diversity, confront racism, and contend with the fear and uncertainty associated with making a home in a new world. The change in social position and the economic and social segregations associated with these changes become most palpable, as children and their parents interact with institutions (especially school and health) in their new environments.”⁴¹

Demographics and Public Assistance Use

This basic outline of a typical family seemed to match the families that I surveyed as well. Mirroring the national trend, the majority of participants were from Mexico, with the rest coming from Central America. Most were near 30 years of age and had lived in America for an average of 6.24 years. The number of women greatly outnumbered men in the surveys, and more often than not, these women found themselves in the unfamiliar role of breadwinner and single-mother.

The largest percentage of participants received a low-income county plan called the Washenaw Health Plan (WHP), whose main advantage for immigrants is that it does not require an

⁴¹ Perreira, 1391

applicant to be a qualified immigrant or have a social security number. One conclusion that can safely be made about this 81% of participants who were on WHP, is that they were unqualified for public benefits (which again means that they were likely either illegal immigrants or unqualified legal residents that were not yet citizens). Considering that more than half of the participants' children had Medicaid, it is unlikely that these children's parents would not be aware of their public assistance options – especially with Medicaid (a federal public benefit), since it offers a superior and more extensive health plan than county-level public assistance such as WHP. Secondly, if their children were eligible for Medicaid, then these parents, too, would certainly qualify in terms of their income-level for the same public-assistance. Therefore, the most likely scenario is that these parents with WHP were unqualified immigrants. It should be noted that, due to the sensitive nature of immigrants' legal status, I did not ask participants to indicate whether they were illegal or legal immigrants, which is why we cannot be absolutely certain of their legal status.

As it was just said, more than half of the participants' children in the survey received Medicaid (56.4%). This higher-enrollment in Medicaid, as compared to other public benefits such as food stamps, is likely due to the difference in the application process. Low-income children born in the United States who do not have health insurance are automatically enrolled in Medicaid when they are born, which often seems to be the case with low-income immigrant children whose parents are not qualified immigrants. Food stamps, on the other hand, are a public benefit that a parent must apply for through the DHS, where many of the current obstacles exist for Hispanic immigrants. Excluding Medicaid, all of the benefits listed in Table 2.1 on page 15 must be applied for through the DHS, and I suspect this is mainly why the enrollment numbers for these benefits are so much lower when compared to Medicaid. Additional studies also show that immigrant children more often receive Medicaid and do not receive the full range of benefits for which they are

eligible.⁴² These findings stand to prove that immigrants are not in fact coming to live off the government (as many Proposition 187 and Welfare Reform advocates have claimed), but are instead looking for basic health coverage for their families when they come to live and work here.

The second most popular public benefit among children was WHP, which again likely implies that these children are unqualified. Any number of reasons can explain why this is the case. The most likely explanation for these children having WHP but not Medicaid is that they weren't born in the U.S. and came with their parents from their home countries. If they were qualified immigrants or U.S. citizens, there is a much better chance that they'd be enrolled for a federal public benefit, since, again, federal benefits in the case of Washtenaw County are higher in quality than county benefits.

<u>Demographic Data of Participants</u>		<u>Data on Children</u>	
Number of Participants	37	% of participants with children	94.5% (34/37)
Men	6	Total children among participants	78
Women	31	<i>with one child</i>	43.2% (16/37)
Average Age	32.02 years	<i>with two children</i>	24.3% (9/37)
Average # of Years Lived in America	6.46	<i>with three children</i>	16.6% (6/37)
		<i>with four children or more</i>	10.8% (4/37)
		<i>with zero children</i>	5.4% (2/37)
<u>Country of Origin</u>		Average Age	8.9 years
Mexico	56.7% (21/37)	Boys	62.8% (49/78)
Guatemala	16.2% (6/37)	Girls	38.4% (29/78)
Honduras	16.2% (6/37)		
El Salvador	8.1% (3/37)		
Costa Rica	2.7% (1/37)		
<u>Public Benefits Used</u>		<u>Public Benefits Used</u>	
Washtenaw Health Plan (WHP)	81% (30/37)*	Medicaid	56.4% (44/70)*
Medicaid	10.1% (4/37)	WIC	30.76%(24/78)
Women and Infant Care (WIC)	8.1% (3/37)	WHP	24.4% (19/78)
No Benefits at all	2.70% (1/37)	Food Stamps	8.9% (7/78)
		Child Protection Services	2.70%(1/78)
		Child Care Services	2.70% (1/78)

*Many had more than one public benefit, so sub totals will not add up to total number of participants or children

⁴² Marchevsky, 24

Data on Interpreter Services in Area Health System

% Offered an interpreter when seeking or using* a public benefit	75.6% (28/37)
% Not offered an interpreter	16.2% (6/37)
% Not sure, declined to say, or n/a	13.5% (5/37)**

Of those that had been offered an interpreter:

% at University of Michigan (UofM) hospital	67.8% (19/28)
% at W.C. DHS	14.3% (4/28)
% at Women and Infant Care (WIC)	10.7% (3/28)
% at Ypsilanti Health Center (part of UofM)	10.7% (2/28)
% at North Campus Family Health Service (UofM)	3.5% (1/28)
% at St. Joe's Mercy Health System	3.5% (1/28)
% at Packard Health Clinic	3.5% (1/28)
% at Planned Parenthood	3.5% (1/28)
% at Dexter Family Medicine (UofM)	3.5% (1/28)

Of those that said they had not been offered one:

% that occurred at W.C. DHS	42.8% (3/7)
% that occurred at St. Joe's Mercy	42.8% (3/7)
% that occurred at Packard Community Health Clinic	14.2% (1/7)

*An example of using a benefit might be trying to use your Medicaid at a hospital or health clinic at the point of service

**Subtotals do not add to 36, because some commented on both where they had been offered an interpreter and where they had not

Data on Perception of DHS

Average satisfaction of service in receiving public benefits for themselves 4.03 on scale of 1-5

