

## **Household Complexity: Low-Income Hispanic Children in the U.S.**

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*Child Trends*

**Research Aim:** This paper provides a comprehensive overview of the complex household configurations experienced by low-income Hispanic children in the U.S. Low-income white and black children are included for comparison, and variation by parental nativity status within the Hispanic population is also examined.

**Significance:** Currently, twenty four percent of all children in the U.S. are Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau 2013). The success and well-being of these children as they age will have a profound impact on the social and economic future of the country as a whole (Lichter 2013; Myers 2007). Because Hispanic children have among the highest levels of poverty in the U.S., many policies and programs are attempting to better reach Hispanic families in need (U.S. Census 2013; Lopez & Velasco 2011). To do this, it is critical to understand the nature of the households in which they live.

It is well-established that children who grow up in married, two-biological-parent families generally fare better than their counterparts in single parent or step families (McLanahan & Sandefur 1994; Brown 2010; Thomson & McLanahan 2012). However, focusing on the immediate family structure of children (i.e. the relationship status of the parents) often overlooks the presence of other adults in households – both related and unrelated – who may also support (or not) the healthy development of children. On the one hand, activities as employment, child care, and housework by other household members can help provide needed resources to families (Edin & Lein 1997; Henly, Danziger, & Offer 2005). On the other hand, some household members can further strain limited resources (if they do not work) or create emotional stress (Evans 2006; Cutts et al. 2011).

In this paper, we examine the household complexity of low-income Hispanic children using recent nationally representative data. Specifically, we report on the size of their households, their family structure, the composition and crowdedness of their household, and the employment status of adult household members. Critically, we explore variation by parental nativity status within the Hispanic population, while also providing comparisons to low-income white and black children. This information will help researchers and practitioners understand the diverse living arrangements of low-income Hispanic children, and to better serve a large, growing, high-need population.

**Methodology:** The American Community Survey is an annual survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau that is nationally representative of the U.S. population. We use the Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) files (Ruggles et al. 2010). Since we are interested in household composition and living arrangements of low-income children, we limited the 2012 profile to Hispanic, (n=39,086), white (n=49,181), and black (n=29,272) children aged 0-17 in families with incomes in the bottom quintile (less than or equal to \$23,000 in 2012 dollars). Nearly two-thirds of the low-income Hispanic respondents (n= 25,394) lived with a foreign-born parent or guardian. For each racial-ethnic group, we conduct descriptive and multivariate analyses across a range of household complexity measures, including household size, family structure, household composition, crowdedness and employment status of adult household members.

**Preliminary Findings:** Low-income Hispanic children, especially those with a foreign-born parent, live in larger households than low-income black and white children (Table 1). Low-income Hispanic children with a foreign-born parent experience more traditional family structures than their counterparts with U.S.-born parent(s) and their black and white peers: a third of low-income Hispanic children with a foreign-born parent live in married, two-parent families and 50% live in the same household as their fathers. Regardless of parental nativity status, nearly one in ten low-income Hispanic children live in the same household as a grandparent. More than a quarter of low-income Hispanic children live with an unrelated adult, and there is a higher prevalence among those with U.S.-born parent(s). Low-income Hispanic children with a foreign-born parent live in households with adults with stronger labor market connections relative to low-income Hispanic children with U.S.-born parents and relative to their white and black peers. See Appendix for a detailed description of preliminary findings.

**Implications:** These findings suggest that the household composition and living arrangements of low-income Hispanic children are shaped by parental nativity status. Children of immigrants experience family structures with greater exposure to resident fathers and married, resident parents than their Hispanic peers with U.S. born parent[s] and even their white peers, which suggests that assimilation and incorporation do not always lead to more positive outcomes. The combination of large household sizes and small residential units means that low-income Hispanic children are more likely to experience crowded housing than their white and black counterparts. Crowded housing is associated with a host of adverse outcomes for children and is of great concern for policy makers and service providers: however, additional adults in the household can also provide contribute additional resources to the household through market work and child care. Non-parental adults are present in the households of low-income Hispanic children, as a quarter live with an unrelated adult. Taken together, this research provides an overview of the household configurations and living arrangement of low-income Hispanic children. It is a first step in assessing whether complex households serve as a survival strategy for low-income Hispanic families.

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- U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (2013). American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.

