

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHY AND  
CIRCUMSTANCES FOR YOUNG  
BLACK CHILDREN IN AFRICAN AND  
CARIBBEAN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES



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A PROJECT OF THE MIGRATION POLICY INSTITUTE'S NATIONAL CENTER ON IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION POLICY

# Changing Demography and Circumstances for Young Black Children in African and Caribbean Immigrant Families

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For more on the Young Children in Black Immigrant Families research initiative, please visit:

[www.migrationpolicy.org/integration/cbi.cfm](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/integration/cbi.cfm).

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## Executive Summary

Driven by increasing migration from Africa and sustained flows from the Caribbean, the number of Black immigrants in the United States has more than doubled over the past 20 years. As a result, the number of children with a Black foreign-born parent has also more than doubled during this period. Today about 813,000 children from birth to age 10 reside with a Black immigrant parent and together these children account for roughly 12 percent of all young Black children in the United States. This trend holds important implications for the US Black child population as well as the overall child population as both are becoming increasingly diverse in their origins, languages, and other characteristics.

The majority of children of Black immigrants have parents who come from Africa and the Caribbean, but no single country accounts for more than one-fifth of this population. The diversity of Black immigrant origins makes it difficult to generalize about the well-being of children of Black immigrants, given that well-being indicators vary greatly by parental country of origin. That said, in general the children of Black immigrants fall in the middle of multiple well-being indicators with Asian and white children tending to fare better and Hispanic children and Black children of natives (i.e., African Americans) tending to fare worse. Black children with parents from Africa generally fare about as well as their counterparts with parents from the Caribbean and, in both cases, children of Black immigrants born in English-speaking countries with a long history of immigration to the United States — for instance, Nigeria, Ghana, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago — tend to be the most advantaged. Children with parents from countries with shorter immigration histories, where English is not a common language, and with substantial refugee flows are likely to be more disadvantaged. Those with origins in the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and war-torn African nations such as Sudan and Somali are most at risk on several key indicators.

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*In general the children of Black immigrants fall in the middle of multiple well-being indicators.*

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Key strengths of Black immigrant families include:

- **High parental employment.** Children of Black immigrants have fathers who, regardless of origin, exhibit high rates of employment, while those with mothers from the Caribbean are more likely than those from Africa to have working mothers. Children of Black immigrants from the Caribbean have mothers whose employment rates are among the highest of any major demographic group, a fact that may be related to the high share of mother-headed single-parent families in the Black Caribbean immigrant population.
- **High levels of parental education and English proficiency.** The majority of children of Black immigrants have at least one parent who speaks English fluently, in contrast to the children of Hispanic immigrants, most of whom have parents with limited English proficiency. Children of Black immigrants have parents with higher college graduation rates than Black children with native-born parents and Hispanic children regardless of parental birthplace. However, children with Black parents from Africa tend to have fathers who are much better educated than their mothers.
- **High parental citizenship rates.** Black children of immigrants are also *less* likely than their Hispanic peers to have parents who are unauthorized and *more* likely to have parents who are US citizens facilitating access to public benefits and services and, in some cases, their pace of integration. Although parents from some refugee origin countries are the least likely to be US citizens given their relatively recent arrival in the United States, those who entered the country as refugees are eligible for benefits and services roughly on the same basis as US citizens.
- **High enrollment in early education.** Children of Black immigrants have the second highest rate of prekindergarten enrollment of any major nativity/race-ethnicity group, with only the



children of Asian natives being enrolled in prekindergarten at higher rates.

- **High rates of health insurance coverage.** Children of Black immigrants are far less likely to lack health insurance than children of Hispanic immigrants. However, they are less likely to be insured than any racial/ethnic group of children of natives.

## Risk Factors

Despite relatively high parental educational attainment and employment, children of Black immigrants have relatively high poverty rates. Children in Black immigrant families are twice as likely to live in poverty as white or Asian children — though the poverty rates for African American and Hispanic children are higher.

Elevated levels of hardship are also consistently observed for children with parents born in some African refugee-sending countries and less-developed Caribbean countries where English is not the common language. Children of Black immigrants born in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Sudan, and Somalia have parents with comparatively low English proficiency rates and educational attainment. Children of Black immigrants from some refugee-origin countries also have mothers who exhibit low employment rates, and children with Black parents from the refugee-origin countries of Somalia and Sudan often live in families with five or more children, stretching parental resources available to promote child well-being. Crowded housing conditions — associated with several risks factors for children’s health, well-being, and development — are also common among Black immigrant families with origins in Haiti, Sudan, and Somalia. Among the critical policy issues raised by these disadvantages are providing sustained assistance to refugee families to help children with adjustment, integration, and school performance; developing more permanent forms of legal status for Haitian parents and children who hold Temporary Protected Status (TPS), a temporary immigration status that does not confer benefits eligibility in most states; and extending basic health benefits eligibility to TPS recipients and their children.

## I. Introduction

The number of US children of Black immigrants has grown rapidly over the past two decades. Driven by increasing migration from Africa and sustained flows from the Caribbean, the number of Black immigrants in the United States has more than doubled over the past 20 years.<sup>1</sup> As a result, the number of children from birth to 10 with a Black foreign-born parent has also more than doubled, rising from 363,000 in 1990 to 813,000 in 2005-09 (see Table 1).

Children of immigrants also comprise an increasing share of Black children. Between 1990 and 2005-09, children of any race with at least one foreign-born parent rose from 13 percent to 24 percent of all US children aged 10 and younger. During the same period, the share of Black children with immigrant parents rose from 7 percent to 12 percent. This trend holds important social implications, since, as described in this report, the US Black child population is becoming increasingly diverse in origins, languages spoken, and other characteristics.

In order to account for potential racial differences between parents and children within the same family, this report focuses on *Black children with Black immigrant parents*. The definition of “Black” children and parents here includes those self-reported in the data as either only Black race or Black and another race (i.e., multiracial).<sup>2</sup>

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1 Randy Capps, Kristen McCabe, and Michael Fix, *Diverse Streams: Black African Migration to the United States* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2012).

2 Prior to 2000, census forms did not permit respondents to report multiple racial identifications. Estimates provided for years before 2000 count only those individuals who reported their race as Black alone.



The report's goal is to provide new and comprehensive data on the changing demography and circumstances of children in Black immigrant families. To this end, the report reviews several standard family, parent, and child indicators that influence child well-being. These indicators are available in the US Census Bureau's annual American Community Survey (ACS), the most comprehensive data set on the US population.<sup>3</sup> They include:

- Family structure
- Parental citizenship
- Home language and linguistic isolation
- Parental education and employment
- Income and poverty
- Housing conditions
- Enrollment in prekindergarten
- Health insurance coverage

Throughout the report, children of Black immigrants are compared on these indicators with children of Black natives and with children of white, Hispanic, and Asian immigrants and natives. The analysis also compares children of Black immigrants from Africa with those from the Caribbean and provides data on some individual origin countries.

The ACS data are generally taken from the last five years of pooled data that were available at the time this report was written (2005 through 2009) in order to maximize the sample size and precision of the estimates for small populations.<sup>4</sup> Where useful for the analysis, comparisons are made with earlier periods using the 1990 and 2000 Census of Population and Housing.

**Table 1. Children from Birth through Age 10 with Black Immigrant Parents: 1990, 2000, 2005-09**

	Number of Black Children with Black Immigrant Parents (thousands)	Share of All Black Children (%)	Share of All Children in Immigrant Families (%)	Number of All Black Children (thousands)	Number of All Children in Immigrant Families (thousands)
2005-09	813	12	8	6,548	10,419
2000	625	10	7	6,505	8,552
1990	363	7	7	5,434	5,112

*Notes:* Analysis includes children living with at least one parent. Race was calculated with IPUMS variables as follows: American Community Survey (ACS) — RACED (with more than one race permitted); 2000 Census — RACDET00; 1990 Census — RACED (with only one major race permitted).

*Source:* Author's analysis of data from the 1990 and 2000 US Census of Population and Housing (census); 2005-09 American Community Surveys (ACS), pooled.

3 Data accessed using Steven Ruggles, J. Trent Alexander, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Matthew B. Schroeder, and Matthew Sobek, *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 5.0* [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010. <http://usa.ipums.org/usa/index.shtml>.

4 The Census Bureau has released American Community Survey (ACS) data for 2010, but these data were not available at the time the detailed results for this report were calculated. Several years of data are needed to produce estimates for smaller populations of Black children of immigrants with different parental origins, and because these small populations are the main focus of the report, data for 2005-09 are employed.





## II. Sending Regions and Countries

This research focuses on Black children — both immigrant and US born — with at least one Black immigrant parent born in either the Caribbean or Africa. These children accounted for 86 percent (or 700,000) of the 813,000 children living in Black immigrant families in 2005-09 (see Table 3). Forty-seven percent of Black children in immigrant families have parents with origins in the Caribbean, while 39 percent have parents from Africa. Eighty percent of those with Caribbean origins are from Haiti (37 percent), Jamaica (34 percent), or Trinidad and Tobago (10 percent), and another 5 percent are from the Dominican Republic. Children of Black African immigrants have more diverse origins, with the largest proportions of parents from Nigeria (22 percent), Ethiopia (11 percent), Somalia (9 percent), Ghana (8 percent), Kenya (6 percent), and Liberia (5 percent).

## III. Geographic Concentration

For children of immigrants overall, the five top states of residence are California, Texas, New York, Florida, and Illinois. But Black children in immigrant families are more heavily concentrated on the East Coast (see Table 2). Two-thirds live in Eastern states: 22 percent in New York, 18 percent in Florida, and 24 percent in Massachusetts, New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia, and Georgia combined. California and Texas each account for about 5 percent of Black children in immigrant families, and 3 percent live in Minnesota. The remaining 23 percent are dispersed across the remaining 40 states and the District of Columbia.

**Table 2. States with Largest Numbers of Children of Black Immigrants from Birth through Age 10, by Parental Region of Birth**

	Black Children of Black Immigrants			Black Children of Black Caribbean Immigrants			Black Children of Black African Immigrants	
	(%)	Number (thousands)		(%)	Number (thousands)		(%)	Number (thousands)
US Total	100	813	US Total	100	384	US Total	100	316
New York	22	182	Florida	32	123	New York	11	34
Florida	17	142	New York	30	117	Maryland	9	30
New Jersey	6	48	New Jersey	7	27	Texas	9	29
Maryland	6	46	Massachusetts	5	21	California	7	23
Georgia	5	42	Georgia	4	16	Minnesota	7	21
Texas	5	41	Connecticut	3	13	Georgia	6	20
California	5	39	Maryland	3	12	Virginia	5	15
Massachusetts	5	37	Pennsylvania	3	10	New Jersey	4	14
Minnesota	3	23	Texas	2	6	Massachusetts	4	12
Virginia	3	22	California	1	5	Ohio	3	11

Notes: Analysis includes children living with at least one parent. Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100.

Source: Author's analysis of 2005-09 ACS, pooled.



**Table 3. Black Children from Birth through Age 10, by Immigrant Origin: 2005-09**

	Number (thousands)	(%)
All Children in United States	42,561	–
Children of Immigrants <sup>0</sup>	10,419	24
All Black Children in United States	6,548	–
Black Children with Immigrant Parents <sup>1</sup>	813	8
Black Children with Immigrant Parent from:		
Caribbean <sup>2</sup>	384	47
Haiti <sup>3</sup>	141	37
Jamaica <sup>3</sup>	129	34
Trinidad and Tobago <sup>3</sup>	38	10
Dominican Republic <sup>3</sup>	19	5
Bahamas <sup>3</sup>	9	2
Other Caribbean <sup>3</sup>	9	2
Barbados <sup>3</sup>	9	2
Grenada <sup>3</sup>	7	2
St. Lucia <sup>3</sup>	6	2
Dominica <sup>3</sup>	5	1
St. Vincent <sup>3</sup>	5	1
Antigua <sup>3</sup>	4	1
Cuba <sup>3</sup>	3	1
St. Kitts <sup>3</sup>	2	1
Bermuda <sup>3</sup>	1	0
Africa <sup>2</sup>	316	39
Nigeria <sup>4</sup>	69	22
Other Africa <sup>4</sup>	64	20
Ethiopia <sup>4</sup>	33	10
Somalia <sup>4</sup>	30	9
Ghana <sup>4</sup>	26	8
Kenya <sup>4</sup>	18	6
Liberia <sup>4</sup>	15	5
Sudan <sup>4</sup>	12	4
Sierra Leone <sup>4</sup>	9	3
Cameroon <sup>4</sup>	8	3
Eritrea <sup>4</sup>	6	2
Senegal <sup>4</sup>	5	2
Guinea <sup>4</sup>	5	2
Cape Verde <sup>4</sup>	4	1
Uganda <sup>4</sup>	3	1
Zimbabwe <sup>4</sup>	3	1
Tanzania <sup>4</sup>	2	1
Egypt <sup>4</sup>	2	1
Morocco <sup>4</sup>	2	1
South Africa <sup>4</sup>	2	1
Algeria <sup>4</sup>	-	0

Notes: Analysis includes children living with at least one parent. Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100.

<sup>0</sup> Percent displayed is percent of all children; <sup>1</sup> Percent displayed is percent of all Black children; <sup>2</sup> Percent displayed is percent of Black children of immigrants; <sup>3</sup> Percent displayed is percent of Black children with Caribbean origins; and <sup>4</sup> Percent displayed is percent of Black children with African origins.

Source: Author's analysis of 2005-09 ACS, pooled.



The high concentration of children of Black immigrants along the East Coast is especially prominent among children with Caribbean parents, as children with African parents are more geographically dispersed. Among Black children with Caribbean origins, almost two-thirds live in just two states: Florida (32 percent) and New York (31 percent). Over one-quarter live in other East Coast states: 7 percent in New Jersey, 6 percent in Massachusetts, 4 percent each in Georgia and in Connecticut, and 3 percent each in Maryland and in Pennsylvania.

Black children in immigrant families from Africa are more spatially dispersed. New York had the highest concentration (11 percent), but no other state accounted for more than 10 percent.

