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AFRICAN AMERICAN AND LATINO FAMILIES FACE HIGH RATES OF HARDSHIP

By Arloc Sherman

A range of measures suggest that many black and Latino families face hardship of some type. Between one-fourth and one-third of families with children headed by blacks or by Latino citizens experience overcrowded living conditions, difficulties paying for food, or lack of needed medical care. Hardship rates rise further — to as many as half of black families with children — when additional types of hardship are considered.

These findings come from the Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), which will be terminated this year unless Congress provides additional funding in the fiscal year 2007 appropriations bill that provides funding for the Bureau.

Analysis of data from the SIPP survey — the most wide-ranging source of government data on family hardships, income and resources, and living conditions— shows the following. These hardship data were collected in 2003 and are the most recent available from the SIPP survey.¹

- Between one-fourth and one-third of black African American families with children (28 percent) experienced at least one of three hardships — overcrowded housing, hunger or the risk of hunger (termed “food insecurity” by the government), or lack of needed medical care — in the 12 months before the survey was conducted in summer 2003.² This was double the comparable rate for non-Latino white families with children (14 percent).
- Nearly one in three families with children headed by a Latino citizen (31 percent) experienced at least one of these three hardships, not significantly different from the rate for black families.³

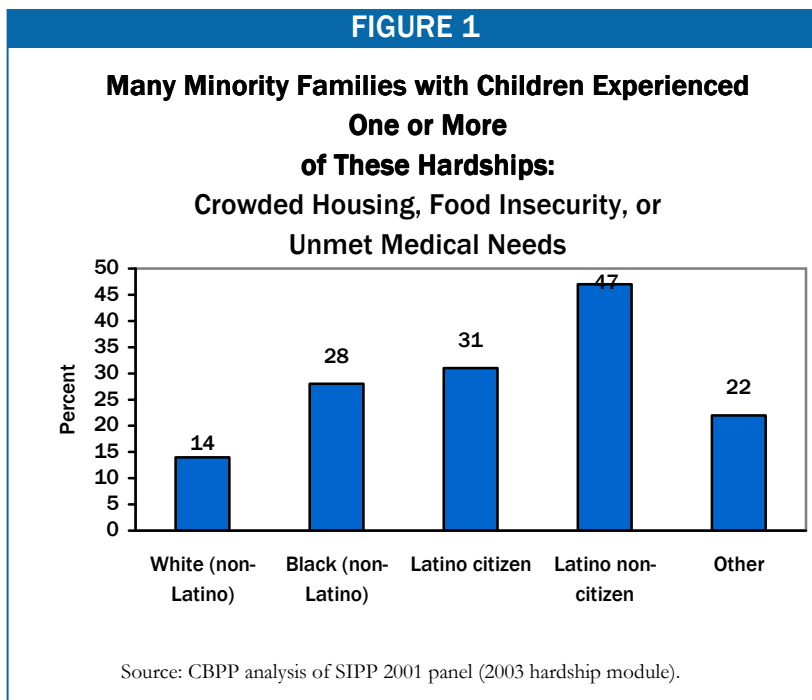
¹ For definitions of hardships, see box on page 5. “Black” and “African American” in this analysis mean non-Latino black. “White” means non-Latino white.

² Hardships in the Census data are determined for the household. The data do not indicate which members of the family (or other household members who may be living with the family) experienced the hardship.

³ About three in five (3.7 million) Latino families are headed by a U.S. citizen. They include 2.8 million families headed by a U.S.-born citizen and 0.9 million headed by a naturalized citizen. For both types of citizen families, hardship patterns are similar. Among households with children headed by either a native-born or naturalized Latino citizen, 31 percent experienced one or more of the three hardships examined in this analysis.