Table 1. Household Complexity of Low-Income Children by Race-Ethnicity

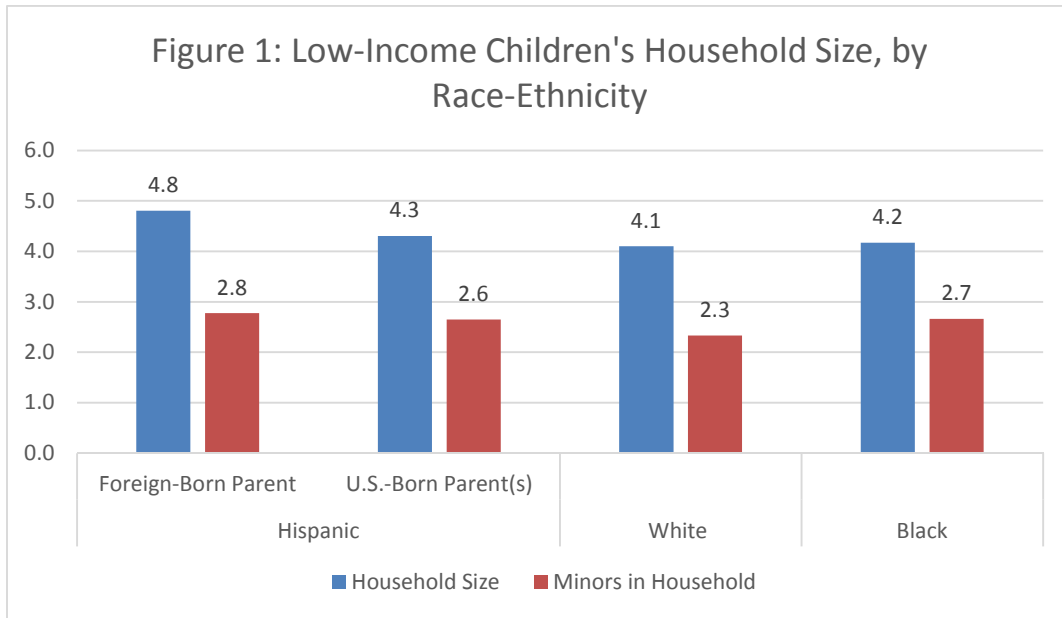
	Hispanic		White	Black	Group Differences				
	Foreign-Born Parent	U.S.-Born Parent(s)			Hispanic Parental Nativity	Foreign-Born Hispanic Parent v. White	Foreign-Born Hispanic Parent v. Black	U.S.-Born Hispanic Parent(s) v. White	U.S.-Born Hispanic Parent(s) v. Black
Number of Persons in Household	4.81	4.30	4.10	4.17	*	*	*	*	*
Number of Minors in Household	2.78	2.65	2.33	2.66	*	*	*	*	*
Nuclear Family Household (%)	36.1%	11.4%	25.7%	7.7%	*	*	*	*	*
Single Parent Family Household (%)	25.7%	47.4%	36.8%	60.6%	*	*	*	*	*
Father in Household (%)	50.2%	22.3%	37.5%	15.1%	*	*	*	*	*
Both Biological Parents in Household (%)	40.1%	12.2%	27.4%	8.4%	*	*	*	*	*
No Biological Parents in Household (%)	9.1%	11.9%	14.0%	14.5%	*	*	*	*	*
No Relatives in Household (%)	0.4%	0.8%	1.3%	0.7%	*	*	*	*	*
Grandparent in Household (%)	9.5%	10.1%	9.4%	13.6%			*	*	*
3 or More Generations in Household (%)	8.4%	8.3%	6.7%	9.9%		*	*	*	*
Unrelated Adult in HH	25.6%	28.1%	26.6%	13.8%	*	*	*	*	*
Subfamily Household	8.1%	8.5%	10.0%	7.5%		*	*	*	*
Related Subfamily in Household	5.5%	5.4%	4.7%	6.1%		*	*	*	*
Unrelated Subfamily in Household	2.7%	3.2%	5.4%	1.4%	*	*	*	*	*
Member of Subfamily	4.0%	4.5%	4.1%	5.5%	*		*		*
Number of Rooms	4.59	5.07	5.77	5.30	*	*	*	*	*
Number of Bedrooms	2.40	2.65	2.94	2.76	*	*	*	*	*
Crowded Housing (%)	39.2%	21.1%	10.0%	13.5%	*	*	*	*	*
Working Adult in Household (%)	80.7%	63.8%	67.2%	53.6%	*	*	*	*	*
Full-Time Working Adult in Household (%)	41.4%	29.7%	30.0%	21.2%	*	*	*		*
Sample Size	25,394	14,412	49,181	29,272	39,806	74,575	54,666	63,593	43,684