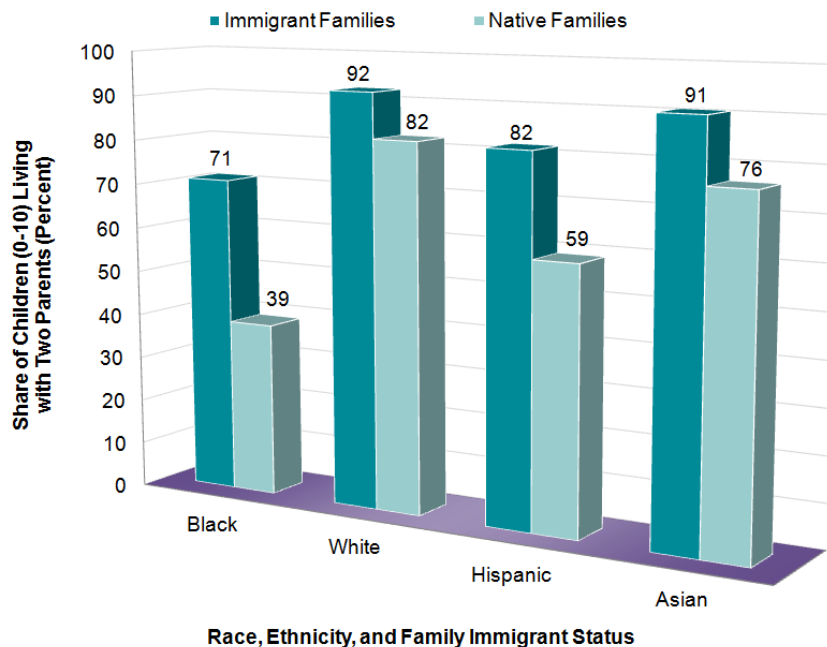
## IV. Family Structure

### A. Two-Parent Families

Most children of immigrants live in two-parent families, and children in two-parent families tend to be advantaged in their educational outcomes compared to children in one-parent families.<sup>5</sup>

Compared to their counterparts in native-born Black families, Black children in immigrant families are significantly more likely to live with two parents (71 versus 39 percent); they are also more likely to live with two parents than Hispanic children of natives (59 percent). They are less likely, however, to live in two-parent families than children of immigrants in the other major race-ethnic groups (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Share of Children Living with Two Parents from Birth through Age 10, by Race-Ethnicity and Family Immigrant Status**



Note: Analysis includes children living with at least one parent.

Source: Author's analysis of 2005-09 ACS, pooled.

5 Andrew J. Cherlin, "Going to Extremes: Family Structure, Children's Well-Being, and Social Sciences," *Demography* 36, No. 4 (1999): 421-28; Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).



Black children in African immigrant families are more likely to live in two-parent homes than their peers in Caribbean immigrant families (76 versus 65 percent). The two-parent share of children among African immigrant families is nearly as high as for Hispanic immigrant and white native families.

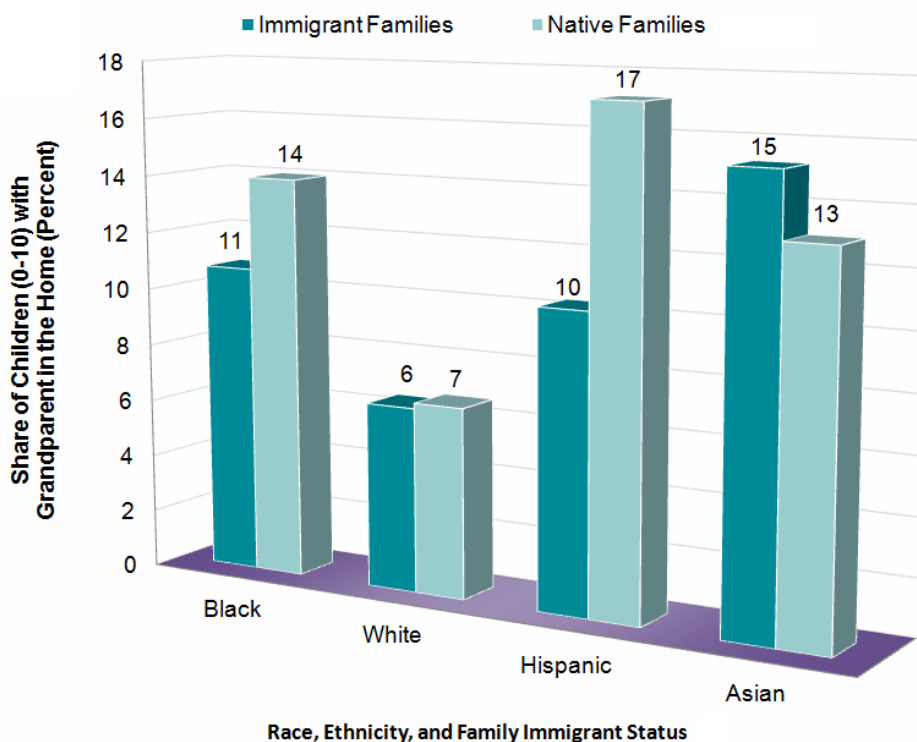
To be more specific, the large majority of Black children with parents born in Ethiopia/Eritrea (79 percent), Nigeria (82 percent), and Sudan (81 percent) live with two parents. The share is lower for Black children with origins in Ghana (70 percent), Haiti (69 percent), and Somalia (68 percent), and for children with origins in Jamaica (62 percent) and other English-speaking Caribbean countries (65 percent) and the Dominican Republic (57 percent).

## B. Extended-Family Households

Grandparents and adult household members may be available to help parents nurture and care for children in the home, allowing parents greater work flexibility. Black and Hispanic children in immigrant families are equally likely to have a grandparent in the home (11 percent versus 10 percent, see Figure 2). The proportions are somewhat higher for Black children in native-born families (14 percent) and for Asian children in both immigrant and native-born families (15 percent and 13 percent, respectively), and higher still for Hispanics in native-born families (17 percent). Among white children, only 6-7 percent have a grandparent in the home.

The shares of Black immigrants' children living in extended families vary by sending regions: 13 percent of children with Caribbean origins have a grandparent in the home, as do 8 percent of those with African origins. The proximity of the Caribbean to the United States and the long history of migration between the two help explain this difference.

**Figure 2. Share of Children from Birth through Age 10 with Grandparent in Home, by Race, Ethnicity, and Family Immigrant Status**



Note: Analysis includes children living with at least one parent.

Source: Author's analysis of 2005-09 ACS, pooled.



### C. Number of Children in the Family

Having brothers and sisters can be a mixed blessing. Growing up in a large family can be beneficial, because siblings share the companionship of childhood and may provide important supports throughout adulthood. But siblings can also be competitors for the limited time and financial resources of their parents, which can lead to reduced educational attainment, and to lower occupational achievement and income during adulthood.<sup>6</sup>

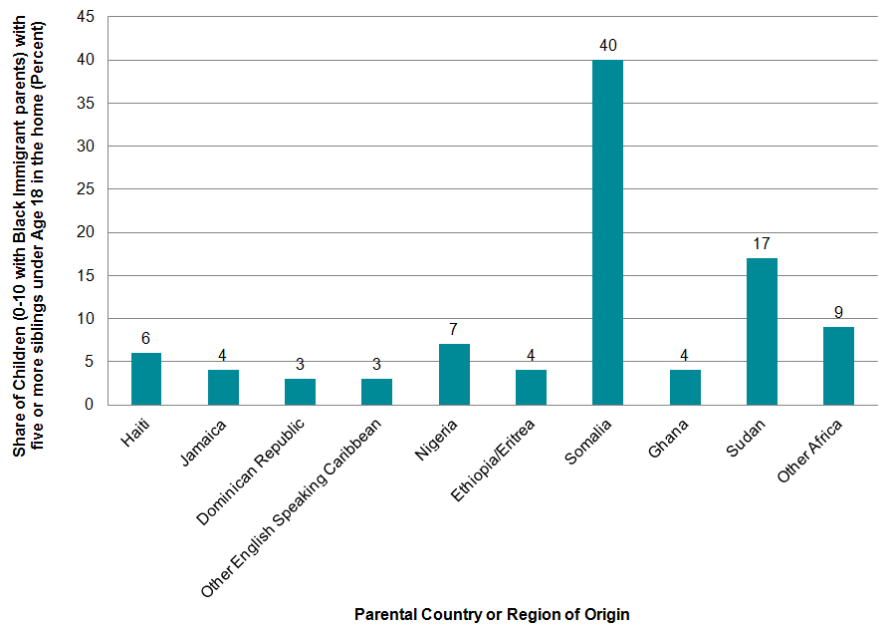
Black children in immigrant and native-born families are about equally likely to live in small families with one or two children (60 percent and 59 percent, respectively) or in medium-sized families with three or four children (34 percent). When compared with white, Hispanic, and Asian children, there is not much variation in the number of children per family.

In terms of sending regions, most Black children with Caribbean origins (63 percent) live in small families. Among Black children with parents born in Caribbean countries, no origin group has more than 6 percent of children living in large families with five or six children or more than 2 percent in families with seven or more children.

Meanwhile, Black families with parents from several African countries are larger.

Comparatively few Black children with origins in Sudan and Somalia live in small families (32 percent and 26 percent, respectively). Fifty-one percent of Black children with Sudanese-born parents live in families with three to four children, and 17 percent live in families with five or more children (see Figure 3). The proportion of children in Somali families with five or more children (40 percent) is much higher than for any of the other groups.

**Figure 3. Share of Children (from Birth through Age 10 with Black Immigrant Parents) Who Have Five or More Siblings under Age 18 in the Home, by Parental Country or Region of Origin**



Note: Analysis includes children living with at least one parent.

Source: Author's analysis of 2005-09 ACS, pooled.

6 Peter M. Blau and Otis Dudley Duncan, *The American Occupational Structure* (New York: Wiley, 1967); David L. Featherman and Robert Mason Hauser, *Opportunity and Change* (New York: Academic Press, 1978); Judith Blake, "Family Size and the Quality of Children," *Demography* 18 (1981), 321-42; Judith Blake, "Number of Siblings and Educational Mobility," *American Sociological Review* 50 (1985): 84-94. Judith Blake, "Differential Parental Investment: Its Effects on Child Quality and Status Attainment," in Jane B. Lancaster, Jeanne Altmann, Alice S. Rossi, and Lonnie R. Sherrod, *Parenting Across the Life Span: Biosocial Dimensions* (New York: Alsiné De Gruyter, 1987), 351-75; Judith Blake, *Family Size and Achievement* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989).



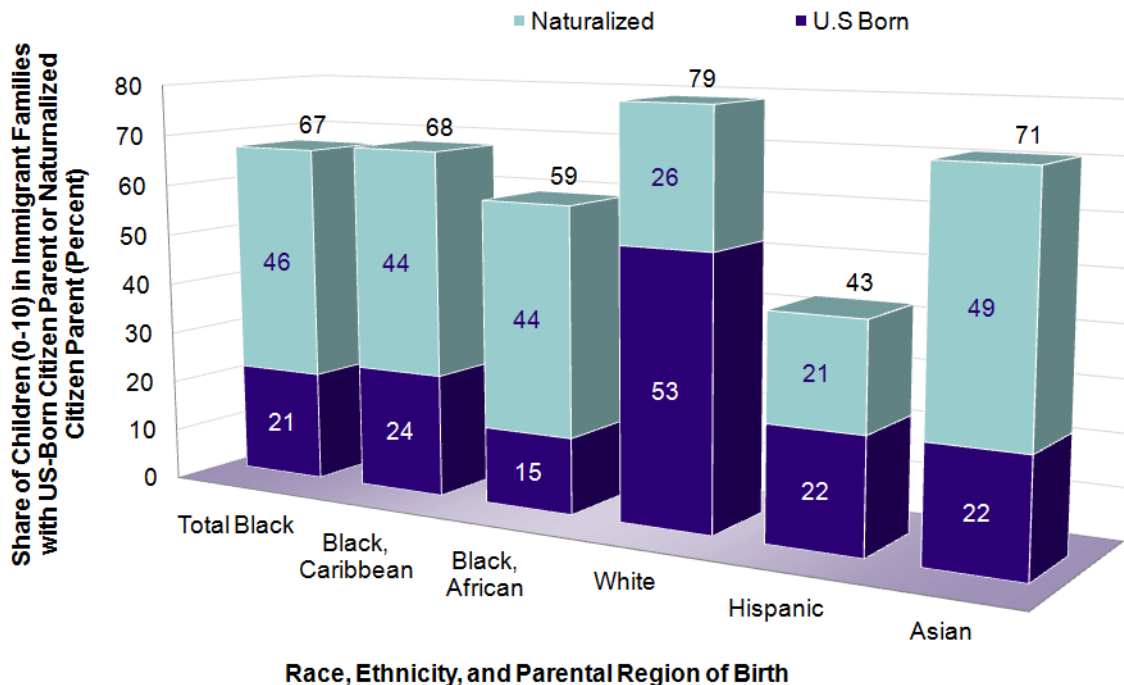
## V. Family, Social, and Economic Resources

### A. US Citizenship of Parents and Children

US citizenship is important for children and their parents because it provides access to important public benefits and services, and the right to vote in local, state, and national elections.<sup>7</sup> By definition, all children in immigrant families have at least one immigrant parent; however, many of these children also live with a US-born parent or a parent who is a naturalized US citizen.

Overall, 67 percent of Black immigrants' children live with at least one citizen parent — a higher rate than children of Hispanic immigrants (59 percent) but lower than children of Asian immigrants (71 percent) and children of white immigrants (79 percent, see Figure 4). Caribbean-born parents of young children are more likely to be US citizens than African-born parents. African parents' lower rates of citizenship may be associated with their relatively recent arrival, as it generally takes five years of legal US residency for immigrants to qualify for US citizenship.<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 4. Share of Children (from Birth through Age 10) in Immigrant Families with US-Born Citizen Parent or Naturalized Citizen Parent, by Race, Ethnicity, and Parental Region of Birth**



Notes: Analysis includes children living with at least one parent. Due to rounding, values may not add up to 100 percent.