Average satisfaction of service in receiving public benefits for their children 3.61 on scale of 1-5

% Pressed about their social security number (which is illegal for DHS to do) when applying "on behalf of their children" at DHS

% Not pressed about SSN at DHS	66.6% (24/37)
% Pressed about SSN at DHS	18.9% (7/37)
% Not sure, declined to say, or n/a	13.5% (5/37)

% Of participants who experienced serious problems at DHS 37.8% (14/37)

Barriers at the W.C. DHS

Significance of Analyzing the W.C. DHS

The Washtenaw County DHS has been no exception among state-run human services agencies in the U.S. when it comes to problems with serving Hispanic and non-Hispanic immigrant families in need following PRWORA. Well documented cases exist for, among other cities, Boston,⁴³ Los Angeles,⁴⁴ and New York City,⁴⁵ where for various reasons, human service agencies were not able to meet the needs of the Hispanic immigrant community. While average satisfaction⁴⁶ seemed very high when using and receiving public assistance in Washtenaw County, once asked more thoroughly about their experiences, participants frequently revealed the serious problems that they were actually having, and the majority of these occurred at the W.C. DHS.

Language Barriers

In Washtenaw County, my survey confirms earlier studies' claims that language barriers continue to be the major issue of concern. 10.8% of the population in Washtenaw County is foreign-born, and 1,600 or 19.9% of this foreign-born population does not speak English at all or well enough to communicate.⁴⁷ Despite posting helpful flyers that explain that any non-English speaking applicant has the right to an interpreter at any moment in the application process,⁴⁸ the most common complaint found in my surveys was that they were not helped adequately because of

⁴³ Varley

⁴⁴ Marchevsky

⁴⁵ Make

⁴⁶ Participants' average rating was 4.03 for their own experience using or receiving public assistance, and 3.61 for their experience using or receiving public assistance for their family members, on a scale of 1-5.

⁴⁷ Origins

⁴⁸ Fact: "...clarifies that where an obligation exists, LEP persons can make an informed choice of whether they want to use a family member or friend as an interpreter, if that choice is consistent with good care and practice. The Guidance explains that LEP persons should be made aware that they can have free interpretation services, and emphasizes that where concerns about competence, confidentiality, appropriateness or conflict of interest are present, interpretation services may still have to be provided."

communication issues. Results in my survey showed that 75% of those surveyed were offered an interpreter when they attempted to apply for or use a public benefit, although, only 14.8% were offered one at W.C. DHS, where nearly all of the county's public assistance is offered.⁴⁹ The majority of instances in which they received and were offered an interpreter were through the University of Michigan (UofM) health system, namely the UofM hospital, which itself accounted for 70.3% of the participants who said they'd been offered an interpreter. Furthermore, out of the participants who said they had not been offered one, 42.8% had this occur at W.C. DHS, while the rest came at two other non-UofM health clinics, St. Joe's Mercy, 42.8%, and Packard Community Clinic, 14.2%.

Facing Serious Barriers

Perhaps the most revealing piece of information found in the study was that 37.8% of participants had experienced significant problems when trying to obtain public assistance at the W.C. DHS. A "significant problem" can be defined as any large inconvenience such as a participant repeatedly not having his/her call returned, having his/her application lost, or in the worst cases, not being helped because he/she could only speak Spanish. In many cases, participants called two to three times for help with their application without ever receiving help from someone who spoke Spanish or who knew the status of their application. In total, 14 of 37 participants experienced such problems, which is remarkably higher than what I believed it would be at the beginning of the study.

Beyond the problems cited above, the most common difficulty was filling out the application itself. The Finance Project – a nonprofit dedicated to policy reform for better children, families, and communities – explains that "language barriers, poor literacy skills, and long, complex

⁴⁹ Just to be clear, one must apply for a benefit at the W.C. DHS, but can use many of these benefits at, for example, hospitals, health clinics, etc.

application forms with unfamiliar terminology often impede immigrants' ability to complete the application process."⁵⁰ Nonprofit workers with whom I spoke (and whose comments will remain anonymous) echoed this general discontent among immigrants, that the application itself is unrealistically hard for an average person. Due to the increasing costs, the web of information, and the confusing politics that immigrants must navigate in order to apply for public assistance, "many immigrants – a number impossible to calculate exactly – have become so confused and intimidated by the new federal rules that they no longer even bother applying."⁵¹

Many Hispanic immigrants in the Washtenaw County community have begun relying on the PAI, as well as on volunteers such as myself, to fill out these complicated applications. When the average lay person needs a university student or a lawyer to apply, it should serve as an indicator of just how difficult these applications are to comprehend.

Even more troubling, there's evidence that the W.C. DHS workforce has trouble understanding their own policies, rules, and applications as well. This will be discussed more in depth in Chapter 3.

Mistrust Between the Hispanic Immigrant Community and the W.C. DHS

While no question directly addressed this concern of avoiding government agencies for fear of being deported in my survey, many immigrants spoke of the mistrust they felt towards the W.C. DHS as a result of their unfavorable experiences and frustration with its case workers. Nonprofit workers in the area have also noted how often W.C. DHS case workers seem to lose their Hispanic immigrant clients' applications. The discrimination and hostility that they at times experience when trying to communicate with the W.C. DHS appeared to foster a general mistrust and discontent towards the agency that they revealed only after I assured them repeatedly that their remarks would

⁵⁰ Kaplan

⁵¹ Kretsedemas, 8

be anonymous. As a result, many Hispanic immigrants have given up on the agency and tried to get by without public benefits, even though they badly need them. In many of the homes that I visited with younger babies, mothers couldn't afford child-care, couldn't work because they had to take care of their baby, had no support network of family or friends, and without any public assistance were facing eviction, utility shut-offs, and absolute poverty.