Source: 2012 American Community Survey

\* Group differences are significant at the p<.05 level

## Appendix

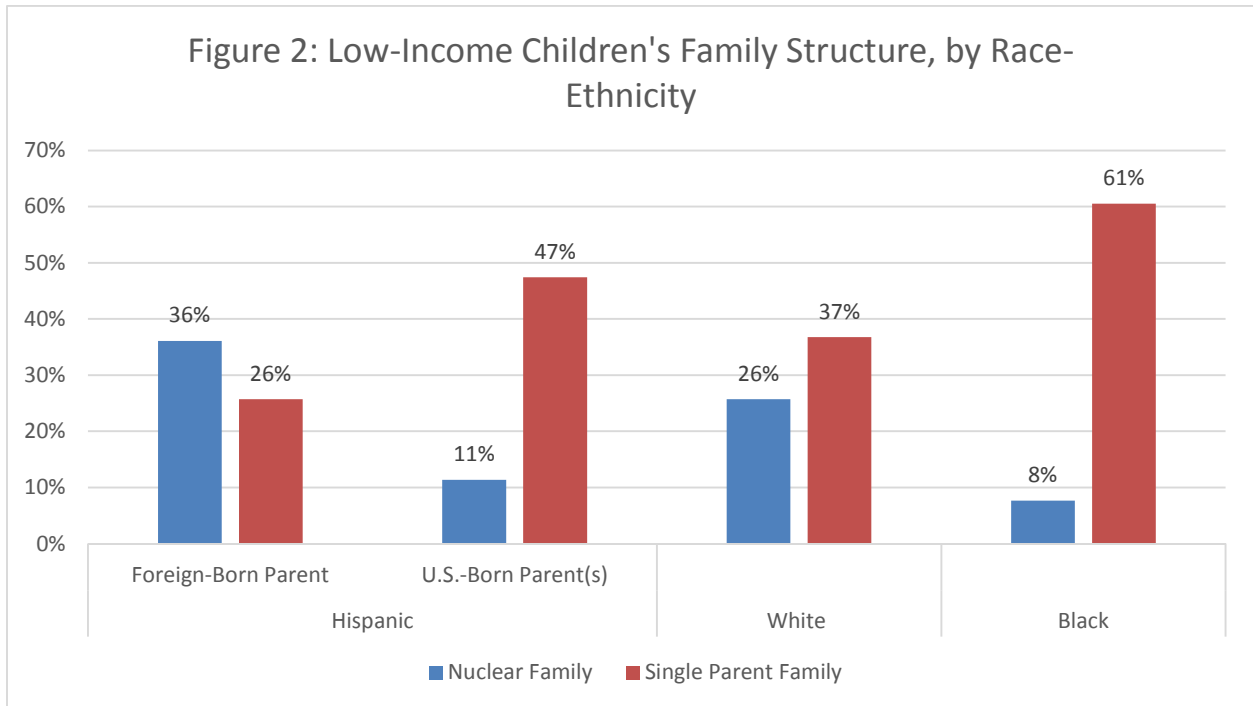
### Household Size



### Low-income Hispanic children reside in larger households than their white and black peers

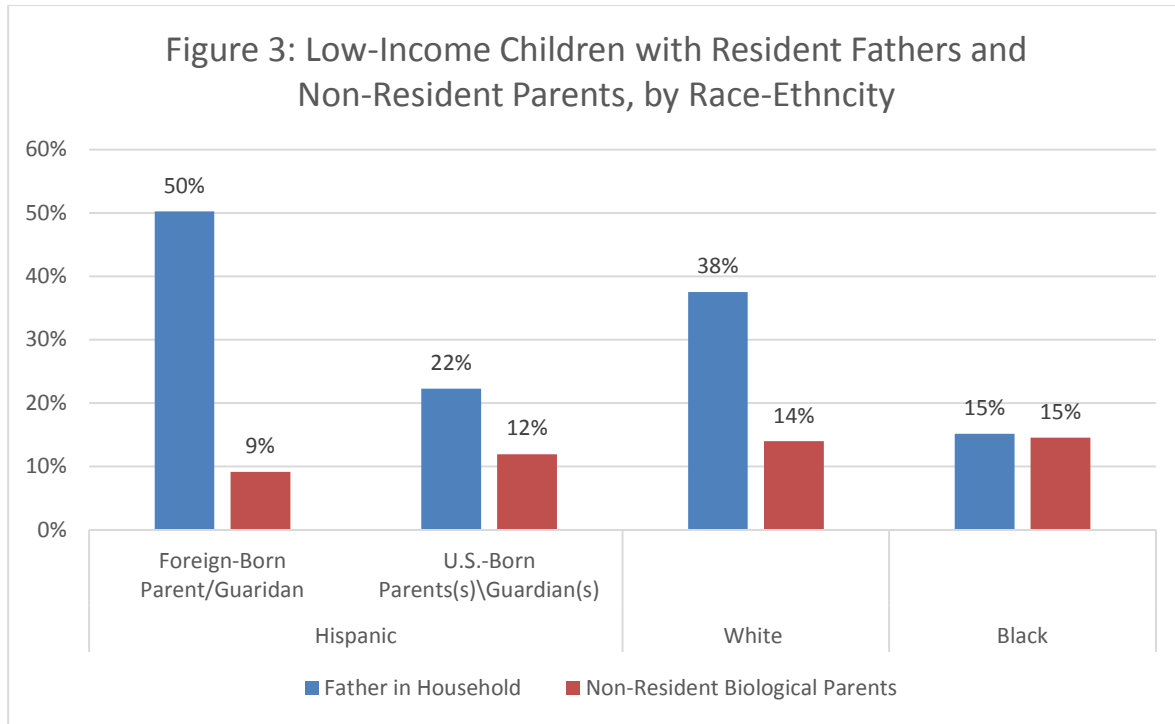
- However, Hispanic children with at least one foreign-born parent have even larger households than do those with U.S.-born parents; the average household size of low-income Hispanic children with a foreign-born parent is 4.8 people compared to 4.3 for low-income Hispanic children with U.S.-born parent(s).