Hardship rates are still higher among Latino families headed by a non-citizen. Nearly half (47 percent) of families with children headed by a Latino non-citizen experienced one or more of these three hardships.⁴

Rates of hardship rise even higher when additional types of hardship are considered. A 2004 report by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services explored a wide range of hardship indicators including 14 distinct measures related to “availability of basic needs and food security” and “housing safety and overcrowding.”⁵ Using this list of measures, we find that 49 percent of black families with children and 43 percent of Latino citizen families with children experienced one or more of these 14 circumstances in 2003, compared with 31 percent of non-Latino white families.



Hardship and Poverty

Not surprisingly, rates of hardship are considerably higher among families living in poverty.⁶

- 45 percent of poor black families with children experienced overcrowded housing, food insecurity, or unmet medical needs, as did 53 percent of poor families with children headed by Latino citizens.
- Hardship rates also were high among poor white families. Some 40 percent of poor non-Latino white families with children experienced one or more of these three hardships.

⁴ The “other” category shown in figure 1 includes 1.6 million Asian and Pacific Islander families and 0.4 million Native American (American Indian, Eskimo or Aleut) families. Asian and Pacific Islander hardship rates are similar to those for non-Latino whites (18 percent experienced crowded housing, food insecurity, or unmet medical needs) while hardship rates for Native Americans (43 percent) are much higher. The relatively small number of Asian and Pacific Islander and Native American families in the Census survey data limits our ability to examine their hardship patterns in detail.

⁵ The 14 indicators include: did not pay rent or mortgage; did not pay gas, oil, or electricity bill; telephone disconnected for failure to pay; needed to see doctor or go to hospital but did not; needed to see dentist but did not; food insecure; problems with pests; leaking roof or ceiling; broken windows; exposed wires, nonworking plumbing; holes in walls or ceiling; holes in floor; overcrowding. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2004), *Measures of Material Hardship: Final Report*, available at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/material-hardship04>.

⁶ Poverty is defined in this analysis as annual family cash income (for the 12 months prior to the hardship survey) below the poverty line (about \$14,680 for a three-person family in 2003 and \$18,810 for a family of four).

SIPP Data May Be Eliminated Without Congressional Action

The 2003 hardship data used in this analysis may be among the last hardship data produced from the SIPP survey unless Congress provides funding to continue the survey. The Administration plans to terminate the SIPP in response to low funding levels from Congress for the Census Bureau overall.

SIPP provides a unique set of data on hardships facing low-income families. A number of other nationally representative data sources provide data on individual hardships, such as food insecurity or crowded housing, but none besides SIPP provides an ongoing, cumulative picture of the extent to which families are affected by one or more hardships. (One privately-funded survey, the National Survey of America's Families, provided cumulative hardship data for 2002, but funding for that survey has not been renewed.)

SIPP also provides unique data on families' monthly income fluctuations and their eligibility and participation in a wide range of government programs — data that are useful in assessing program participation rates and how program resources are being targeted.

Rates of hardship rise higher among poor families when additional types of hardship are considered. Using the 14 distinct measures examined by HHS, we find that 71 percent of poor black families with children experienced one or more of these circumstances, as did 65 percent of poor Latino citizen families with children and 61 percent of poor white families.

The high rates of poverty among minority families with children contribute to their risk of hardship. Poverty rates are two to four times higher among black families (29 percent) and Latino citizen families (17 percent) than among non-Latino white families (8 percent) in the SIPP data.

Poverty data in SIPP show that, regardless of race or ethnicity, most able-bodied families in poverty work. Leaving aside families headed by someone who was 65 or older or had a work-preventing disability, seventy-five percent of poor black families with children and 85 percent of poor Latino citizen families with children had some amount of earnings during the year.