Participants' reluctance to speak with me about their true experiences or feelings at the W.C. DHS seems to reflect a growing concern in the Hispanic immigrant community nation-wide about their mistrust of the state in general. The Pew Hispanic Center, a nonpartisan research group in Washington, found just last December that 53 percent of Hispanics in the United States worry that they or a loved one could be deported.⁵² The effect that bolstered security appears to be having is devastating on the everyday lives of Hispanic immigrants and what they can and can't do securely. Last year, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detained more than 35,000 illegal immigrants (more than double in 2006) and deported a record 276,912.⁵³ Princeton demographer, Professor Douglas S. Massey, has said that based on his own surveys and recent reports by other scholars doing field-research on the issue, the "palpable sense of fear and of traumatization" in immigrant communities was more intense than at any other time since the mass deportations of Mexican farm workers in 1954."⁵⁴ Consequently, many families are trying their best to stay below the radar of the ICE and draw as little attention to themselves as possible. It is therefore very plausible to say that the stepped-up efforts by the government's own agencies, namely the ICE, are significantly interfering with its ability to provide public assistance to this already hard-to-reach Hispanic immigrant community.

⁵² Preston

⁵³ Preston

⁵⁴ Preston

Understaffed and Undertrained

When I approached the W.C. DHS with a proposition to do a short survey with them, it became obvious just how constrained they had become by their lack of resources. After passing their requirements for running a short, anonymous, five-minute survey, I was told that I could still not survey anyone, because “the time commitment was too much for them to take on.” For me, this reflected the rigidity of the organization and its inability to accommodate anything out of its routine.

Since I could not ask the W.C. DHS itself why so many problems were occurring with applicants, it is hard to pinpoint the exact reasons why the organization seems so constrained and unwilling to help people. However, in a similar study done by researchers at the University of Michigan on the Wayne County DHS, state budget cuts were found to be a major contributor to case workers’ inability to do their jobs effectively. Even as that study was being conducted in 2006, six offices were closed in Wayne County, 22% of the workforce took early retirement, and considerable restructuring and job cutting took place as a result of the turbulent state of the Michigan economy. While nothing can be concluded for the Washtenaw County DHS, it might be assumed that it was similarly crippled by the recent state budget-cuts.

Considering that no eligible applicant can be turned away by the DHS, it is easy to picture why many workers will take advantage of opportunities to turn immigrants away. Employees at these large state agencies are undoubtedly over-worked and immigrants become easy targets to try and lighten case-loads. With the immigration debate raging over whether foreign-born families should even be allowed into our country, let alone given our tax dollars for public benefits, the window of opportunity to do so certainly exists for DHS workers. In the current political climate, Hispanic immigrants are clearly not in any position of bargaining power. They are being deported and arrested in record numbers, and drawing any attention to themselves is the last thing that they want or need. Just by applying for certain types of public assistance, such as “cash assistance” or

“extended medical-stay coverage,” they are labeled as a “public charge” and can legally be deported.⁵⁵ Considering the immense odds against them in this public assistance system, it is very easy to see how it is possible for so many of them to be harassed and hassled when applying.

One specific goal of the survey was to find out how many Hispanic immigrants were unlawfully being pressed about providing their social security numbers when applying “on behalf of their children.” First of all, it is illegal for DHS workers to ask for the social-security number of anyone but the person receiving the benefit.⁵⁶ Secondly, as earlier mentioned, Hispanic immigrants are already paranoid that they will be taken from their families at any given moment outside of their homes by ICE. Asking such invasive and unsettling questions is part of the reason many Hispanic immigrants mistrust and avoid government agencies. There are over 3 million children of immigrants who are U.S. citizens in this country and who have at least one undocumented parent.⁵⁷ It cannot be stressed enough that in the current political climate, with increased numbers of immigration raids, children of immigrants are frequently being left with no family to take care of them and coming home from school with no responsible adult left. With this in mind, it is essential to understand why intrusive questions might deter all immigrant parents from applying for public assistance on behalf of their children.

In my study, only 18.9% (7/37) admitted that they were pressed for their social security numbers, but another 13.5 (5/37) declined to comment on the matter, and considering how carefully most participants spoke about anything remotely negative with their experiences, the number may have in fact been higher than the results suggest.

⁵⁵ Broder, 779-78

⁵⁶ United

⁵⁷ Passel

Summary

The fact of the matter remains, though, that failing to provide an interpreter for a non-English speaking client or pressing him/her about his/her social security number when applying on behalf of someone else is illegal. To add insult to injury, though, both my survey and many additional studies have found that hang-ups, lost applications, and the general disorder experienced by so many struggling Hispanic families is very common. This behavior is neither lawful nor permissible under any circumstance from state workers and finding ways to improve upon such failures in state service is as critical to the well being of Hispanic immigrants in Washtenaw County as it is anywhere throughout the country.

The Study's Limitations

My study faced several major limitations. First and foremost, it was very limited in its scope, as there were only 37 participants involved, while there are almost 4,000 Hispanic immigrants living in Washtenaw County.⁵⁸

Second, it was definitely a biased sample. All of the participants were already seeking public assistance at the Washtenaw County Public Health or from the W.C. DHS (these were the individuals referred to me by the PAI). Furthermore, the latter individuals were typically referred to me because they were already experiencing difficulties with the W.C. DHS. For this reason, my survey sample likely excludes those Hispanic immigrants who are unaware of the public assistance available to them, as well as many of those that have not had any problems at all with the W.C. DHS. The study, nonetheless, achieves its goal of documenting many of the barriers a certain portion⁵⁹ of the Hispanic immigrant population is facing.

⁵⁸ Origins

⁵⁹ That exact portion cannot be determined by the results of this survey or any other known study on the area.

In terms of the technical aspects of the survey, there were several problems that occurred as a result of my inexperience as a statistician and a researcher. Two questions were discarded due to the fact that so few of the participants could answer them, because it did not apply to their given situation or because there was not enough time for them to answer.