Source: Author's analysis of 2005-09 ACS, pooled.

7 Randy Capps, Genevieve Kenny, and Michael Fix, "Health Insurance Coverage of Children in Mixed-Status Immigrant Families," in *Snapshots of America's Families III*, No. 12 (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2003); Michael Fix and Jeffrey S. Passel, *Trends in Noncitizens' and Citizens' Use of Public Benefits Following Welfare Reform: 1994-97* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 1999), [www.urban.org/publications/408086.html](http://www.urban.org/publications/408086.html); Michael Fix and Wendy Zimmerman, "When Should Immigrants Receive Benefits?" in Isabel V. Sawhill, ed., *Welfare Reform: An Analysis of the Issues* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 1995); Donald J. Hernandez and Evan Charney, eds., *From Generation to Generation: The Health and Well-Being of Children in Immigrant Families* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1998), [www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record\\_id=6164#toc](http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=6164#toc); Wendy Zimmermann and Karen Tumlin, "Patchwork Policies: State Assistance for Immigrants under Welfare Reform" (Occasional Paper No. 24, The Urban Institute, Washington, DC, 1999), [www.urban.org/publications/309007.html](http://www.urban.org/publications/309007.html).

8 The waiting period for citizenship is three years for legal immigrants married to US citizens.



While Black children with Caribbean-born parents are more likely to have a naturalized parent, they are equally likely as children with African-born parents to have a US-born parent (44 percent). This share is substantially higher than among white and Hispanic children of immigrants (both below 30 percent), though slightly lower than Asian children of immigrants (49 percent). These figures reflect substantial intermarriage between immigrants and natives in the Asian and Black populations.

Rates of parental citizenship are lowest for Black children of Somali (51 percent) and Sudanese (54 percent) origins and highest for those of Jamaican and Nigerian origins (75 percent). These high rates are likely due to the fact that Jamaica and Nigeria have relatively long histories of US immigration. By contrast, Somali and Sudanese immigrants have arrived most recently, many entering as refugees. These factors may slow their intermarriage rates and perhaps their children's integration.

Despite these variations across parental origin countries, the findings described here suggest that Black children of immigrants live in families with parents who have made commitments to the United States by acquiring citizenship and/or marrying US citizens. Comparatively high rates of parental citizenship bode well for the integration of children with Black immigrant parents.

Regardless of parental origin or citizenship, the overwhelming majority (90 percent) of Black children of immigrants are US-born citizens. Ninety-three percent of Black children with Caribbean origins are citizens; the share for those with African origins is slightly lower (85 percent), potentially due to the fact that African immigrants — both parents and children — arrived more recently.

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*Comparatively high rates of parental citizenship  
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Black immigrant parents.*

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Even when children are US citizens, however, their parents are often noncitizens — and lack of citizenship can disqualify these parents from important benefits and services for their families. For instance, the 1996 federal welfare reform law and subsequent amendments restricted noncitizen access to cash welfare (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF), food stamps (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP), and public health insurance (Medicaid); in particular, immigrants with fewer than five years of legal residency and all unauthorized immigrants were excluded from these benefits in most states. Often the US-born child is eligible while the parent is not, and this can result in a reduced benefit level for TANF and SNAP. Complex eligibility rules along with fears and misconceptions about the consequences of applying for benefits can also deter noncitizen parents from seeking assistance for their needy, qualified children.<sup>9</sup>

Rates of mixed citizenship and, therefore, mixed eligibility for public benefits within families are higher for Black immigrant families than all other families, except Hispanic immigrant families.

Fifty-five percent of Black immigrants' children live in mixed-citizenship nuclear families with at least one US citizen and one noncitizen. This is substantially lower than the corresponding proportion for Hispanic children in immigrant families (75 percent), but notably higher than for white or Asian children in immigrant families (48 percent and 42 percent, respectively). The proportion living in mixed-citizenship families is essentially the same for Black children with parents from Africa (55 percent) and the Caribbean (56 percent). Children who live in mixed-citizenship families may face barriers to accessing public benefits that could be important for their well-being and development.

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Fix, ed., *Immigrants and Welfare* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009).



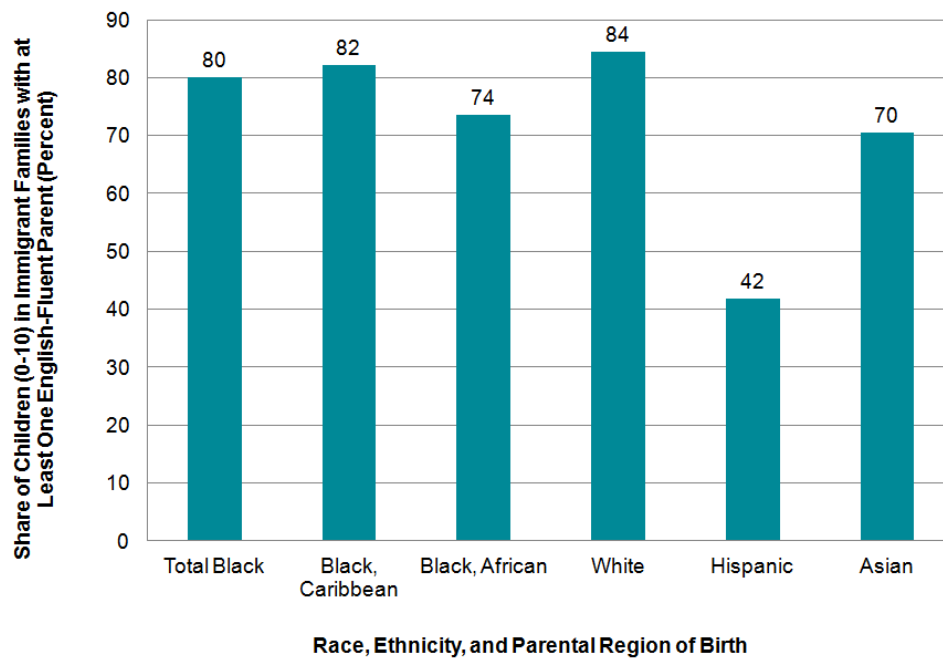


## B. English Language Fluency and Linguistic Isolation

Parents with English language skills can often get better jobs, better assist their children with school and homework, and thus better contribute to the social and economic integration of immigrant families into US society. Overall the children of Black immigrants have a substantial advantage over most other groups of children in immigrant families because of their parents' relatively high levels of English proficiency, though there are variations here as well.

Eighty percent of Black immigrants' children have at least one parent who speaks English fluently: that is, who speaks English exclusively or "very well." The other 20 percent have parents who speak English "well," "not well," or "not at all" (see Figure 5).<sup>10</sup> Black immigrants' children are only slightly less likely than white immigrants' children to have English-fluent parents (84 percent), but substantially more likely to have fluent parents than Asian (70 percent) or Hispanic (42 percent) children of immigrants.

**Figure 5. Share of Children (from Birth through Age 10) in Immigrant Families with at Least One English-Fluent Parent, by Race-Ethnicity**



*Note:* Analysis includes children living with at least one parent.

*Source:* Author's analysis of 2005-09 ACS, pooled.

English fluency rates vary widely by parental origin. Among Black children with immigrant parents from Jamaica and other English-speaking Caribbean countries, 99-100 percent live with a mother or father who is English fluent. The proportions are somewhat lower for Black children with parents born in Nigeria (92 percent) and Ghana (84 percent), and fall to about two-thirds for Ethiopia/Eritrea (67 percent) and the lower levels for those with origins in Sudan (59 percent), the Dominican Republic (58 percent), and Haiti (59 percent). Black children of Somali-born parents are the least likely to have an English-fluent parent (44 percent). In fact, refugees and other immigrants from Somalia speak several different, less common languages, potentially complicating their integration and communication with the host society.

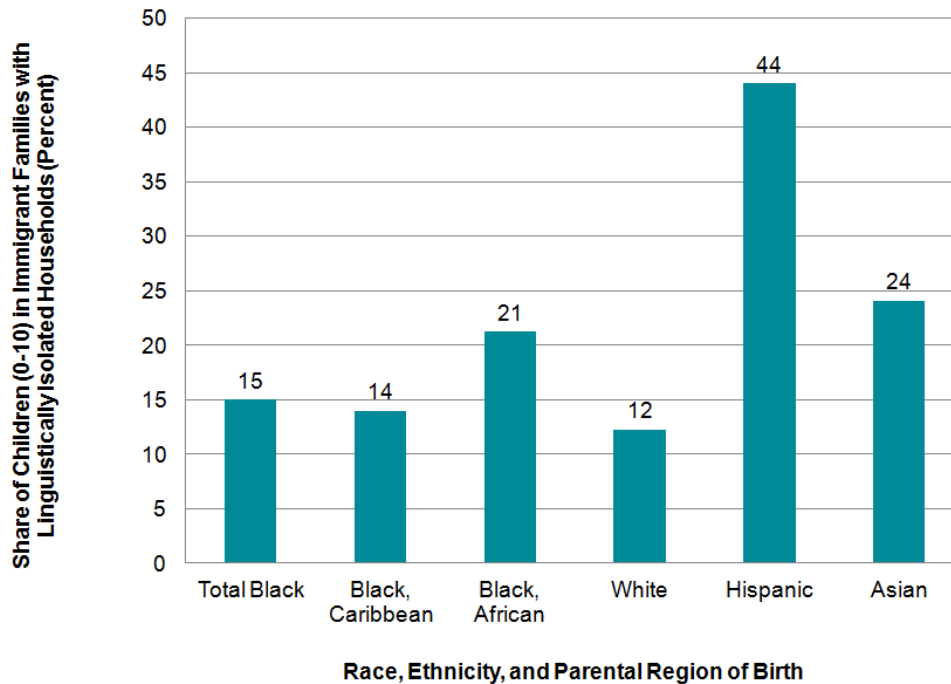
<sup>10</sup> The Census asks respondents whether people in the household over age 5 speak English or another language at home. The level of spoken English fluency is queried for those who speak another language. Those who speak English at home or speak another language and speak English very well are considered proficient. Those who speak English well, not well, or not at all are considered limited English proficient (LEP).





Linguistic isolation is a broader measure of English language fluency based on whether *all household members* aged 13 or older — including parents, older siblings, other relatives, and nonrelatives— speak English very well.<sup>11</sup> Using this broader measure, 15 percent of Black immigrants’ children live in linguistically isolated households, somewhat higher than the rate for white children in immigrant families (12 percent), but notably lower than for Asian immigrants’ children (24 percent) and Hispanic immigrants’ children (44 percent, see Figure 6).

**Figure 6. Share of Children (from Birth through Age 10) in Immigrant Families with Linguistically Isolated Households, by Race-Ethnicity**



Note: Analysis includes children living with at least one parent.

Source: Author’s analysis of 2005-09 ACS, pooled.

Only 6 percent of children with Nigerian origins and 11 percent with Ghanaian origins live in linguistically isolated households. This share rises to 27 percent for those with Ethiopian/Eritrean origins, 31 percent for Haitian, 32 percent for Sudanese, and 45 percent for children with Somali-born parents. Not surprisingly, the children of Somali and Sudanese immigrants are the most likely to be linguistically isolated, just as they are the most likely to have parents with limited English proficiency.

### C. Parental Educational Attainment

It has long been known that children whose parents have completed fewer years of schooling tend to themselves leave school earlier and obtain lower-paying jobs when they reach adulthood.<sup>12</sup> Immigrant parents often have high educational aspirations for their children, but may know little about the US educational system, particularly if they have low levels of education.<sup>13</sup>

11 Children are considered linguistically isolated if no one in the household over age 13 speaks English exclusively or very well.

12 William H. Sewell, Robert M. Hauser, and Wendy C. Wolf, “Sex, Schooling, and Occupational Status,” *American Journal of Sociology* 83, No. 3 (1980): 551–83; Featherman and Hauser, *Opportunity and Change*; William H. Sewell and Robert M. Hauser, *Education, Occupation and Earnings* (New York: Academic Press, 1975); Blau and Duncan, *The American Occupational Structure*.

13 Grace Kao, “Psychological Well-Being and Educational Achievement among Immigrant Youth,” in *Children of Immigrants: Health, Adjustment, and Public Assistance*, ed. Donald J. Hernandez (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1999), 410–77;



Children in immigrant and native-born Black families are about equally likely to have a mother who has not graduated from high school (16 percent and 15 percent respectively) or a father who has not graduated from high school (both 12 percent, see Figures 7 and 8). The proportions are several percentage points higher for Hispanic children in native-born families (19 percent for mothers and 17 percent for fathers), but much higher for Hispanic children in immigrant families (48 percent for mothers and 51 percent for fathers). In contrast, 10 percent or less of white and Asian children has either a father or mother without a high school education, regardless of parental nativity.

At the higher end of the educational distribution, children of Black immigrants are much more likely than children of Black natives to have parents who are college graduates: 33 percent versus 18 percent for fathers and 26 percent versus 15 percent for mothers (see Figures 9 and 10). Hispanic children are much less likely to have parents who are college graduates, while college attainment rates for white and Asian parents are substantially higher.

When Black children of African and Caribbean immigrants are compared, an interesting gender pattern emerges: African immigrant fathers are much better educated than mothers, while the educational attainment rates of mothers and fathers from the Caribbean are similar. For instance, Black children of Caribbean immigrants are equally likely to have mothers and fathers without a high school education (13 percent). But children of African immigrants are twice as likely to have mothers as fathers without a high school education (20 percent versus 11 percent). Similarly, the shares of Caribbean-origin children with college-educated mothers and fathers are the same (23 percent), while African-origin children are much more likely to have college-educated fathers than mothers (45 percent versus 27 percent).