- Low-income Hispanic children, regardless of where their parents were born, also live in households that have more children than their white counterparts (see Figure 1).

## Family Structure



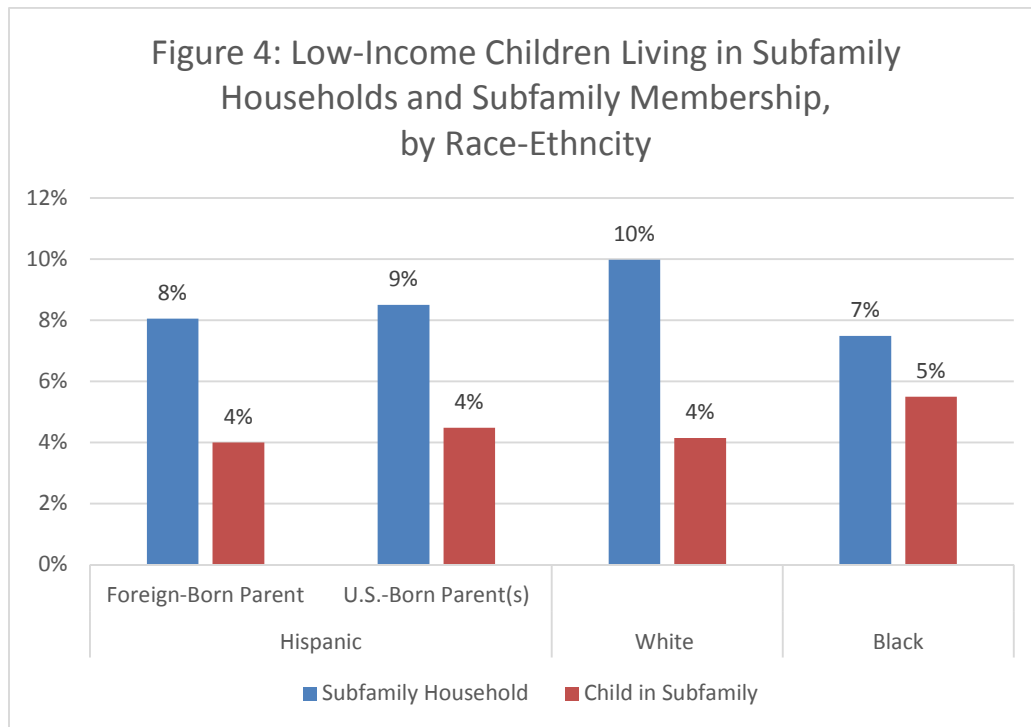
**Only 11 percent of low-income Hispanic children with U.S.-born parents live in married two-parent households, approaching the level among low-income black children (8 percent).** However, more than one-third of low-income Hispanic children with at least one foreign-born parent live in married, two-parent households, exceeding the level of low-income white children (26 percent) (see Figure 2).