The nature of interviewing them in an environment in which participants were waiting to be seen by a doctor or nurse, placed serious time constraints on their ability to thoroughly answer each question. The fact that we needed to hurry before it was their turn to be called by the clinic, in certain instances, prevented me from going farther in depth with my follow-up questions. Had I done so, I believe that I would have documented more problems with the W.C. DHS. In the instances where there was enough time, participants were more often able to speak at length about their experiences and to divulge concerns.⁶⁰

As already noted, another major limitation of the study was my inability to interview the DHS to hear their perspectives on the problems being cited by Hispanic immigrants and nonprofit workers.

Given the above limitations, the results obviously cannot be generalized to the rest of the Hispanic immigrant population in the United States. They can, however, be used to support existing evidence being built to further the claim that the public assistance system in the United States is under-serving Hispanic immigrants. As before stated, the strength of this study lies in its focus on an understudied population – first-generation Latino immigrants – and its capacity to uncover common threads in their subjective experiences that can be used to help make culturally relevant policy changes to the welfare system.

⁶⁰ If any question was ever incomplete due to a time constraint throughout the study, it was disregarded and not used.

Chapter 3: Discussion and Implications

Understanding the Motives behind PRWORA

The motives behind the passage of PRWORA were numerous, but three movements in particular had the greatest influence over its passage. In one respect, the legislation was a continuation of the same coalition⁶¹ of “anti-immigrant” and “anti-welfare” movements in support of Proposition 187, which sought to use immigrants as scapegoats for the country’s economic problems.

“The exclusionary culture”⁶² surrounding public assistance that was promoted during the approval of PRWORA, and as evidenced in my survey study in Washtenaw County, is nothing new to the poor in the United States. Throughout its history, U.S. politicians in favor of keeping the poor off of welfare have diverted the attention away from the facts and needs of the poor, and largely stereotyped and moralized the issue instead. Welfare has its very roots in the racist control of public assistance in the south and southeast, where, due to fears of losing cheap labor during harvests, white politicians banned African-Americans from receiving public assistance by declaring them ineligible and intimidating them from applying.⁶³ In the southeast, this was also case, only with Hispanic immigrants.⁶⁴ During his presidency, Nixon similarly decreased public assistance, affirming that it gave a partial advantage to minorities and that it promoted broken families and illegitimate children.⁶⁵

⁶¹ This coalition being, as earlier mentioned, two separate movements: anti-welfare and anti-immigrant.

⁶² Kretsedemas x

⁶³ Roberts, 207: “The number of negro cases is few (on welfare) due to the unanimous feeling on the part of the staff and the board that there are more working opportunities for Negro women and to their intense desire not to interfere with local labor conditions.”

⁶⁴ Roberts, 207

⁶⁵ Ugarte, 16: In response to Nixon’s proposal, Sandra Ugarte responded: “The taxpayers are not the only ones who want the poor to work – the poor also want to work. But at decent jobs with decent wages and without the stigma of

Since then, the tone of the debate has changed little. The arguments to deprive low-wage workers of public-assistance have transcended party lines and only grown in strength, culminating with the passage of PRWORA in 1996. Much of the contemporary evidence of the anti-immigrant movement has already been discussed in this report with regards to how it's affected immigrants in the second-half of the 20th century. Proposition 187 and PRWORA are both well-cited examples of legislation that were influenced by “nativism,” the term which formally refers to opposition to immigration. Since the 1970's, nativism has also been referred to as “new-nativism” and “immigration reductionism.”

What is important to point out is how recent anti-immigrant forces incorporated traditional racist ideas into a Welfare Reform platform that disavowed having anything to do with race.⁶⁶ Whereas nativism in the past decades focused on immigrants as threats to American workers, the new-nativism of the 1990's used in Proposition 187 and Welfare Reform framed immigrants as threats to the “civil and fiscal community,”⁶⁷ despite there being ample evidence that this was not in fact true. As earlier mentioned in this report, “anti-welfare” rhetoric has historically targeted the colored peoples of America, mainly African Americans and only more recently Hispanics, as promiscuous and irresponsible welfare cheats. In effect, anti-immigrant groups were able to borrow anti-welfare rhetoric and use Welfare Reform as a vehicle to propagate and conceal the same, traditional, nativist discourse that it has used throughout U.S. history. Consequently, Welfare reform deployed a racial-nationalistic discourse, as nativism always has, while also furthering a neoliberal economic agenda to maintain a cheap work-force in place for the U.S. economy – the other major driving force behind PRWORA.

welfare...[Nixon's proposal] will force a cheap source of labor on the labor market at a time when job competition is already at a critical level...Employers are already laying off their own employees and replacing them with welfare recipients at far reduced wage rates.”

⁶⁶ Marchevisky, 33

⁶⁷ Marchevisky, 34

The Influence of Economic Globalization on PRWORA

The third influence that has persuaded policy makers to consider cutting public-assistance to low-income groups, and which has yet to be discussed in this report, has been the growing competitiveness of the global economy. Due to economic globalization and the predominance of neoliberalism in the world economy following the cold war, the tendency to diminish social services for non-citizens has been occurring more and more often in the Western world.⁶⁸ Researchers Michael Bommers and Andrew Geddes, in their research on immigration and welfare in recent years, have found that there is a startling correlation between the rise of non-European immigrants in the western world and the deterioration of social-welfare programs throughout the Western industrialized world.⁶⁹

One author on the topic, Kim Moody, believes that legislation such as Proposition 187 or PRWORA reflect this trend by governments in the western world to serve the interests of global capital, by ensuring the availability of a foreign-born and low-wage workforce in the United States.⁷⁰ Neoliberal concepts such as “laissez-faire” and “fiscal austerity” do in fact demand minimum interference from the state in the economy and scarce public spending. As Figure 4 shows in the appendix, the United States has the lowest social spending of any western country in the world.