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*Children of Black immigrants are much more likely than children of Black natives to have parents who are college graduates.*

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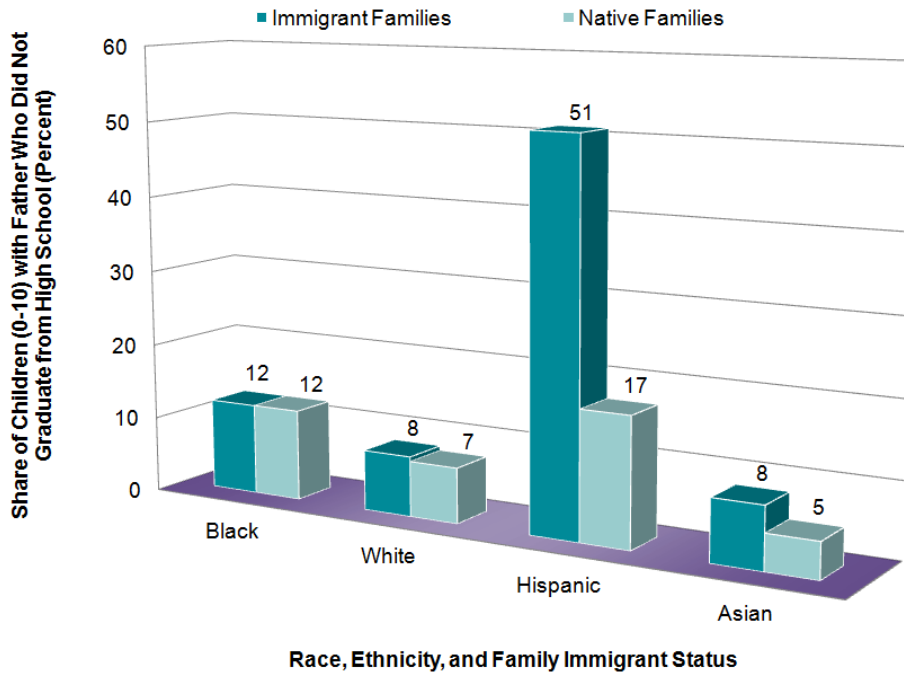
Once again, variations across origin countries are even more pronounced than those across regions. The highest high school graduation rates are found among Nigerian parents (only 1 percent of Nigerian-origin children have fathers or mothers who did not graduate), followed by children with origins in Jamaica (11 percent for fathers, 9 percent for mothers), other English-speaking Caribbean countries (9 percent for fathers, 8 percent for mothers), and Ghana (5 percent for fathers, 10 percent for mothers). By contrast, the proportion of children who have fathers who are not high school graduates is 13 percent for Sudanese children and 12 percent for Ethiopian/Eritrean-born children, while 20 percent of children with Ethiopian-/Eritrean-origin and 35 percent with Sudanese-origin parents have *mothers* who are not high school graduates. Children in Somali immigrant families are the most likely to have parents without a high school education and have the largest gap between fathers (30 percent) and mothers (53 percent).

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Rubén G. Rumbaut, "Passages to Adulthood: The Adaptation of Children of Immigrants in Southern California," in *Children of Immigrants: Health, Adjustment, and Public Assistance*, ed. Donald J. Hernandez (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1999), 478–545; Hernandez and Charney, *From Generation to Generation*.

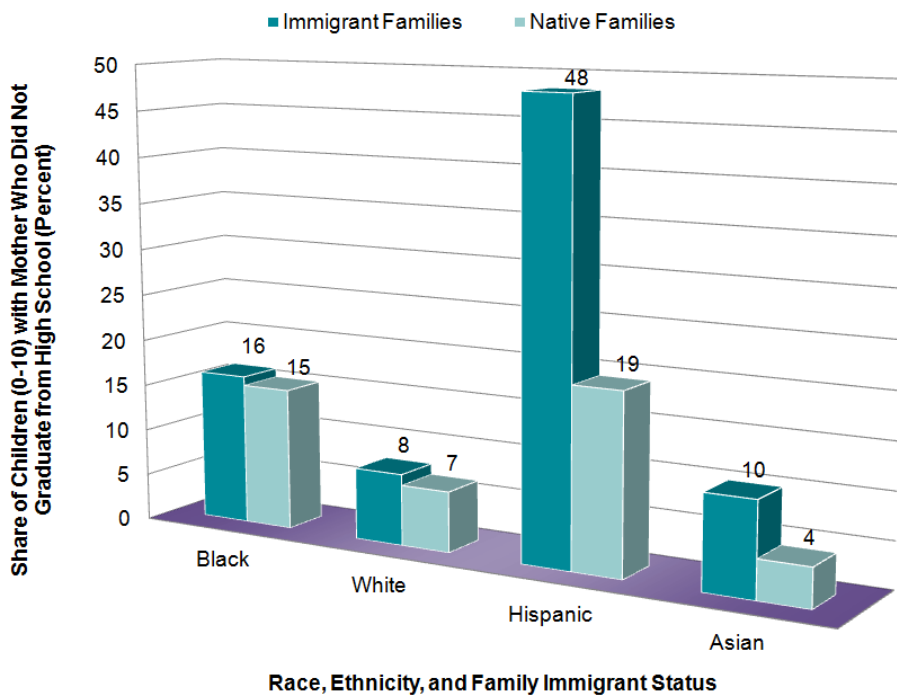


**Figure 7. Share of Children (from Birth through Age 10) with Father Who Did Not Graduate from High School, by Race, Ethnicity, and Family Immigrant Status**



Note: Analysis includes children living with father.  
Source: Author's analysis of 2005-09 ACS, pooled.

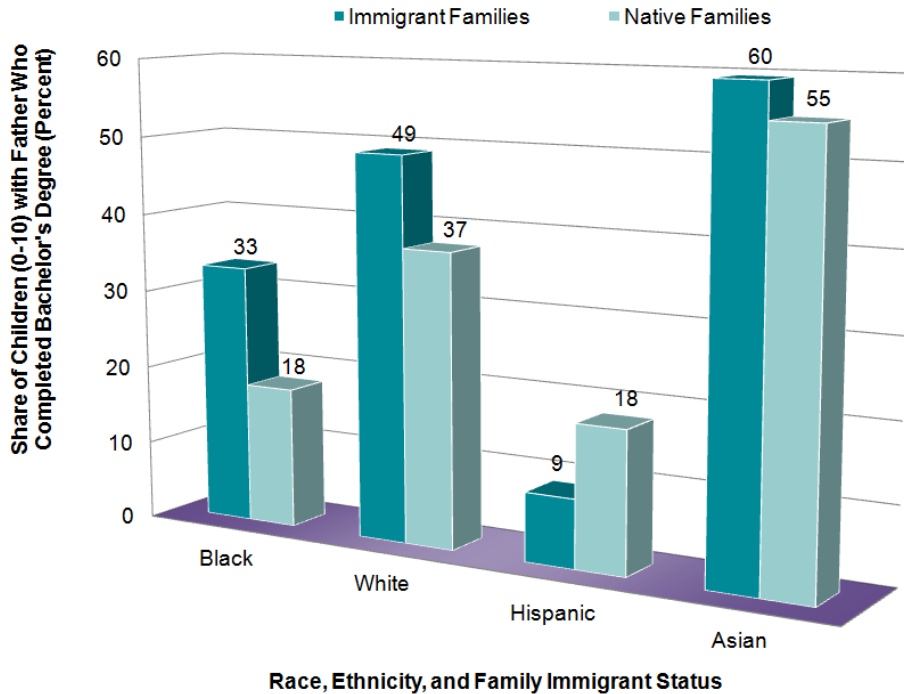
**Figure 8. Share of Children (from Birth through Age 10) with Mother Who Did Not Graduate from High School, by Race, Ethnicity, and Family Immigrant Status**



Note: Analysis includes children living with mother.  
Source: Author's analysis of 2005-09 ACS, pooled.



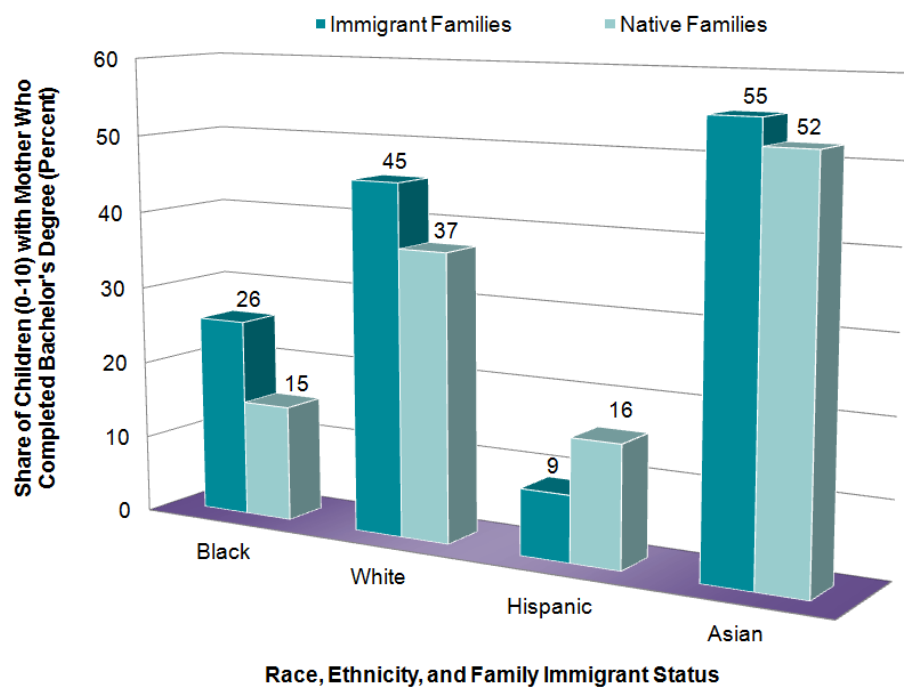
**Figure 9. Share of Children (from Birth through Age 10) with Father Who Completed Bachelor's Degree, by Race, Ethnicity, and Family Immigrant Status**



Note: Analysis includes children living with father.

Source: Author's analysis of 2005-09 ACS, pooled.

**Figure 10. Share of Children (from Birth through Age 10) with Mother Who Completed Bachelor's Degree, by Race, Ethnicity, and Family Immigrant Status**



Note: Analysis includes children living with mother.

Source: Author's analysis of 2005-09 ACS, pooled.

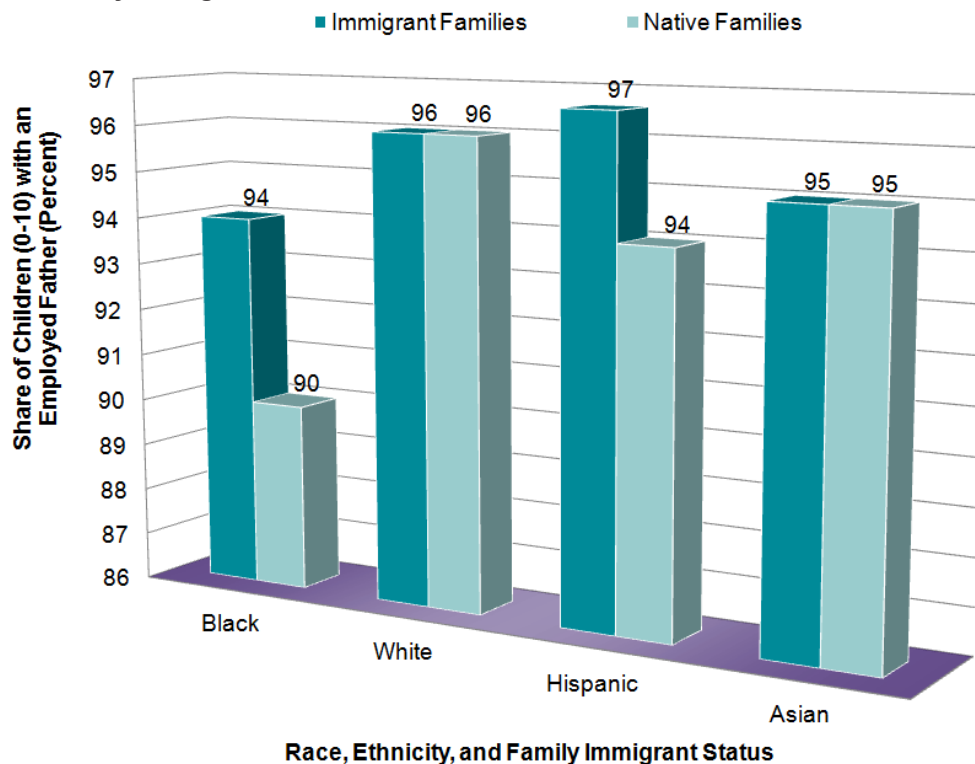


Patterns of college attainment among Black immigrant parents are similar, though gaps between fathers and mothers are larger. Children of Nigerian immigrants are the most likely to have college-educated parents (73 percent for fathers and 53 percent for mothers). In fact, children of Nigerian immigrants are even more likely to have college-educated fathers than children of Asian immigrants (60 percent). At the other end of the spectrum, 14 percent of children in Somali immigrant families have college-educated fathers, and only 5 percent have college-educated mothers. College completion rates for immigrant parents from the Caribbean tend to fall between these two extremes. For most English-speaking Caribbean countries, there is no gender gap in college completion. Notably, Black children of Jamaican immigrants are more likely to have college-educated mothers than fathers (29 percent versus 24 percent).

#### D. Parental Workforce Attachment

Almost all fathers living with their young children (94 percent) work. This high rate of employment holds for most children in African and Caribbean immigrant families (see Figure 11). Children in white, Hispanic, and Asian immigrant families are slightly more likely to have employed fathers (with rates ranging from 95 percent to 97 percent). Black children of US natives have a somewhat lower paternal employment rate (90 percent).

**Figure 11. Share of Children (from Birth through Age 10) with an Employed Father, by Race, Ethnicity, and Family Immigrant Status**



Note: Analysis includes children living with father.