**Almost twice as many low-income Hispanic children with a U.S.-born parent reside in single parent households than do those with a foreign-born parent.** Forty-seven percent of low-income Hispanic children with a U.S.-born parent reside in single parent households – households comprised of child(ren) and one parent – compared to 26 percent of those with a foreign-born parent. For comparison, 37 percent of low-income white children and 61 percent of low-income black children live in single parent households.



**Low-Income Hispanic children with a foreign-born parent are the most likely to live in the same household as their biological father.** Half of low-income Hispanic children with foreign-born parents live with their father compared to 22 percent of those with U.S.-born parent(s) (see Table 1). In both cases this is higher than among black children (15 percent).

**Low-income Hispanic children are the least likely to live in a household without a biological parent.** About one out of ten Hispanic children do not reside with a parent compared to 14 to 15 percent of their white and black peers (see Figure 3).

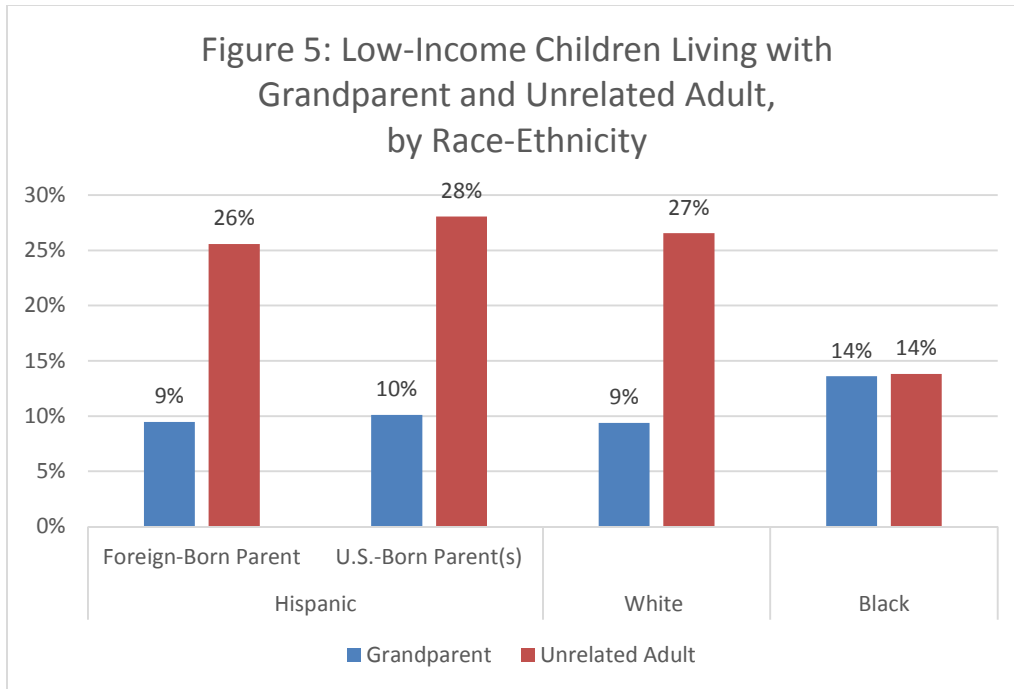


**Less than 10 percent of low-income Hispanic children live in a household with another family (a subfamily).** A subfamily is a family – married adults with or without children or a parent and child(ren) – that lives in someone else’s household. The prevalence of subfamily households among low-income Hispanic children does not vary by parental nativity status and falls between that of low-income black (7 percent) and white (10 percent) children (see Figure 4).