Unfortunately, by following these concepts, legislators in the U.S. government are allowing immigrants to jump from the frying pan into the fire. Critics of welfare reform point out that the majority of Hispanic immigrants’ employment is already unqualified, non-unionized work with low salaries and few worker protections, leaving them with no choice but to turn to the state for help.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Bommers, 1-12

⁶⁹ Bommers, 1-12

⁷⁰ Marchevsky, 34

⁷¹ Kretsedemas, 8

Furthermore, immigrants continue to be invited to the United States through guest worker programs and allowed to work without documents in the low-wage sectors, with salaries below minimum-wage – only, now, increasingly without the right to social services.

PRWORA’S Failure and the Need for Policy Reform

The problem, in terms of policymaking, is thus the entire way that immigrants are being viewed. They are not economic goods⁷² to be manipulated or traded in the for-profit world, nor are they foreign invaders coming to the United States to live off of the government.

Not only is the current stereotypical depiction of welfare users inaccurate, but it forces the discussion away from the true matter at hand, that these are people, without the adequate resources or means to provide for themselves. Implicit in that is not that they are inferior, lazy, or undeserving of help in their effort to create a life for themselves. As the editors of the Wall Street Journal, William Bennett and Jack Kemp, state:

“Immigrants tend to live in strong, stable families; possess impressive energy and entrepreneurial spirit; have a deeply rooted religious faith; and make important intellectual contributions to the nation. Most come to America in large part because they believe in traditional American ideals. Their achievements and contributions are worth celebrating, not demeaning or denying.”⁷³

The new challenge for policymakers will thus be to take seriously the lives and conditions of these immigrants that their policies are affecting. As the authors of Immigrants, Welfare Poverty, and the Policy of Reform, Philip Kretsedemas and Ana Aparicio, say: “All parties have an interest in making welfare reform work, and this general interest in empowering those who need assistance should motivate policymakers to take seriously the life circumstances of those to whom it is

⁷² See footnote 76 for an illustrative anecdote of immigrants being treated as economic goods

⁷³ Marchevsky

applied”.⁷⁴

Rather, there is still a frustrating myth that in America, anyone can transcend class barriers, provide for themselves, and embody this founding American virtue of independence or self-reliance. The reality is, though, that class mobility and self-sufficiency are for many individuals, especially newly arrived immigrants, nearly unobtainable ideals given the current structural barriers in place.⁷⁵ Globalization and economic restructuring have dramatically changed the job landscape for lower-class workers, and it may even be safe to say that the American Dream is no longer a reachable goal for newly arrived immigrants as it was in the past. In a study done on class mobility among Hispanic immigrants, Alejandro Portes and his colleagues warn:

“The children of today’s low-skill immigrants may not be able to advance in the way that was possible during the 1910 to 1960 period [when the other large waves of immigrants came to America], for several reasons. First, the nature of the economy has changed, especially in the decline of manufacturing jobs. Today far fewer American jobs require minimal education but still offer advancement over the unskilled work of immigrant arrivals. Second, an extended education, necessary for today’s better jobs, is out of the reach of immigrant families that enter at the bottom. Third, labor migrants of today and their children are nonwhite, and American society is a long way from ignoring race.”⁷⁶

Consider that under a federal provision, children of illegal immigrants who were not born here in the U.S., who did not choose to come here and were brought by their parents, cannot receive state or federal loans, grants, or scholarships for college.⁷⁷ In addition to the decreasing number of secure job opportunities with livable wages in the new global economy, these are exactly the kinds of policy barriers that immigrants face (including PRWORA and Proposition 187), which prevent them from being able to advance on their own. Policymakers, for too long, have left this myth of

⁷⁴ Kretsedemas x

⁷⁵ Marchevsky, 10: Again, structural barriers such as declining “real wages”, eroding worker protections, racism, the dismantling of civil rights, unaffordable and inadequate child-care, underfunded public-schools, diminished access to higher education, etc.

⁷⁶ Perlmann, 3

⁷⁷ Horwedel

self-destiny unchallenged at the expense of those, such as Hispanic immigrants, who face its brutal inaccuracy every day. In order for policies to successfully accommodate immigrants, it will be vital for policymakers to re-examine immigrants' lives and circumstances, as human beings, and no longer as economic goods or lazy foreign-intruders.⁷⁸

Organizational Constraints at the W.C. DHS

Another major conclusion that can be drawn from this report, more on the local level, is that the government organizations in charge of providing public-assistance and carrying out these welfare policies are currently unequipped and unprepared to do so. Part of the reason may be their high degrees of “formalization and centralization”, their lack of training, as well as their lack of adequate funding.

While public-assistance may be delivered at the county level by organizations like the W.C. DHS, they are funded and regulated at both the state and federal level. Consequently, there is a very complex web of rules and procedures set, one on the hand, by a state government, and on the other, by federal legislation like PRWORA. The resulting combination can become both overwhelming and unmanageable for the average public assistance case worker to grasp without the proper training and incentives. In fact, many nonprofit workers with whom I spoke complained that the DHS did not even understand its own policies, and this was also my experience when attending meetings between case workers and Hispanic immigrants.⁷⁹ As it was earlier mentioned, many of

⁷⁸ An example of immigrants being treated like economic goods, provided by one nonprofit worker in the area, is that children born outside the U.S. cannot receive benefits, while their brothers and sisters that were born here can. As this nonprofit worker said, “Let children receive benefits regardless of status. It is so arbitrary how in a family the older two kids are not eligible for services [such as food stamps] and the younger two are just because of where and when they were born. Children do not choose to be born into a legal or illegal status.”