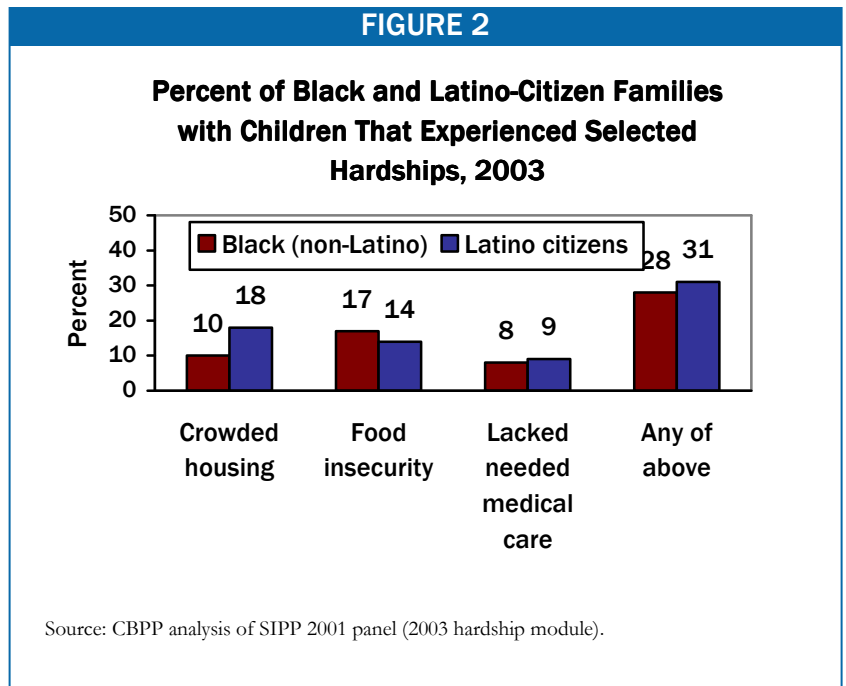
In most cases, work provides more than half the family's income. Sixty-one percent of able-bodied poor black families with children and 67 percent of able-bodied poor Latino citizen families with children received more than half of their annual income from earnings, as did 70 percent of able-bodied poor white families. Among able-bodied poor Latino *non-citizen* families with children, the figure was 87 percent.

High reliance on work, however, does not protect poor families from hardship. The chances of experiencing crowded housing, food insecurity, or unmet medical needs were virtually identical among poor able-bodied families with children, regardless of whether they received most of their income from work (48 percent) or not (47 percent).

Comparing Racial and Ethnic Groups

The different racial and ethnic groups face somewhat different types of hardship, with crowded housing being especially widespread among Latinos.

- For black families, the most common of the three hardships examined was food insecurity: 17 percent of non-Latino black families with children experienced food insecurity during the four months preceding the survey, while 10 percent experienced crowded housing and 8 percent had unmet medical needs.
- For Latino families, rates of crowded housing were significantly higher than for other groups. One in six families headed by a Latino citizen (18 percent) lived in crowded housing, with more than one person per room. Fourteen percent of Latino citizen families experienced food insecurity, and 9 percent reported unmet medical needs.
- For non-Latino white families, food insecurity (7 percent) and unmet medical needs (7 percent) were more common than living in crowded housing (3 percent).



Combining citizen and non-citizen families together, the SIPP data indicate that 38 percent of Latino families overall face one of the three hardships examined here: crowded housing, food insecurity, or unmet medical needs. This is significantly more than among non-Latino families, whether white (14 percent) or black (28 percent).

On the other hand, other groups fare worse than Latinos on certain other hardship measures. For example, non-Latino blacks have slightly higher rates of a particularly severe category of food insecurity, termed food insecurity with hunger (see Appendix Table).⁷

⁷ Some additional measures of living conditions in the SIPP data that are not examined in detail in this analysis also show black families faring comparatively poorly. For example, 5 percent of non-Latino black families had their heat or power cut off following a failure to pay bills, compared with 2 percent of non-Latino white families and 3 percent of Latino families.

Definitions of Hardships

Crowded living conditions (or **crowded housing**) are defined as more than 1 person per room, a standard used by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The other three hardships discussed in this analysis are defined as they are in a 2004 report issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*:

Lack of needed medical care means the family answered “yes” when asked “In the past 12 months, was there a time anyone in your household needed to see a doctor or go to the hospital but did not go?”