For low-income Hispanic children who live in subfamily household, there is a higher prevalence of related subfamilies – a member of the subfamily is related to the head of household – than unrelated subfamilies, whereas the opposite is true for their white counterparts (See Table 1).

**Four percent of low-income Hispanic children are members of the subfamily in the household and this does not vary by parental nativity (See Table 1).**

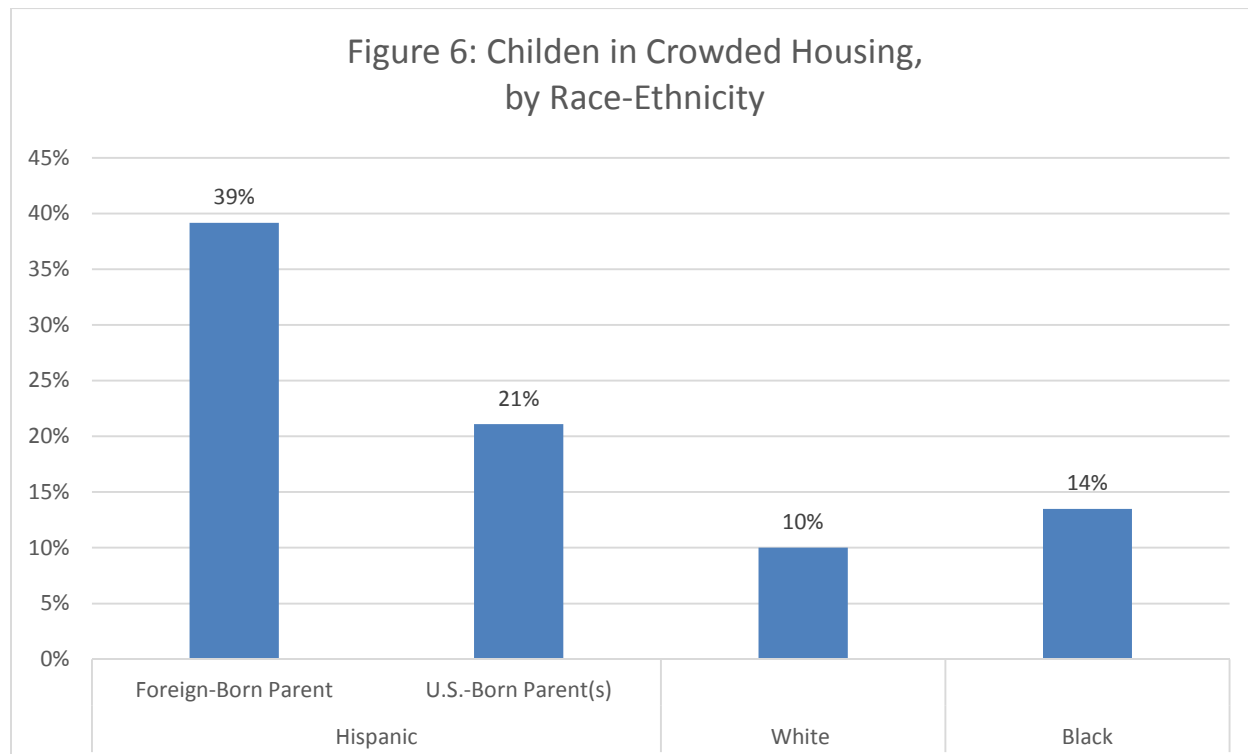




**Almost one in ten low-income Hispanic children, regardless of parental nativity, live with a grandparent.** These levels (and those for white children) are lower than that of low-income black children (14 percent). Eight percent of low-income Hispanic children live in three or more generation households—a child, parent, and grandparent—and this also does not vary by parental nativity status (See Table 1).

**More than one quarter of low-income Hispanic children, regardless of parental nativity, live in households with an unrelated adult (See Figure 5).** This is comparable to the levels among low-income white children and exceeds that of low-income black children (14 percent) (See Figure 5).