⁷⁹ In one instance, I was told by a case worker that an employment verification letter brought by the immigrant I was helping, was inadequate because it did not specify how many hours per week this person worked. The letter explicitly said that the immigrant worked “X” number of hours “a week”, but the case worker believed that by saying “a week”, instead of “per week”, it was possibly implying that the immigrant had only worked “X” number of hours one week, and not regularly. As I sat dumbfounded and tried to explain that the two expressions were synonymous, the case

the signs posted at the W.C. DHS point out that every LEP (Limited English Proficiency) applicant has the right to an interpreter and all of their information in their respective language. Nevertheless, one of the most common complaints among my survey participants was that they received mailings in English instead of in Spanish or were not helped fully because of a language barrier. As one nonprofit worker revealed, “I called our local DHS office [the W.C. DHS] and they could not even answer my basic questions in English about whether a family would qualify for various services. They referred me to Lansing [where the Michigan DHS is headquartered], where still no one could answer my question.” This has unfortunately been the case for many of the applicants that I surveyed, which signals that there is a critical disconnect between policymakers that set the rules and regulations, and the case workers that apply and enforce them. Whether this comes down to an issue of not-knowing or not-caring is unclear, probably both, but the cause in either case is under-training and poor management.

A second major organizational barrier seems to be that DHS workers do not have sufficient time, training, or resources to deal with every applicant adequately. “Adequately” might be defined, in the case of Hispanic immigrants, as going to great lengths to ensure documents are delivered in the language of the applicant or arranging an interpreter for scheduled meetings with non-English speaking applicants. It may also encompass such basic duties as not losing applications or treating people with sympathy and respect. Losing or giving the wrong application, not to mention being unable to explain the rules of their own service, is an extremely costly mistake when every visit to the W.C. DHS for Hispanic immigrants can mean losing crucial work hours, having to pay for transportation, and possibly finding and having to pay for a babysitter.⁸⁰ As

worker said that she couldn't risk having it written any other way than “per week”, in case she was audited. Her incentive clearly was not to accommodate the immigrant, but to protect herself from being punished. This inflexibility and difficulty embodies the entire experience most immigrants must go through to receive benefits, and, imagine, in a language (English) that they in most cases still cannot understand.

⁸⁰ Perreira, 1386

organizational theorist Diane Vaughn explains: high performance pressure – or in the DHS’ case, overloading workers with too many cases – limits the ability of an organization to do its job by “establishing out-of-reach goals or not providing sufficient resources necessary to obtain goals.”⁸¹ With state budget cuts being made and high unemployment sending more people to public assistance offices in the state of Michigan, the potential for case workers to be overloaded and provide inadequate service is thus a very real concern.

A study done by a team of University of Michigan researchers at local DHS offices in Wayne County, MI, provides an interesting parallel to what my survey found in Washtenaw County, and may help to explain some of the organizational concerns raised above.

In their research, the group found that poor customer service was a major barrier for low-income parents trying to enroll their children for health-insurance; that high workloads and persistent staff and organizational changes greatly inhibited DHS caseworkers from being able to provide excellent customer service; and that these caseworkers’ individual practices greatly contributed to the poor overall customer service at these local offices.⁸²

Their study found many of the same barriers that my survey revealed, such as “poor quality service, intrusive questions, and the poor way that [applicants felt that] they were treated.”⁸³ Not only were these some of the most common complaints among applicants for public-assistance at the Wayne County DHS, but they also reflected the most frequent concerns identified in other local and national surveys.⁸⁴ This Wayne County study did not exclusively focus on Hispanic immigrants, but its results do shed light on the organizational problems at public-assistance agencies in Southeast Michigan for all applicants applying.

⁸¹ Vaughn, 290

⁸² Lichtenstein, 490

⁸³ Lichtenstein, 488

⁸⁴ Lichtenstein, 488

The last organizational concern found in this survey seems to stem from the individual practices of case workers and not the inadequacies of the organization as a whole. Considering that so many workers are overloaded with cases, as noted above, it isn't hard to picture why they might take advantage of opportunities to turn applicants away. Many participants in my study felt that their phone messages were repeatedly ignored, their cases lost on purpose, or their telephone conversations cut-off unfairly without having their questions answered. In the Wayne County study, it was similarly found that "customer-service issues" and, in the words of applicants, "the way they treat you," were some of largest deterrents that kept them from applying for public-assistance.⁸⁵

In the end, speculating about motives that might be behind such disservices is not what is most important. These types of mistakes are neither lawful nor permissible under any circumstance, and finding ways to improve upon such failures is as critical to the well being of Hispanic immigrants in Washtenaw County, as it is to any persons applying for public assistance in the United States.

Fortunately, there is evidence that with the proper training, such barriers can be overcome. The Wayne County study found that training workers in improving work relationships did indeed produce positive results, and that these case-workers rated their level of satisfaction with their training sessions at 3.81 (scaled from 1, not at all useful, to 5, extremely useful). Clearly, interventions and training programs by nonprofit, advocacy, and academic groups can make a difference on the local level. In the future, their participation in the improvement of the public assistance system will be vital for under-served groups like Hispanic immigrants to be accommodated successfully.

⁸⁵ Lichtenstein, 488 and 490

Final Conclusions

The purpose of this report has not been to swing the argument of this debate in favor of illegal immigration or Hispanic immigrants, but rather to provide a more honest depiction of the average Hispanic immigrant needing public assistance and how welfare policies are currently affecting them.

The sad and obvious reality is that the opponents of immigration are having success with the diminishment of immigrant rights through legislation such as Proposition 187, PRWORA, IIRIRA (Illegal Immigrant Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act) and the Patriot Act. As Philip Kretsedemas and Ana Aparicio say:

“Whereas throughout the 20th century immigrants had slowly gained many of the same political and social rights as citizens, welfare reform dramatically reversed this trend by widening the gap between these two groups and creating a new category of permanently disenfranchised persons inside the body politic.”⁸⁶

In response to the new public-assistance restrictions placed on immigrants, the quantity of people soliciting citizenship has risen sharply, which many believe is an indication that the social support currently available for non-citizens is insufficient.⁸⁷ Even the architect of PRWORA, Bill Clinton, while signing the bill into legislation, recognized that the social support in it was inadequate for immigrants.⁸⁸ The restrictions and sanctions that came with welfare reform, together with the new price hikes⁸⁹ and high waiting times for citizenship, have created an ever growing gap

⁸⁶ Kretsedemas, 11

⁸⁷ Marchevsky, 26

⁸⁸ Kretsedemas, 27-28: Clinton said immediately that he would work for improvements in the welfare system for immigrants and approved two acts that reinstated some types of public assistance for illegal immigrants.