Food Insecurity as defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture means that a household’s “access to enough food is limited by a lack of money and other resources.” In the SIPP data, food insecurity is determined by a positive answer to at least two out of five questions ranging from “[In the past four months] The food that we bought just didn’t last and we didn’t have money to get more” to “[In the past four months, did you or the other adults in the family ever] Not eat for a whole day because there wasn’t enough money for food.” **Food insecurity with hunger** is considered a particularly severe form of food insecurity and is determined by positive answers to at least four of the five questions. Unlike the other hardship questions (which refer to the previous 12 months), the food insecurity and hunger questions in SIPP are asked with respect to the previous four months.

* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2004), *Measures of Material Hardship: Final Report*, available at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/material-hardship04/>.

Changes Since the SIPP Survey

The government has not published comparable data showing families' cumulative experience of a range of hardships since the SIPP data examined here. It has, however, published updated figures for some individual hardship measures. These data differ slightly from the data used in this analysis in terms of the concepts and time periods measured.

The newer data show that the proportion of all Latino families with children that experienced food insecurity has declined since 2003, a change that may in part reflect the restoration of food stamp benefits to some legal immigrants under the 2002 Farm Bill. The proportion of Latino families with children experiencing food insecurity in the previous 12 months fell from 28.1 percent in 2003 to 21.6 percent in 2005, according to a recent Agriculture Department report

In other respects, the data show little change. The proportion of all Latino families with children not receiving needed medical care, or receiving delayed care, due to cost in the past year increased slightly, from 13 percent in 2002/2003 (the time period of the SIPP medical hardship questions) to 14 percent in 2005, according to data from the National Health Interview Survey.

The proportion of all Latino households living in overcrowded housing did not change significantly from 2003 to 2005, according to data from the American Housing Survey. For blacks, none of these three measures — food insecurity, delayed or no medical care, or crowded housing — changed significantly through 2005.

APPENDIX TABLE — HARSHIPS AND POVERTY STATUS

**Families with Children
by Ethnicity and Race of Head of Household: 2003**

	<u>White non-Latino</u>	<u>Black non-Latino</u>	<u>Latino citizen</u>	<u>Latino non-citizen</u>	<u>Latino total</u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>Percent with Selected Hardships, 2003</u>							
All Incomes							
Crowded Housing	3%	10%	18%	32%	24%	14%	8%
Food insecurity	7	17	14	20	17	9	10
With Hunger	3	7	4	5	5	4	4
Unmet Medical Needs	7	8	9	15	12	5	7
Any of the above	14	28	31	47	38	22	20
In Poverty							
Crowded Housing	9	16	29	46	38	31	19
Food Insecurity	24	31	36	34	35	33	29
With Hunger	14	10	8	13	10	21	12
Unmet Medical Needs	16	10	15	24	19	16	15
Any of the above	40	45	52	64	59	59	47
Not in Poverty							
Crowded Housing	2	7	16	27	20	11	6
Food Insecurity	6	11	10	15	12	6	7
Hunger	2	5	3	3	3	2	3
Unmet Medical Needs	6	7	8	12	10	4	6
Any of the above	12	21	27	41	32	18	16
<u>Number of Households with Children</u>							
Total (000s)	25,062	5,504	3,718	2,198	6,447*	2,049	39,062
In Poverty (000s)	2,126	1,589	634	547	1,345	229	5,289
Percent in Poverty (%)	8.5	28.9	17.1	24.9	20.9	11.2	13.5

* Includes 535,000 whose citizenship could not be determined at the time of the 2003 SIPP survey module on hardship because the head of household was not present in the household in 2001 when the citizenship question was asked or was too young to ask (under age 15 in 2001).

Source: CBPP analysis of the Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2001 panel. Hardship questions were asked between May and August 2003, depending on the household. Figures show the percentage of families ever experiencing the hardship in the preceding 12 months (4 months in the case of food insecurity and hunger). Poverty status is based on annual family cash income for the same 12-month period. (For families for which data on income or family size are missing in some months, poverty status is based on the family's average income and family size in the available months.)