## Crowded Housing



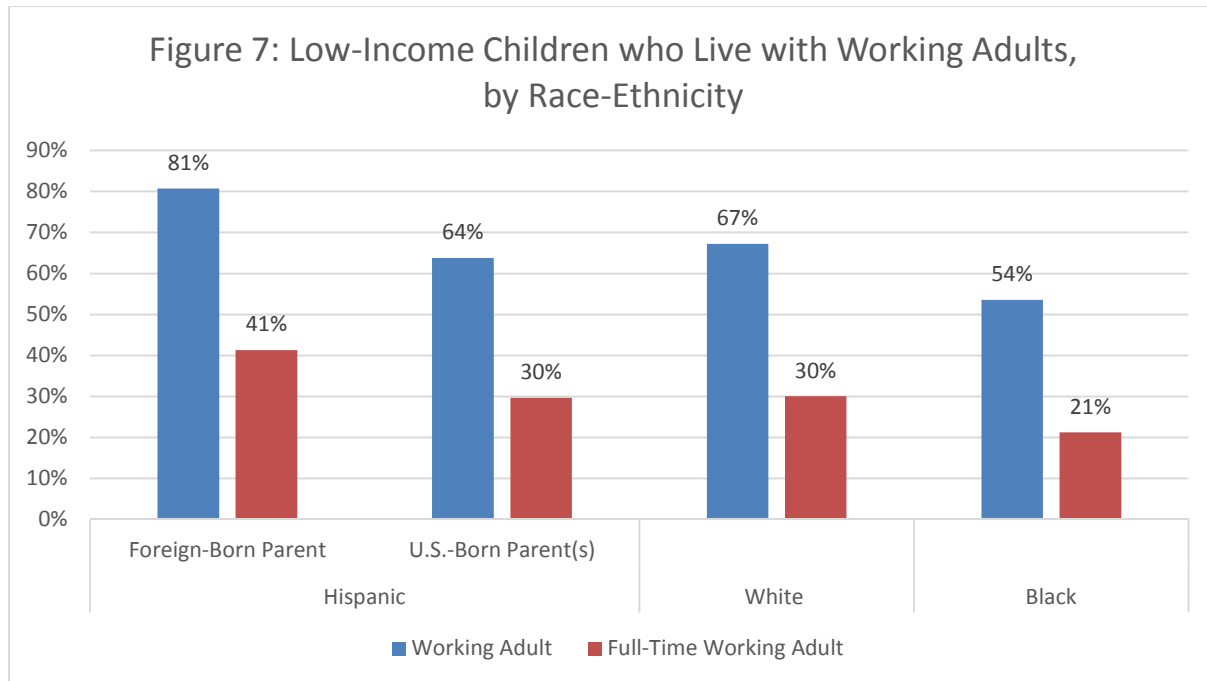
**Despite having the largest household sizes, low-income Hispanic children also live in the smallest residences compared to their white and black peers.** They live in residences that have fewer rooms and fewer bedrooms than do other children.

- This particularly true for those with foreign-born parents. Low-income Hispanic children with a foreign-born parent live in residential units that average 4.6 rooms and 2.4 bedrooms whereas those with U.S.-born parents(s) live in units that average 5.1 rooms and 2.7 bedrooms (See Table 1). Low-income white children live in the largest residences that average 5.8 rooms and 2.9 bedrooms (See Table 1).

**Almost twice as many Hispanic children with a foreign-born parent live in crowded housing than do those with U.S. born parents.** Crowded housing is defined as more than two persons per bedroom (or more than 1 person per room if the unit has zero bedrooms) (see Figure 6).

- Nearly 40 percent of Hispanic children with a foreign-born parent live in crowded housing compared to 21 percent of those with U.S. born parents.
- Less than 15 percent of low-income white and black children live in crowded housing.

## Employment



**Low-income Hispanic children with a foreign-born parent live in households with stronger labor market connections than do other children.** Over 80 percent of low-income Hispanic children with a foreign-born parent live in households with a working adult compared to about two-thirds of low-income Hispanic children with U.S.-born parent(s) and white children and just over half of low-income black children.

- Over 40 percent of low-income Hispanic children with a foreign-born parent reside with an adult who works full time compared to 30 percent of low-income Hispanic children with U.S.-born parents and low-income white children and 21 percent of low-income black children.