⁸⁹ Gamboa: 99% of ICE's budget comes from these fees, which in part explains why fees have risen, undoubtedly in response to bolstered security efforts.

in the rights and access to social support between citizens and noncitizens.⁹⁰

In place of a social safety net, new immigrants were promised training and education, through programs like Workfare, to help them find better employment with livable wages. The majority are still unable to find anything but the minimum-wage jobs that they had before. Only now, they can no longer receive the public-assistance that they could before PRWORA to offset the inadequacy of their low-wages.

As evidenced by my survey and those others cited in this report, this is partly because intimidation and stereotyping continue to be employed as a tactic to deprive immigrants of their social and political rights. The Southern Poverty Law Center estimates that in the past two years alone, 250 new “nativist” hate groups have emerged in response to the growing debate over illegal immigration, using a variety of fear and intimidation tactics to diminish the rights of immigrants.⁹¹ The hysteria that they create surrounding illegal Hispanic immigrants is nothing but a vicious and xenophobic attempt to shift the blame on others for some of the economic and structural problems that everyone in this country is facing. The scapegoating that happened to the Chinese at the turn of the 20th century, and the Polish and Italian immigrants around the 1920’s, is the same thing that is happening now with Hispanic immigrants. As one nonprofit worker with whom I spoke put it:

“It seems like some policy-makers have a fantasy that if we make things difficult enough for undocumented immigrants they will all just vanish. These people are here! They are not going to disappear! And so many of them are working hard and contributing to our economy and society. However, if we make it completely impossible for them to make ends meet through legitimate means, maybe at some point they would have to turn to crime just to survive.”

Hispanic immigrants come to the United States, as I pointed out in an earlier quote in this report, because they “have goals and values for their children [and themselves] that cannot be

⁹⁰ Adjustment, 4911: The average fee increase included in the latest legislation by the Bush administration for citizenship applications is 223\$, which clearly poses an enormous economic hurdle for immigrants already scraping by with little legal and economic security.

⁹¹ Hate

fulfilled in their home countries because of societal factors such as poverty and war.”⁹² If nothing else, they have come to work-hard and better their lives for bare-minimum wages and benefits that contribute to our society, and it is inaccurate to depict them as freeloaders of the system.

As my survey and the national data shows, they are asking for very basic provisions in return, such as Medicaid for their children and food stamps when they have no other option to provide for themselves. The little that they do need is neither a crime to ask for nor receive. Alejandra Marchevsky points out that, unfortunately, “we live in a society where dependency is treated as a social pathology and an individual failing,” instead of a society “where relying on help from others and the state is seen as a good common sense and an act of responsible citizenship.”⁹³

Obviously, due to its limited size and scope, this report is in no position to recommend policy changes or solutions to the rise in anti-immigrant and anti-welfare movements that are influencing public-policy. Policy and anti-immigrant sentiment can only be reformed over time by educating people with a more accurate analysis of immigrants, why they come here, and the specific needs that they have – as this report has tried to do. However, the study done by the University of Michigan group in Wayne County proves that empowering case workers can be a successful, more immediate solution to improving public assistance at the local level. With the help of nonprofit, academic, and advocacy groups, I believe that the organizational barriers and inaccuracies reflected in today’s social policies can in time slowly be overcome.

The opportunity of starting a new life should never be sacrificed in order to further the gains of the economically privileged. Under the current welfare system, this opportunity is being denied to the impoverished and non-citizen groups in our country. It is my hope that this report, along with

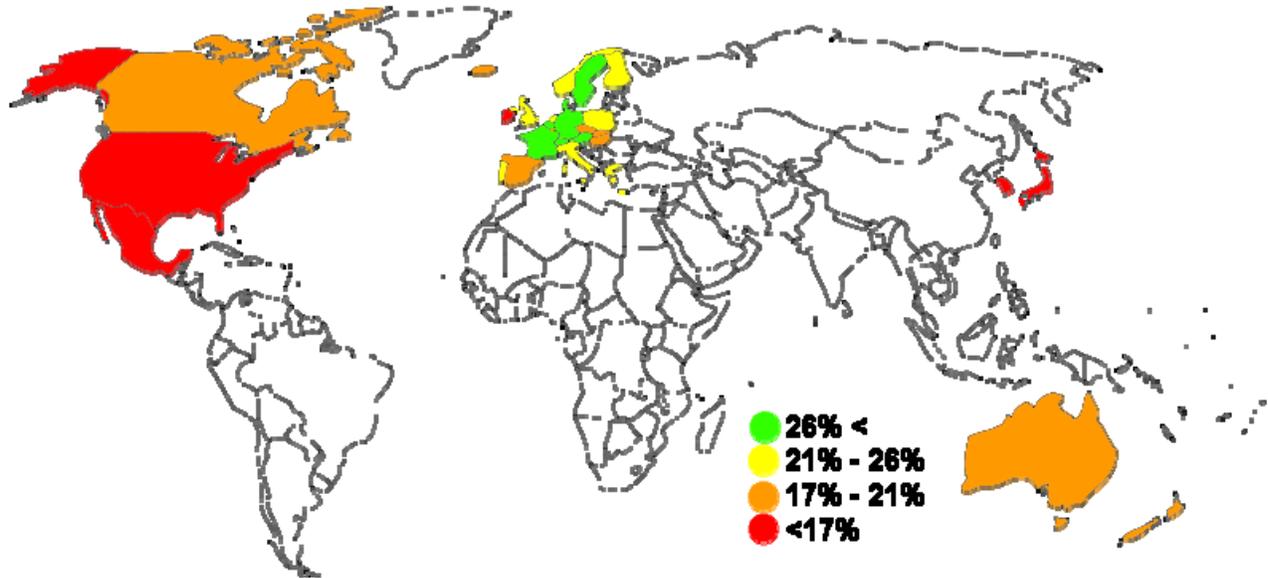
⁹² Pereira, 1391

⁹³ Marchevsky, vii

the many other incredible people and studies that helped contribute to this analysis, can in a small way help that to change.