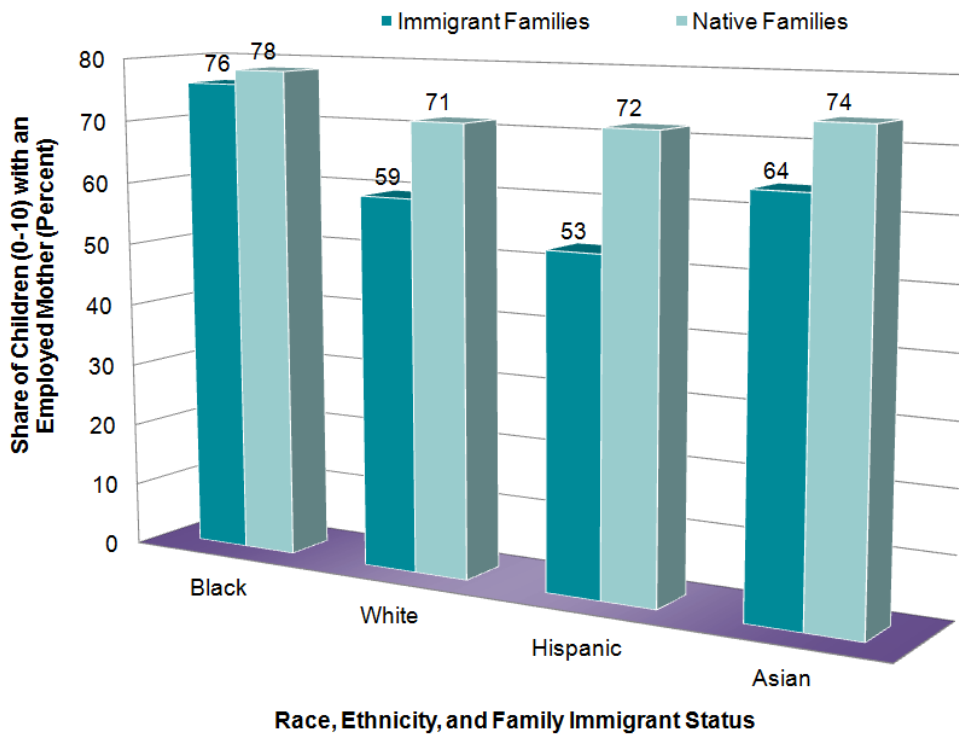
Source: Author's analysis of 2005-09 ACS, pooled.



Other studies have also found that paternal employment is nearly universal among immigrant families, regardless of their race or ethnic origin.<sup>14</sup>

The employment of immigrant mothers varies more widely. Black immigrant mothers of young children are more likely to work than mothers in all other immigrant and race-ethnic groups — except for Black native mothers (see Figure 12). Eighty-one percent of Black Caribbean immigrants' children have working mothers, exceeding the high rate for Black natives' children (78 percent). The maternal employment rate is 70 percent or higher for Black children with parents from all major African and Caribbean sending countries, except Sudan (57 percent) and Somalia (47 percent).

**Figure 12. Share of Children (from Birth through Age 10) with an Employed Mother, by Race, Ethnicity, and Family Immigrant Status**



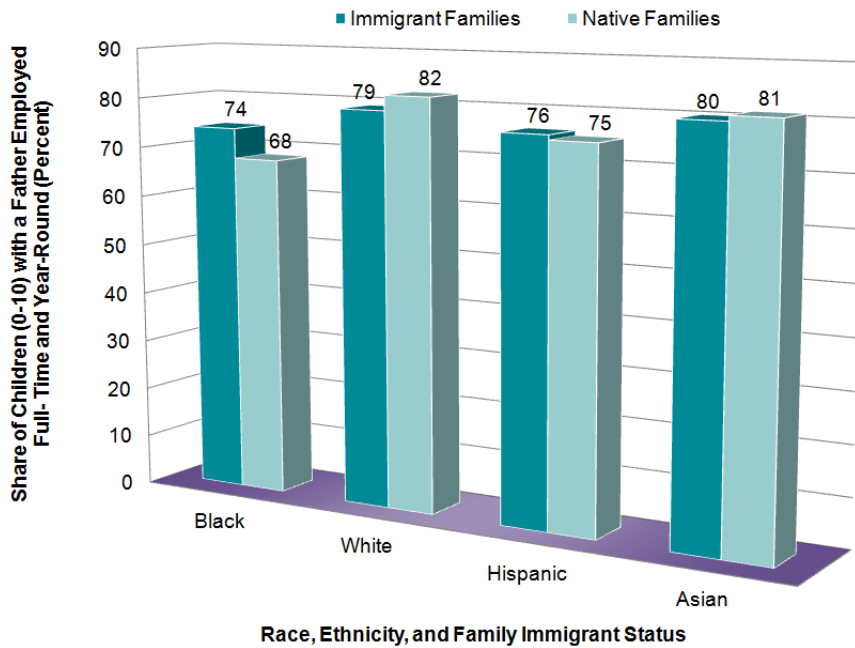
Note: Analysis includes children living with mother.  
Source: Author's analysis of 2005-09 ACS, pooled.

When it comes to full-time work, Black immigrant fathers do not fare as well as immigrant fathers in other race-ethnic groups. The share of Black immigrants' children with fathers who work full-time is 74 percent, lower by a few percentage points than for white, Asian, and Hispanic immigrant children (see Figure 13). Only Black natives' children have a lower share of fathers working full-time (68 percent). The rate of paternal full-time work falls within a narrow range (72 percent to 79 percent) for children with Black immigrant parents from all origins except Somalia (57 percent).

14 For instance, see Donald J. Hernandez, Nancy A. Denton, and Suzanne E. Macartney, "Indicators of Characteristics and Circumstances of Children Ages 0-17 in Immigrant Families by Country of Origin and in Native-Born Families by Race-Ethnicity," University of Albany Center for Demographic and Social Analysis, 2011, [www.albany.edu/csda/children](http://www.albany.edu/csda/children).

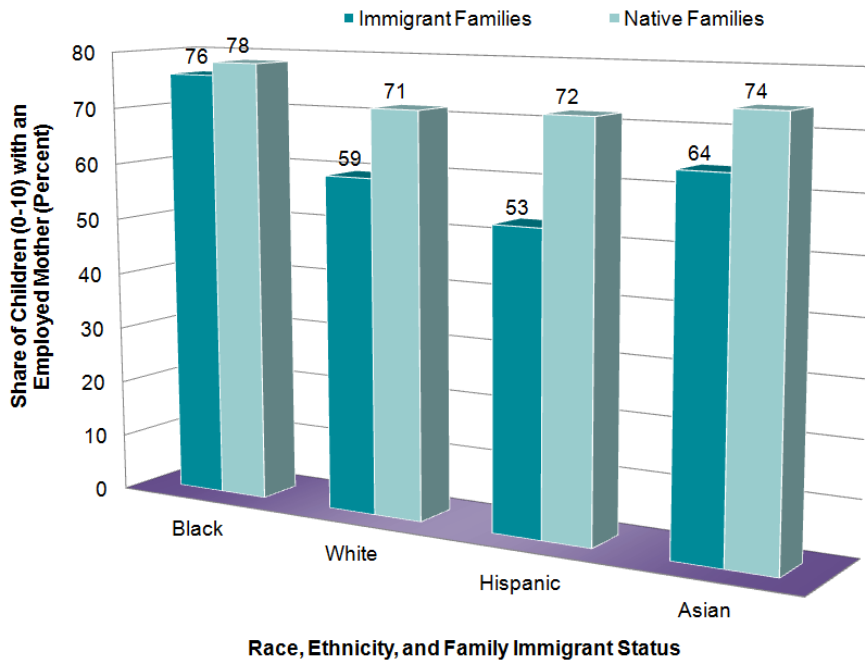


**Figure 13. Share of Children (from Birth through Age 10) with a Father Employed Full-Time and Year-Round, by Race, Ethnicity, and Family Immigrant Status**



*Note:* Analysis includes children living with father.  
*Source:* Author's analysis of 2005-09 ACS, pooled.

**Figure 14. Share of Children (from Birth through Age 10) with a Mother Employed Full-Time and Year-Round, by Race, Ethnicity, and Family Immigrant Status**



*Note:* Analysis includes children living with mother.  
*Source:* Author's analysis of 2005-09 ACS, pooled.





In contrast to the pattern for fathers, Black children are the *most* likely to have mothers working full-time (45 percent for Black children of immigrants and 43 percent for Black children of natives, see Figure 14). Among children with Black immigrant parents, the children with the highest proportion of mothers working full-time are those with mothers born in Jamaica (56 percent), followed by English-speaking Caribbean countries and Haiti (49-50 percent), and then by Ghana and Nigeria (45-46 percent). The lowest proportions are among children with mothers born in Sudan (23 percent) and Somalia (14 percent). The lower levels of full-time employment for these two origin countries may be related to comparatively low shares of English-fluent mothers, high shares who have not graduated from high school, traumas experienced by mothers fleeing as refugees from war-torn regions, and culturally influenced social roles for women.

Immigrant families do not rely solely on parents for income from work, as many have other workers in the home. For instance, 14 percent of Black children of immigrants have another adult worker in the home as do 12 percent of Asian children of immigrants and 21 percent of Hispanic children of immigrants. Children in native-born families and white children are less likely to have another working adult in the household. Black children in immigrant families are most likely to have another adult worker in the home if they have a parent born in Haiti (19 percent), Jamaica (17 percent), other English-speaking Caribbean countries (15 percent), the Dominican Republic (14 percent), or Ghana (14 percent).

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*Black children are the most likely to have  
mothers working full-time.*

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### **E. Parental Earnings**

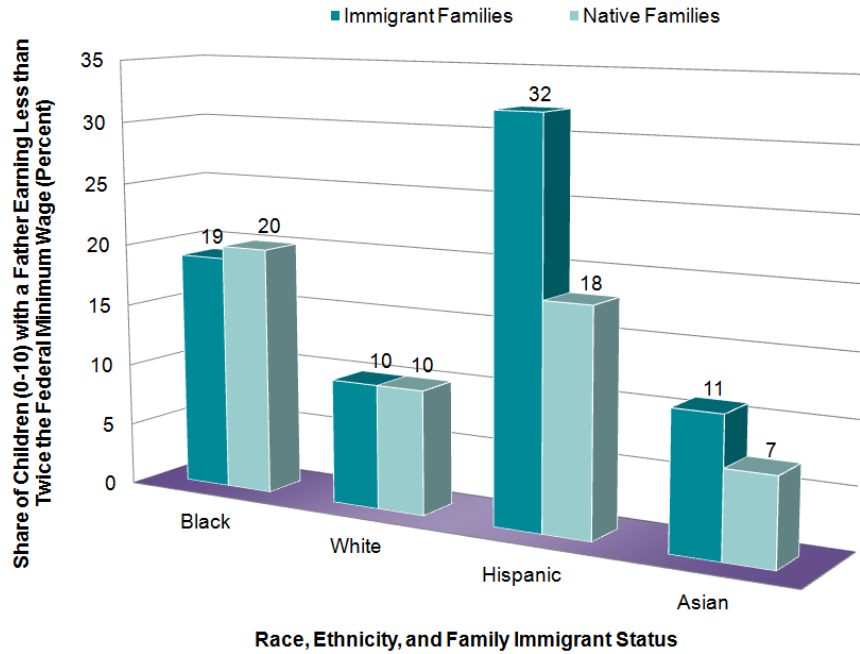
Parental income is central to determining children's well-being, and 19 percent of Black children in both immigrant and native-born families have working fathers who earn less than twice the federal minimum wage — a wage level needed to support a family at above 150 percent of the federal poverty level (see Figure 15).<sup>15</sup> The share of white and Asian children with fathers earning below twice the minimum wage was much lower (11 percent and below). The share for Hispanic children of immigrants was the highest (32 percent). Among Black children of immigrants, those with fathers born in Ghana were the least likely to have fathers earning below twice the minimum wage (10 percent) while those with fathers born in Somalia were the most likely (41 percent).

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<sup>15</sup> The minimum wage was set at \$5.15 in 2005-06, and increased to \$5.85 in 2007, \$6.55 in 2008, and \$7.25 in 2009. Assuming 40 hours per week and 50 weeks' work, a person earning twice the federal minimum wage in 2009 would earn \$29,000. Since the 2009 federal poverty thresholds were set at \$17,258 for a family of three with two children, and \$21,756 for a family of four with two children, the corresponding 200 percent poverty thresholds are \$34,516 and \$43,512. Thus, annual earnings at twice the value of the federal minimum wage in 2009 (\$29,000) would allow a worker to keep his or her family at a level between 100 percent and 200 percent of the poverty threshold. Please note that these calculations are based on the federal minimum wage and do not take account of variations in minimum wages enacted at the state level.



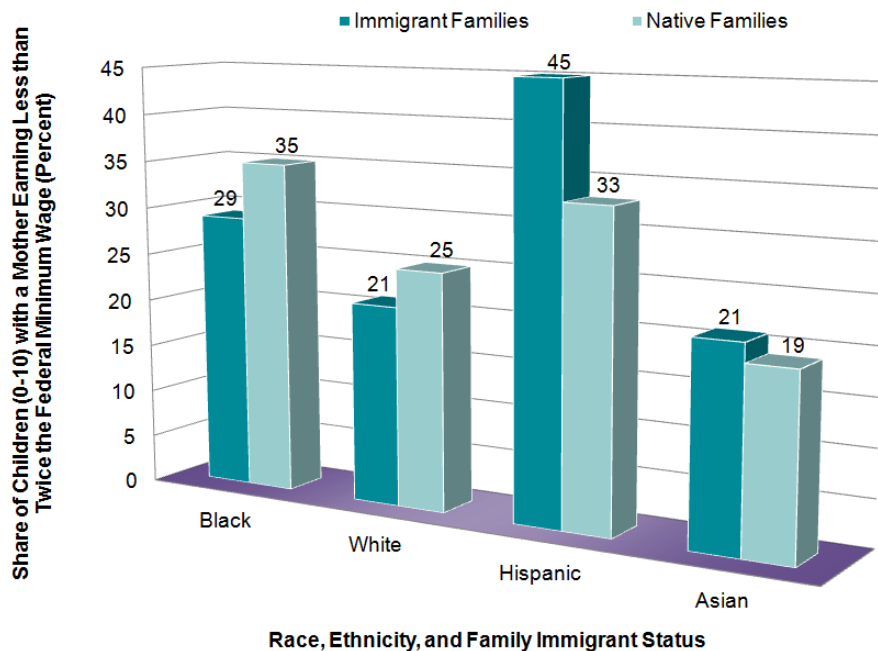
**Figure 15. Share of Children (from Birth through Age 10) with a Father Earning Less than Twice the Federal Minimum Wage, by Race, Ethnicity, and Family Immigrant Status**



*Note:* Analysis includes children living with father.  
*Source:* Author's analysis of 2005-09 ACS, pooled.

Mothers earn less than fathers across all major race-ethnic groups, and patterns across groups are similar. Twenty-nine percent of Black immigrants' working mothers do not earn twice the minimum wage (see Figure 16). Hispanic children of immigrants had the largest share of mothers earning below twice the minimum wage (45 percent).

**Figure 16. Share of Children (from Birth through Age 10) with a Mother Earning Less than Twice the Federal Minimum Wage, by Race, Ethnicity, and Family Immigrant Status**



*Note:* Analysis includes children living with mother.  
*Source:* Author's analysis of 2005-09 ACS, pooled.

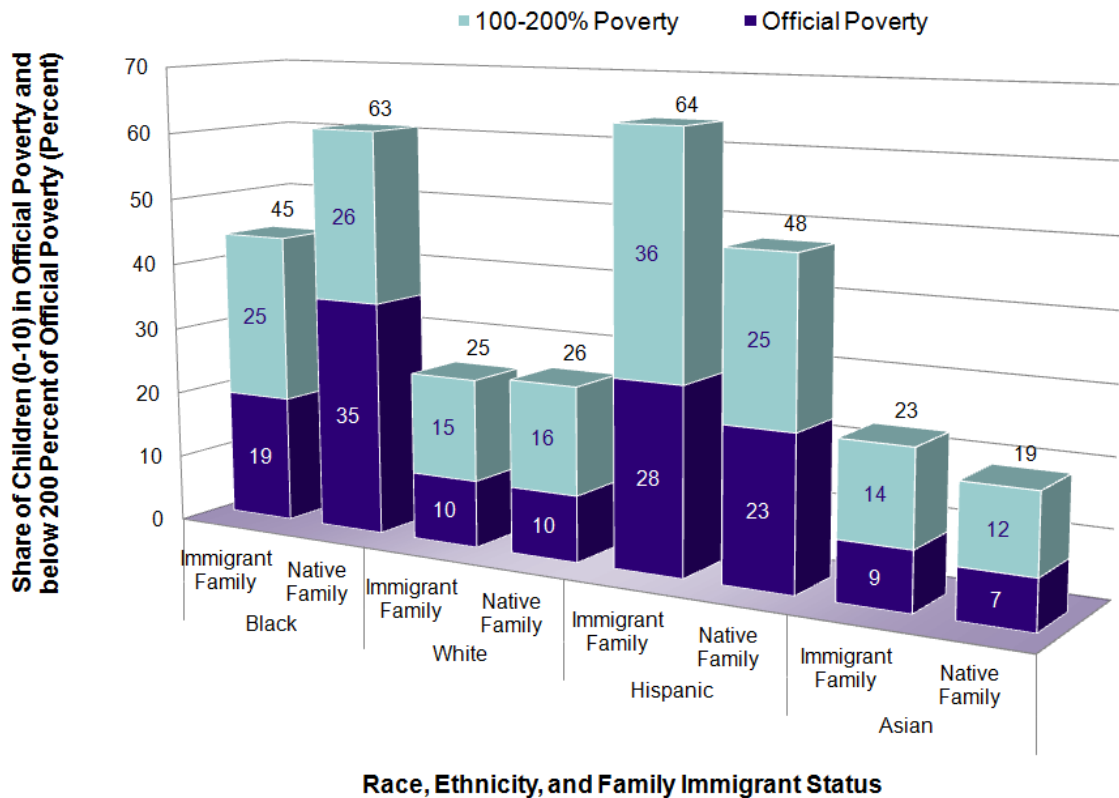


## F. Poverty

Children from low-income families often experience less success in school and lower earnings in adulthood.<sup>16</sup> In fact, over time family poverty has greater negative consequences for children than either limited parental education or living in a one-parent family.<sup>17</sup>

Nineteen percent of Black immigrants' children live in families with incomes below the federal poverty threshold (see Figure 17). Poverty rates are higher for Hispanic children of natives (23 percent) and Hispanic children of immigrants (28 percent). Black children of natives have the highest rate (35 percent). Poverty rates for white and Asian children in immigrant and native-born families are much lower (7 percent to 10 percent). Black children in immigrant families with African origins are more likely than those with Caribbean origins to live in poverty (23 percent versus 18 percent).

**Figure 17. Share of Children (from Birth through Age 10) in Official Poverty and below 200 Percent of Official Poverty, by Race, Ethnicity, and Family Immigrant Status**



Note: Analysis includes children living with at least one parent. Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100.  
Source: Author's analysis of 2005-09 ACS, pooled.

Poverty rates for Black immigrants' children vary across African and Caribbean parents' countries of origin. Only Black children with parents born in Nigeria have poverty rates as low as white children (10 percent). Black children with parents born in Jamaica (14 percent), Ghana (15 percent), and other English-speaking Caribbean countries (16 percent) have the next lowest poverty rates, and poverty rates are highest for Black children with parents born in Sudan (35 percent) and Somalia (60 percent).

16 Vonnie McLoyd, "Socioeconomic Disadvantage and Child Development," *American Psychologist* 53, No. 2 (1998): 185-204; Greg J. Duncan and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, eds., *Consequences of Growing Up Poor* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1997); Sewell and Hauser, *Education, Occupation and Earnings*.  
17 Duncan and Brooks-Gunn, *Consequences of Growing Up Poor*; McLoyd, "Socioeconomic Disadvantage and Child Development."



The share of families with income below twice the poverty level (what we refer to as the “low-income” level here) is greater. Using this definition, 45 percent of Black immigrants’ children live in low-income families, a substantially smaller share than Black children of natives (63 percent), Hispanic children of natives (48 percent), or Hispanic children of immigrants (64 percent, see Figure 17). Black children with African-born parents are more likely than their counterparts with Caribbean-born parents to live in low-income families (49 percent and 43 percent, respectively).

Among the Black children of immigrants, children with Somali- and Sudan-born parents are the most likely to be low income (85 percent and 70 percent, respectively), followed by those with origins in Haiti and the Dominican Republic (56 percent and 52 percent, respectively). Rates are substantially lower among Black children with origins in Nigeria (29 percent), Ghana and Jamaica (35 percent), and other English-speaking Caribbean countries (38 percent).

Overall, children with parents from Nigeria, Ghana, Jamaica, and the rest of the English-speaking Caribbean fare best on most economic indicators, while those from Haiti and the African refugee-sending countries of Sudan and Somalia fare the worst.

## G. Housing

Housing costs and conditions can influence the financial resources and time parents are able to devote to their children. Patterns of housing hardship often reflect income and poverty, as limited incomes may require families to live in rented rather than owned homes, spend a substantial share of income on housing, or double- or triple-up, resulting in crowded housing conditions.

**Family homeownership.** Homeownership can reflect both access to higher-quality housing and a commitment by families to their local communities. Nearly one-half (48 percent) of Black children in immigrant families live in homes owned by their parents (or other family members, see Figure 18). Thirty-five percent of Black children of natives live in their families’ homes. Homeownership is much higher in white and Asian families — ranging from 69 percent to 75 percent.

Among children of Black immigrants, those with Caribbean origins are more likely to live in owned homes than those from African origins (49 percent versus 44 percent), reflecting their higher incomes and longer residence in the United States. Family homeownership is very high for Black children of Nigerian immigrants (67 percent). Children of Jamaican immigrants also have a relatively high rate of family homeownership (54 percent). Only 30 percent of Black children with Sudanese origins and 9 percent of those with Somali origins, however, live in owned homes. Thus, patterns of family homeownership track patterns of poverty.

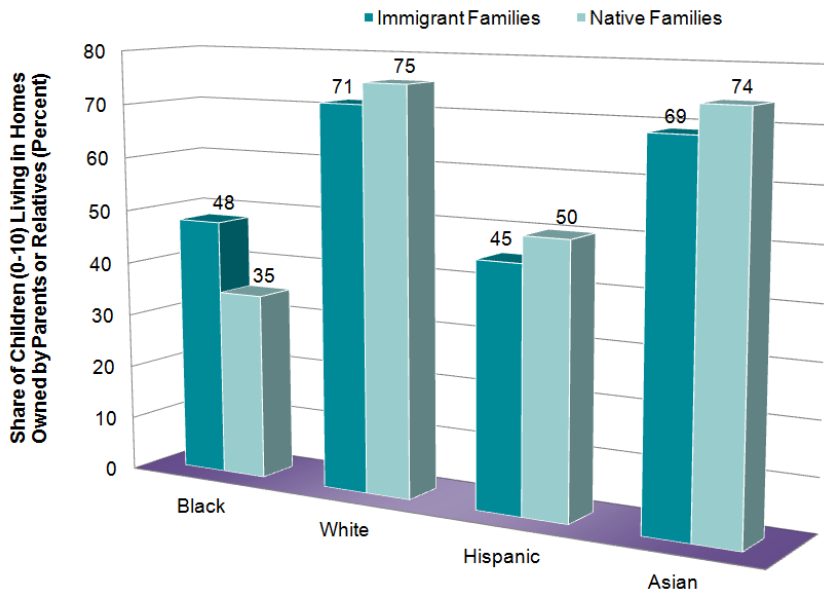
**Housing cost burdens.** Households that pay more than half of their income for housing are more likely to lack the resources to meet other basic needs, including supporting the development of their children. This high ratio of housing costs to income is referred to as a “severe housing-cost burden.” Twenty-eight percent of Black immigrants’ children live in families with severe housing-cost burdens, a rate exceeded only by Black children of natives (31 percent) and Hispanic children of immigrants (29 percent, see Figure 19). The severe housing cost burden rate is 12 percent for white children of natives.

Substantial shares of children from all backgrounds live in families with “moderate” housing burdens, defined as housing costs between one-third and one-half of family incomes. Taken together, over half of Black children of immigrants (56 percent), Black children of natives (55 percent), and Hispanic children of immigrants (58 percent) live in families with moderate or severe housing burdens.

Among the children of Black immigrants, those with Caribbean origins are about as likely as their peers with African origins to live in homes with severe (30 percent versus 28 percent) and moderate housing-cost burdens (28 percent each).



**Figure 18. Percent of Children (from Birth through Age 10) Living in Homes Owned by Parents or Relatives, by Race, Ethnicity, and Family Immigrant Status**

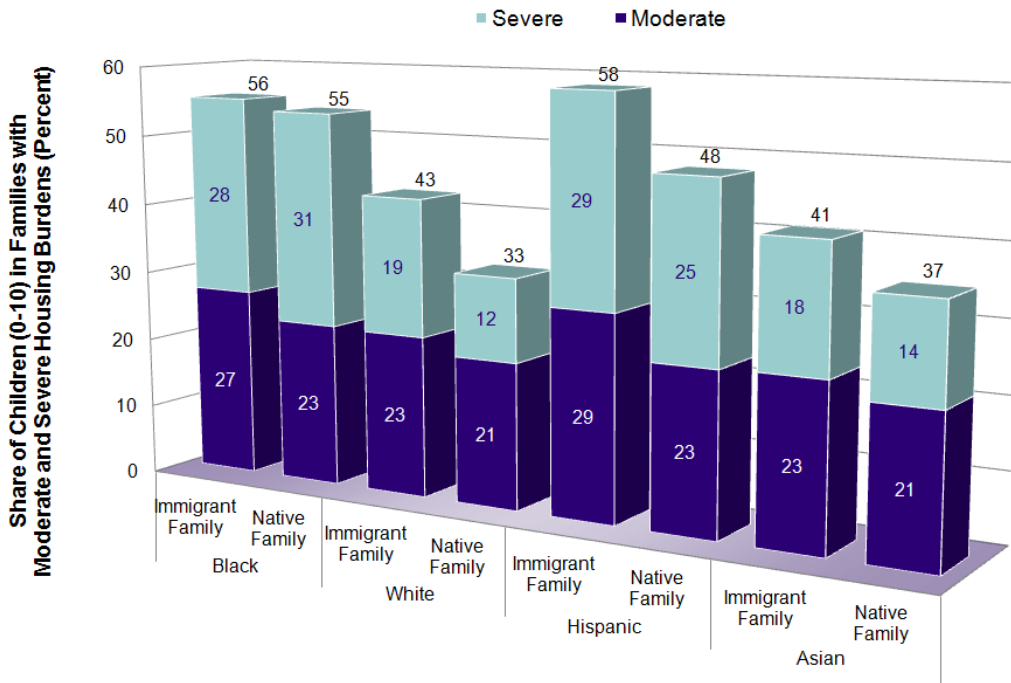


**Race, Ethnicity, and Family Immigrant Status**

Note: Analysis includes children living with at least one parent.

Source: Author's analysis of 2005-09 ACS, pooled.

**Figure 19. Share of Children (from Birth through Age 10) in Families with Moderate and Severe Housing Burdens, by Race, Ethnicity, and Family Immigrant Status**



**Race, Ethnicity, and Family Immigrant Status**

Notes: Analysis includes children living with at least one parent. Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100.

Source: Author's analysis of 2005-09 ACS, pooled.