Appendix

Figure 4: % of GDP in social expenditures



<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Social-expenditures-2001-OCSE.png>

This graph shows the percentage of GDP spent on social expenditures in the developing world. It is useful for illustrating the country's obvious inferiority compared to other western nations in its social support net for its citizens.

Figure 5: Ratio of Children Receiving Welfare to Children Living in Poverty

	1993	1996	2002			1993	1996	2002
Rhode Island	0.81	0.94	0.77		Pennsylvania	0.7	0.78	0.36
Vermont	0.7	0.75	0.7		New York	0.63	0.68	0.35
Alaska	0.72	0.8	0.61		Maryland	0.77	0.77	0.33
Hawaii	0.79	0.83	0.56		New Jersey	0.77	0.7	0.33
California	0.72	0.79	0.49		Nebraska	0.52	0.48	0.32
Minnesota	0.68	0.77	0.48		North Dakota	0.43	0.38	0.3
Connecticut	0.81	0.89	0.45		Kentucky	0.53	0.48	0.3
Indiana	0.54	0.51	0.45		West Virginia	0.52	0.52	0.3
New Hampshire	0.54	0.68	0.44		Ohio	0.76	0.79	0.29
Washington	0.74	0.71	0.43		Montana	0.47	0.43	0.27
Tennessee	0.65	0.62	0.43		Arizona	0.41	0.36	0.25
Missouri	0.56	0.63	0.4		New Mexico	0.4	0.44	0.25
Delaware	0.62	0.55	0.4		Kansas	0.5	0.48	0.25
Massachusetts	0.79	0.72	0.4		Georgia	0.58	0.54	0.24
Iowa	0.59	0.65	0.4		Illinois	0.73	0.77	0.22
Maine	0.7	0.71	0.39		Nevada	0.38	0.43	0.21
Michigan	0.74	0.73	0.38		Virginia	0.46	0.42	0.21
Oregon	0.53	0.43	0.2		Arkansas	0.31	0.25	0.15
					Oklahoma	0.44	0.35	0.14
					Utah	0.37	0.33	0.14
					Alabama	0.35	0.3	0.14
					Louisiana	0.45	0.45	0.14
					Florida	0.58	0.5	0.14
					Wyoming	0.59	0.52	0.04
					Idaho	0.26	0.28	0.03
South Carolina	0.48	0.4	0.19					
South Dakota	0.36	0.33	0.19					
Texas	0.36	0.34	0.18					
Wisconsin	0.64	0.79	0.18					
North Carolina	0.63	0.52	0.16					
Colorado	0.51	0.44	0.16					
Mississippi	0.48	0.43	0.15					

This illustrates positive correlation (not cause and effect) between rises in child poverty and the passage of PRWORA in 1996

Provided by Dr. Duncan Lindsay, UCLA
http://www.childwelfare.com/welfare_reform_myths.htm

Survey (English Version)

Your Background Information

Age _____ Gender _____

How many years have you lived in the United States? _____

What is your country of origin? _____

1. Please indicate the types of benefits *YOU* receive currently or have received in the past

- (a) CHILD CARE (b) MEDICAID (c) FOOD STAMPS
(d) WELFARE (e) WASHTENAW HEALTH PLAN
(f) CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES (g) WIC (h) NONE

OTHER: _____ WHERE? _____

2. Is there another member of your family that receives public assistance or that has received it in the past? If you mark “**YES**”, please write the **age** and **gender** of this family member and the **type** of assistance that he/she receives.

YES NO

Age _____ Gender _____ Type of Public Assistance _____
Age _____ Gender _____ Type of Public Assistance _____
Age _____ Gender _____ Type of Public Assistance _____

3. If you answered “**NONE**” and/or “**NO**” in the previous questions, please indicate the reasons that you or a family member have never received public assistance and explain why:

- (a) I DID NOT KNOW THAT I COULD RECEIVE PUBLIC ASSISTANCE
(b) I NEEDED AND INTERPRETER AND COULDN'T COMMUNICATE IN ENGLISH
(c) THEY DENIED ME OR A FAMILY MEMBER PUBLIC ASSISTANCE
(d) TENÍA MIEDO DE SER DETENIDO(A) POR LA MIGRA O EL INS

Please explain more: _____

If they denied, please indicate where this occurred: _____

4. If you have never received public assistance, do you return to your country of origin to receive medical attention, simply never visit a doctor, or treat your health concerns in another manner?

(a) I RETURN TO MY COUNTRY

(b) I NEVER GO TO THE DOCTOR

(c) OTHER (please explain): _____

5. If you or a member of your family went to apply for public assistance, did anyone ever inform you of your right to an interpreter? Please indicate the agency or clinic where this took place.

SÍ NO **Agency or Clinic** _____

6. If **YOU** receive public assistance, have you been happy with the services that **YOU** receive?

1	2	3	4	5
Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	I am not sure	Satisfied	Very Satisfied

7. Please explain why **YOU** have been dissatisfied or satisfied with your experience: _____

8. If a **FAMILY MEMBER** receives public assistance, has he/she been happy with the services that he/she receives?

1	2	3	4	5
Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	I am not sure	Satisfied	Very Satisfied

9. Please explain why **HE/SHE** has been dissatisfied or satisfied with **HIS/HER** experience:

10. If you went to apply for public assistance for your children, did anyone ask you for your **social security number** or the documentation of your **'migratory status'**, or did they ask for either of these things for a family member that **WAS NOT** receiving or applying for public assistance? If so, please indicate at which agency or clinic this occurred.

YES NO **Agency or Clinic** _____

If you have more questions about this study or want more information about your right to an interpreter and/or public assistance, please call the lead investigator of this study, Alex Nichols, at (231) 590-3777

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