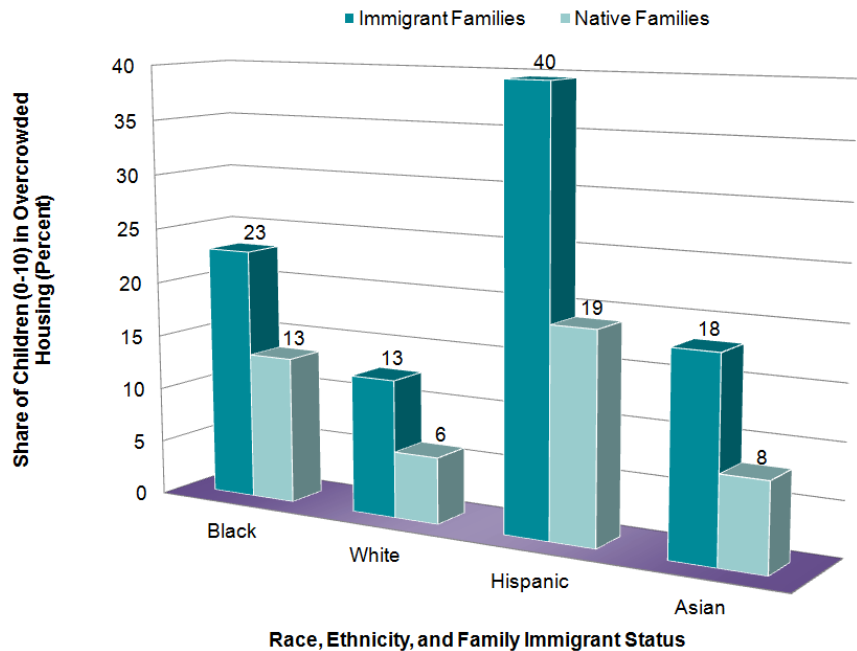
Black children with origins in Haiti or Somalia are the most likely to experience either severe or moderate housing-cost burdens (63 percent each), but their rate is only slightly higher than for Black children of immigrants from most other origins (53-56 percent); the lowest rate is for children with Nigerian origins (51 percent). Thus, rates of housing burdens for Black children of immigrants often exceed by a substantial margin their poverty rates and their rates of living in low-income families. These high housing burdens are accounted for at least partly by Black immigrants' concentration in East Coast states with high housing costs.

**Crowded housing.** Low-income families may double up with other family members or nonrelatives, leading to overcrowding. Overcrowded housing is linked to several risk factors for children's health, well-being, and development. When household members have different schedules, children may sleep less or have irregular sleep patterns, resulting in poorer behavior and difficulty concentrating in school. Lack of privacy can create household stress and lead to less responsive parenting. Crowded housing has also been linked to a higher risk of infectious diseases among children.<sup>18</sup> Children are considered to be living in crowded housing if they live in a home with more than one person per room.<sup>19</sup>

Twenty-three percent of Black immigrants' children live in overcrowded housing, nearly twice the level for Black children in native-born families (13 percent, see Figure 20). White children in immigrant and native-born families are less likely still to live in overcrowded housing (13 percent and 6 percent, respectively), as are Asian children in native-born families (8 percent). Hispanic immigrants' children are the only group with a higher overcrowding rate (40 percent). Black children with African-born parents (28 percent) are more likely than their peers with Caribbean-born parents (21 percent) to live in crowded housing, but again substantial variation exists across parental countries of origin.

Overcrowding is lowest among Black children with immigrant parents born in Jamaica (15 percent), other English-speaking Caribbean countries (17 percent), and Nigeria (18 percent), and highest for those

**Figure 20. Share of Children (from Birth through Age 10) in Overcrowded Housing, by Race, Ethnicity, and Family Immigrant Status**



Note: Analysis includes children living with at least one parent.  
Source: Author's analysis of 2005-09 ACS, pooled.

18 John N. Edwards, Theodore D. Fuller, Santhat Sermisri, and Sairudee Vorakitphokatorn, *Household Crowding and Its Consequences* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994); Gary W. Evans, Stephen J. Lepore, B. R. Shejwal, and M.N. Palsane, "Chronic Residential Crowding and Children's Well Being," *Child Development* 69, no. 6 (1998): 1514-23; Hernandez and Charney, *From Generation to Generation*; Gary W. Evans, Susan Saegert, and Rebecca Harris, "Residential Density and Psychological Health among Children in Low-Income Families," *Environment and Behavior* 33, vol. 2 (2001): 165-80; Gary W. Evans, Henry N. Ricciuti, Steven Hope, Ingrid Schoon, Robert H. Bradley, Robert F. Corwyn, and Cindy Hazan, "Crowding and Cognitive Development: The Mediating Role of Maternal Responsiveness among 36-Month-Old Children," *Environment and Behavior* 42, vol. 1 (2010): 135-48.

19 US Census Bureau, *Housing of Lower-Income Households*, Statistical Brief No. sb/94/18 (Washington, DC: US Census Bureau, 1994). [www.census.gov/apsd/www/statbrief/sb94\\_18.pdf](http://www.census.gov/apsd/www/statbrief/sb94_18.pdf).





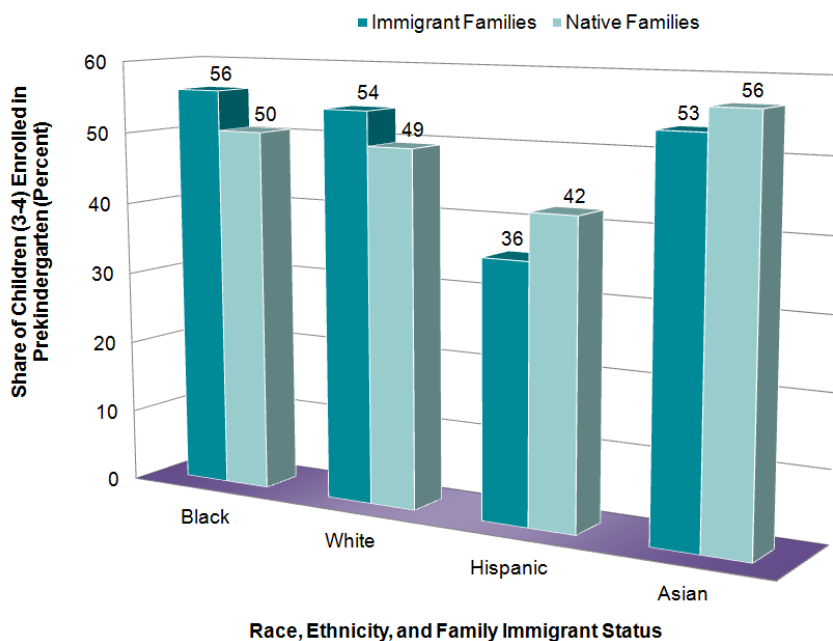
with origins in Haiti (29 percent), Sudan (42 percent), and Somalia (56 percent). Thus, overcrowding, like housing cost burdens, is relatively high among Black children with immigrant parents of many different origins. There is greater variation in overcrowding than cost burdens, however, with the least economically advantaged groups (Somalis and Sudanese) having overcrowding rates several times as high as better-off groups such as Nigerians and Jamaicans.

## VI. Access to Social Supports

### A. Prekindergarten

Participation in high-quality early care and education promotes language, cognitive, and social development. Participation in high-quality preschool programs may be particularly valuable for the development of children in immigrant families with parents who do not speak English fluently.<sup>20</sup> The analysis of preschool enrollment described here is based on the assumption that prekindergarten is generally beneficial for children's academic and socioemotional development; data on the *quality* of preschool were unavailable for analysis.<sup>21</sup>

**Figure 21. Share of Children Aged 3-4 Enrolled in Prekindergarten, by Race, Ethnicity, and Family Immigrant Status**



Black children of immigrants are more advantaged than most other children in terms of access to early education — at least prekindergarten. Young Black children aged 3-4 are slightly more likely than white children to be enrolled in prekindergarten (56 percent versus 54 percent for young children in immigrant families, and 50 percent versus 49 percent for those in native families — see Figure 21). Asian children of immigrants are equally likely to be enrolled in prekindergarten (56 percent), but enrollment rates are lower among all other race-ethnic groups. Hispanic children in immigrant families are the least likely to be enrolled in prekindergarten (36 percent).

Among young children in Black immigrant families, prekindergarten enrollment is

*Note:* Analysis includes children living with at least one parent.  
*Source:* Author's analysis of 2005-09 ACS, pooled.

20 William T. Gormley, "Early Childhood Care and Education: Lessons and Puzzles," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 26, No. 3 (2007): 633-71; William T. Gormley, "The Effect of Oklahoma's Pre-K Program on Hispanic Children," *Social Science Quarterly* 89, No. 4 (2008): 916-36; William T. Gormley and Ted Gayer, "Promoting School Readiness in Oklahoma: An Evaluation of Tulsa's Pre-K Program," *Journal of Human Resources* 40, No. 3 (2005): 533-58; William T. Gormley, Ted Gayer, Deborah Phillips, and Brittany Dawson, "The Effects of Universal Pre-K on Cognitive Development," *Developmental Psychology* 41, No. 6 (2005): 872-84.

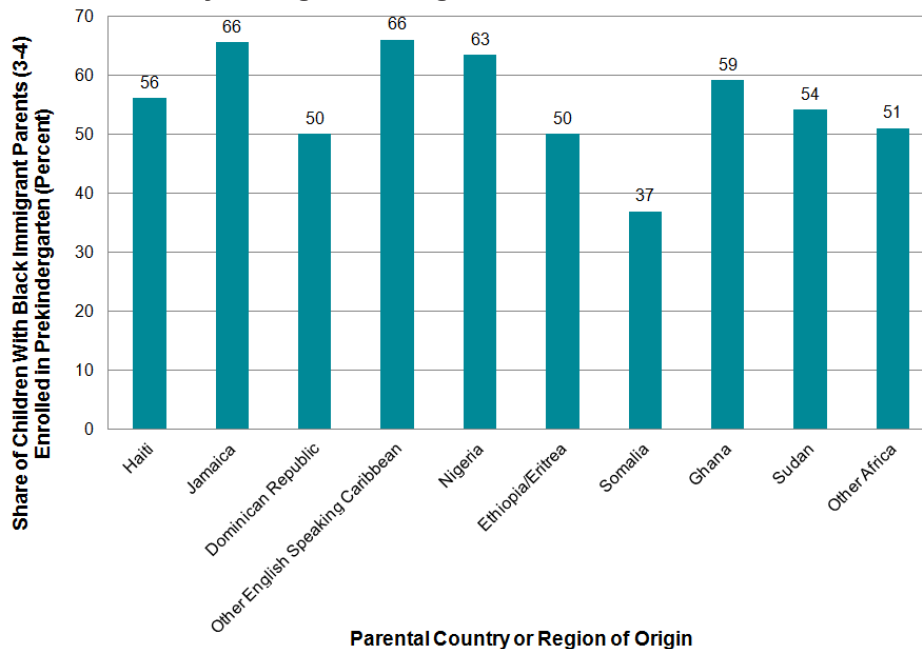
21 The ACS data on preschool enrollment may exclude some children participating in Head Start and other forms of center-based care, as some respondents may categorize these programs as prekindergarten.





somewhat higher for those with Caribbean origins than African origins (61 percent versus 53 percent). The highest prekindergarten enrollment rates are for young Black children in immigrant families with parents from Jamaica, other English-speaking Caribbean countries, and Nigeria (ranging from 63 to 66 percent), followed by Ghana, Haiti, and Sudan (ranging from 54 to 59 percent, see Figure 22). Fifty percent of young children in Black immigrant families with parents from the Dominican Republic and Ethiopia/Eritrea are enrolled in prekindergarten, but the enrollment rate falls to 37 percent for those from Somalia. Thus, excluding children with Somali-born parents, the majority of Black children of immigrants in the relevant age range (3-4 years) are enrolled in prekindergarten. Given the very low parental education rates and precarious economic well-being of children in the Somali group, low preschool enrollment rates are troubling; among the children of Black immigrants, this group of children likely has the greatest need for high-quality early education.

**Figure 22. Share of Children (with Black Immigrant Parents) Aged 3-4 Enrolled in Prekindergarten, by Parental Country or Region of Origin**



Note: Analysis includes children living with at least one parent.  
Source: Author's analysis of 2005-09 ACS, pooled.

## B. Health Insurance

Good health is correlated with success in school and work, and the availability of health insurance coverage is in turn tied to health outcomes. Because ACS did not begin reporting on health insurance data until 2008, only two years of data (2008-09) were available at the time this analysis was written.

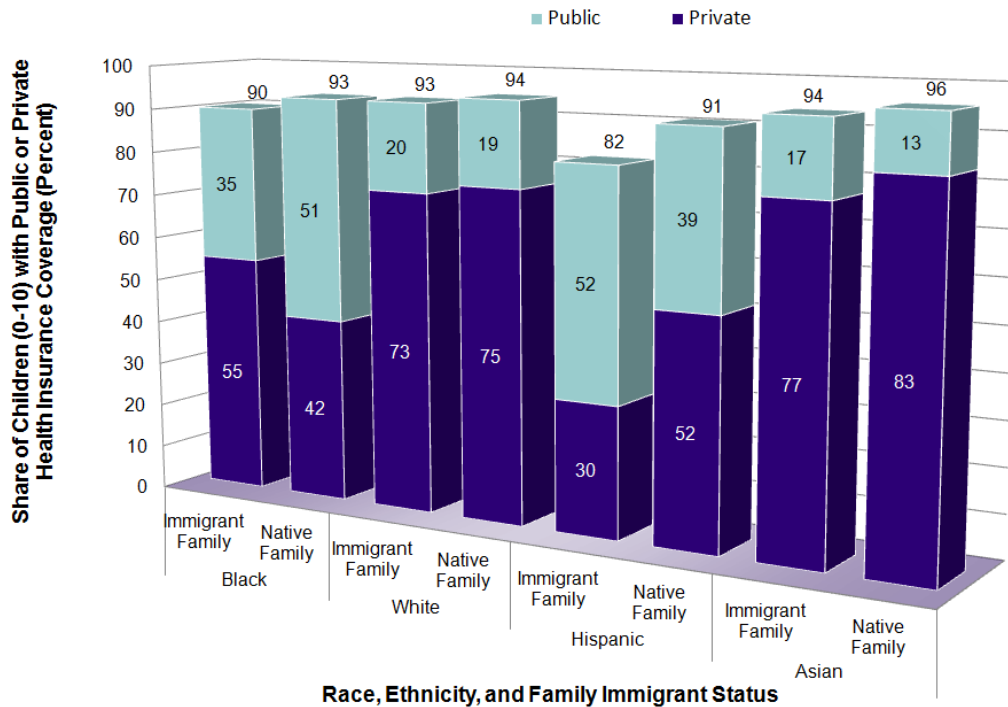
Health insurance coverage is very high for US children overall and nearly universal for some groups of children, due in large part to expansions in public coverage in recent years. The share of children with either public or private coverage is 90 percent or higher for all groups, except Hispanic children of natives (82 percent, see Figure 23). For some groups such as Black and Hispanic children of natives, coverage through Medicaid, Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and other public programs now exceeds coverage through employers and other private sources.

A majority (55 percent) of Black immigrants' children has private insurance coverage, and this rate exceeds the rates for Black children of natives and all Hispanic children regardless of parental nativity. Asian and white children, however, have substantially higher private coverage rates (73 percent and



higher). The *public* coverage rate for Black children of immigrants (35 percent) is lower than for Black children of natives and Hispanic children, but considerably higher than for white and Asian children.

**Figure 23. Share of Children (from Birth through Age 10) with Public or Private Health Insurance Coverage, by Race, Ethnicity, and Family Immigrant Status**



Notes: Analysis includes children living with at least one parent. Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100.  
Source: Author's analysis of 2005-09 ACS, pooled.

Among children in Black immigrant families, 92 percent of young children with African origins were covered under any form of health insurance, at any time during the year, compared with 88 percent of those with Caribbean origins. There is not that much variation by origin in the share of Black immigrants' children with either public or private insurance coverage. Eighty-nine percent or more of these children have some form of coverage — except for children of Haitian-origin parents, who have somewhat lower coverage (81 percent, see Figure 24). Thus Haitian families represent the parental origin group with the largest share of uninsured children. The lack of insurance in this population may be due to the large number of Haitian immigrants who are unauthorized — or at least were during the period 2008-09.<sup>22</sup> Unauthorized children are ineligible for public insurance in most states, and unauthorized parents may fear applying for public coverage for their eligible US-born children. Moreover, many unauthorized parents work “off the books” without benefits such as employer-provided coverage.

There is, however, considerable variation in types of coverage for Black children with immigrant parents from different countries. Children with Somali parents have the highest public coverage (75 percent), most likely because many enter as refugees, and refugees are connected with Medicaid and other public benefits immediately upon arrival. In fact, the high public coverage of children with Somali parents has resulted in their having the highest overall coverage of any group (96 percent). Black children from two other parental origin groups have relatively high public coverage: those with parents from the Dominican

<sup>22</sup> More recently, thousands of previously unauthorized Haitian immigrants received Temporary Protected Status (TPS), a form of temporary immigration status that allows them to work but does not make them eligible for Medicaid in most states. TPS can be awarded to immigrant-origin groups already in the United States if they are not able to return to their home countries due to natural disasters, armed conflict, or other extraordinary situations; it was awarded to Haitians following the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti.

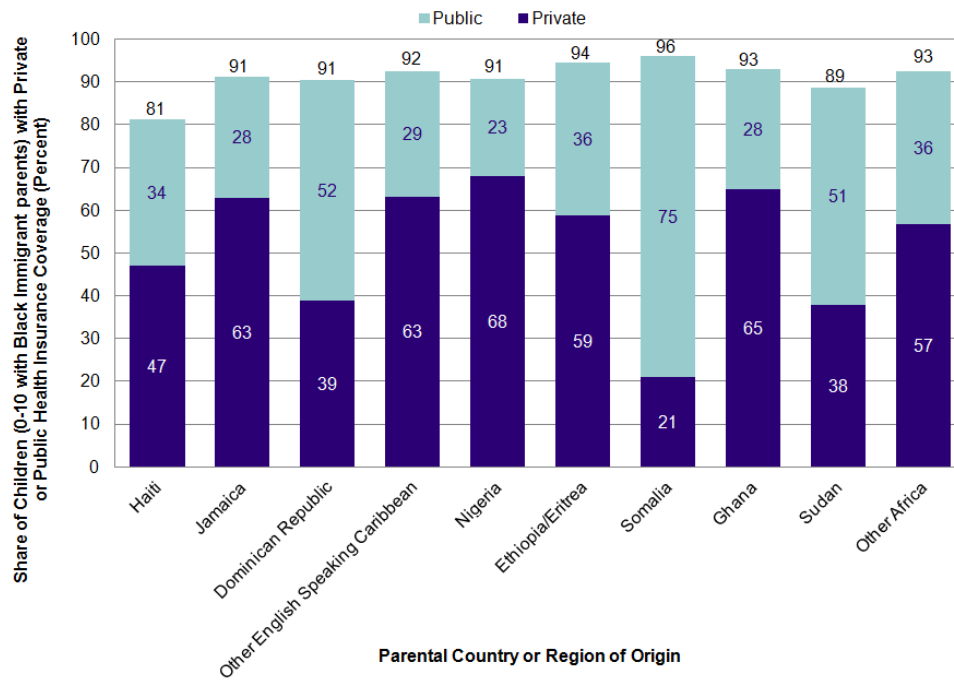


Republic (52 percent) and Sudan (51 percent). Sudanese immigrants also often enter as refugees and receive assistance upon their arrival, while Dominican immigrants are most likely to settle in New York and Massachusetts — two states with nearly universal coverage of children through public insurance programs and other means.

The children of Black immigrants from all other countries are more likely to have private than public health insurance coverage. The highest private coverage can be found among children with parental origins in Nigeria (68 percent), Ghana (65 percent), and Jamaica and other English-speaking Caribbean countries (63 percent each).

Overall, 52 percent of Black children with African-born parents were covered by private health insurance at some point during the year, compared to 56 percent with Caribbean-born parents. The rates of public health insurance coverage (excluding those with any private coverage) for these groups were 40 percent and 32 percent, respectively.

**Figure 24. Share of Children (from Birth through Age 10 with Black Immigrant Parents) with Private or Public Health Insurance Coverage, by Parental Country or Region of Origin**



Notes: Analysis includes children living with at least one parent. Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100.

Source: Author’s analysis of 2005-09 ACS, pooled.

These results suggest the importance of access to public programs for refugee children and those with refugee parents, as well as those from other parental origin groups with limited private insurance coverage.

## VII. Conclusions and Implications for Public Policy

Rapid immigration has led to the diversification of the Black child population in the United States, even as it has the overall child population. Black immigrant parents come from countries spread across Africa, the Caribbean, and other world regions — with no single country accounting for more than one-fifth of the



total. These parents' diverse origins make it difficult to generate sweeping conclusions about the well-being of Black immigrants' children, since well-being indicators vary greatly by parental country of origin.

In general, the children of Black immigrants fall in the middle of multiple well-being indicators. Black children of natives (i.e., African Americans) and Hispanic children — whether the parents are immigrants or US born — tend to fare worse on most indicators, while Asian and white children fare better. Children with parents from Africa tend to fare about as well as children with parents from the Caribbean.

Children with parents from English-speaking countries that have a long history of immigration to the United States tend to fare the best; these countries include Nigeria and Ghana in Africa along with Jamaica, Trinidad, and several smaller West Indian countries in the Caribbean. The most at risk are children with parents from countries with shorter immigration histories, where English is not a common language, and with substantial refugee flows. Refugees are involuntary migrants and have often experienced trauma and persecution in their home countries or refugee camps; many recent refugees have comparatively low levels of formal education. As a result, children with parents born in the African refugee-sending countries of Somalia, Sudan, and Ethiopia/Eritrea face many risks to their successful development, as do children with parents born in Haiti and the Dominican Republic — the two largest Caribbean origins of Black immigrants who do not speak English as their primary language.

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*Children with parents from English-speaking countries that have a long history of immigration to the United States tend to fare the best.*

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#### **A. Protective Factors for Black Children of Immigrants**

Family structure and work patterns are key strengths of Black immigrant families, but these strengths vary in nature between African and Caribbean families. Black African families are more likely to have two parents in the home, and Black immigrant fathers generally exhibit high rates of employment. Black Caribbean families are more likely to be headed by single parents, but the mothers in these families have among the highest employment rates of any demographic group. Black Caribbean families are also more likely to have a grandparent in the home and to have two working parents when both parents are in the home. High rates of work among parents and the presence of multiple adults in the home provide important economic resources for children in most Black immigrant families.

Paternal employment is universally high among Black children of immigrants, and only Black immigrant mothers with origins in Somalia and Sudan exhibit low rates of employment — these are countries most associated with recent refugee flows.

Black children of immigrants are more likely than Hispanic children of immigrants to have parents who are US citizens and less likely to have parents who are unauthorized. Two-thirds of Black children of immigrants have at least one US-citizen parent, and 46 percent have at least one US-born parent, signaling a relatively high level of intermarriage with the US-born population. High levels of citizenship promote Black immigrant parents' integration and facilitate access to public benefits and services. Somali and Sudanese parents are the least likely to be US citizens since they arrived in the United States more recently than other Black immigrant groups. A high share came as refugees and therefore retains access to public benefits and services. While Haitian parents have high naturalization rates, many are unauthorized or hold Temporary Protected Status (TPS), barring their use of public benefits.

Parental education and English language fluency also protect children in Black immigrant families. Eighty percent of Black immigrants' children have a parent who speaks English fluently or exclusively, about twice the rate for Hispanic children of immigrants. Black immigrant parents have higher college



graduation rates than Black native-born parents or Hispanic parents, and they are about a third as likely as Hispanic immigrant parents to lack a high school education. Here there are some important exceptions, as parents born in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Sudan, and Somalia have much lower educational attainment and English proficiency rates than Black immigrant parents with other origins. There are also significant gender variations, as Black African fathers tend to be much better educated than Black African mothers, while educational attainment rates among Caribbeans do not vary much by gender. In fact, Jamaican mothers are slightly better educated than Jamaican fathers.

Access to public benefits and services represents a fourth set of protective factors for Black children of immigrants. These children are more likely than any major nativity/race-ethnic group to be enrolled in prekindergarten at ages 3-4. They also have relatively high rates of health insurance coverage, especially through Medicaid and other public programs. Concentration in states along the East Coast with relatively high preschool enrollment and strong social safety nets (for instance, New York) may partly explain why Black children's preschool enrollment and Medicaid participation rates are higher than other children of immigrants.<sup>23</sup> The relatively small share with unauthorized parents and large share with parents who entered as refugees may be another explanation.

## **B. Risk Factors**

Despite relatively high parental educational attainment and employment, children of Black immigrants are still at risk for poverty and associated difficulties because their parents have relatively low earnings. Black immigrant fathers earn wages similar to African American fathers, trailing those of white and Asian fathers. Poverty rates track the pattern of wages, with children in Black immigrant families twice as likely to live in poverty as white or Asian children — though African American and Hispanic children's poverty rates are higher. Only Black children with parents born in Nigeria have a poverty rate as low as that of white children.

Children of Black immigrants are about as likely to live in owned homes as children of Hispanic immigrants, and their families' housing cost burdens are nearly as high. They also have the second-highest rate of overcrowded housing behind children of Hispanic immigrants. High housing costs and crowding may be associated with residence in more expensive states on the East Coast, particularly in New York and particularly in the Haitian population.

Finally, Black children with parents from some refugee-origin countries — particularly Somalia and Sudan — often live in very large families that include five or more children. Resources to promote children's well-being are attenuated in larger families. Most children in Black immigrant families, however, tend to have family sizes that are near the average for all US children.

## **C. Policy Implications**

Public policies are critical to the well-being of many children. Despite the important role that policies play, however, many children are not covered by health insurance and are not attending prekindergarten, particularly if they live in families with limited economic resources. This is especially true for children with Black immigrant parents from a range of African and Caribbean origins. It is essential that policies be expanded and improved to include these children, to ensure they have the same opportunities for success as other US children.

A few states, particularly along the East Coast, account for large shares of children in Black immigrant

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<sup>23</sup> William O'Hare, Mark Mather, and Genevieve Dupuis, *Analyzing State Differences in Child Well-Being* (New York: Foundation for Child Development, 2012), [http://fcd-us.org/sites/default/files/Analyzing%20State%20Differences%20in%20Child%20Well-Being\\_0.pdf](http://fcd-us.org/sites/default/files/Analyzing%20State%20Differences%20in%20Child%20Well-Being_0.pdf).



families. Some of these states — such as New York, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Maryland — have comparatively strong public policies and programs to promote immigrant integration and to provide health care and early childhood education to many low-income residents, including immigrants.<sup>24</sup> Sustaining these initiatives in the current budget climate will remain a challenge.

The high levels of disadvantage among Black children in refugee families suggest a need for sustained assistance to these families. US refugee resettlement programs focus primarily on initial resettlement — defined as the first several months after arrival — and on the English language proficiency and employment of refugee adults. The federal government does not provide substantial resources to help refugee children with adjustment, integration, or school performance. Yet, refugee children from origins such as Somalia, Sudan, and Ethiopia/Eritrea are likely to need prolonged support due to their relatively high poverty rates, crowded housing conditions, and other risk factors associated with socioeconomic disadvantage.

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*The high levels of disadvantage among Black children in refugee families suggest a need for sustained assistance to these families.*

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Refugee status incurs some benefits for Black children from refugee backgrounds — for instance, access to health insurance coverage through Medicaid, CHIP, and similar public programs. Expansions in these programs in the wake of the 1996 welfare reforms have provided an important safety net for Black children of immigrants, just as they have for many other low-income children.

Black children in Haitian immigrant families are the one major origin group with a high rate of exclusion from public benefits such as Medicaid and CHIP. As a result, they are significantly less likely to have health insurance than other Black children of immigrants. Their exclusion results from the high share of both Haitian parents and children who are unauthorized or have TPS, a temporary immigration status that does not confer public benefits eligibility in most states. TPS was extended to some Haitian immigrants already in the United States on account of recent natural disasters in Haiti, and Haiti remains the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. Developing more permanent forms of legal status and extending basic health benefits eligibility to TPS recipients could represent an important strategy for protecting children in this vulnerable population.

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<sup>24</sup> Among these states, New Jersey has a comparatively lower proportion of children overall covered by health insurance; see O'Hare, Mather, and Dupuis, *Analyzing State Differences in Child Well-Being*.





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