

Family Structure Change Among Latinos: Variation by Ecologic Risk

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Abstract

We examined differences in family structure change in an urban sample of mothers ($N = 1,314$) from their child's birth to age 5 and whether ecological risk moderated this association. We found that compared with U.S.-born Latino mothers, foreign-born Latino mothers were 62% less likely to break up and 75% less likely to repartner than remain stably resident. Across nativity status, Latina mothers with fewer children, more economic stress, less income, and less frequently reported father involvement were more likely to break up and repartner than remain stably resident. We found no moderation effects of ecological risk.

Keywords

family change, Latino families, depressive symptoms, education, family stability

Over the past 50 years, there have been dramatic changes in family composition, including increased rates of nonmarital births and divorce and decreased rates of marriage (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Kennedy & Bumpass, 2008). Changes in family structure, also called family transitions, happen when a parent ends

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a current romantic residential relationship (e.g., divorce, breakup) or forms a new one (e.g., marriage, cohabitation). In 1970, 11% of infants were born to unmarried mothers (Akerlof, Yellen, & Katz 1996), whereas today 41% of all children are born to unmarried mothers (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). Even more children will live with only one parent at some point in their lives (Cherlin, 2010). Only 56% of children are born to married or cohabiting parents who remain together until the child's 12th birthday (Brown, Stykes, & Manning, 2016). Moreover, single parents are highly likely to enter into at least one romantic relationship soon after the dissolution of their relationship with the child's father (Gray, Garcia, Crosier, & Fisher, 2015), thus potentially experiencing multiple changes. These dramatic changes in family structure and child rearing have sparked research on understanding its consequences mostly for poverty and income as well as the implications for children's well-being (Bachman, Coley, & Carrano, 2011; Bloome, 2017; Brown, 2010; Fomby & Osborne, 2010). There has also been keen interest in understanding the individual and family-level characteristics that are associated with changes in family structure. Understanding what factors, in addition to income and poverty, predict changes in family structure is critical because they are quite common and these transitions threaten the economic well-being of the family as well as the well-being of children (Bloome, 2017; Cancian & Haskins, 2014). Moreover, changes in family structure disproportionately affect ethnic minority families who are more likely to experience economic disadvantages than their higher income counterparts and any family change might exacerbate this disadvantage (Brown et al., 2016; Lehrer & Son, 2017).

However, not all low-income ethnic minority families experience family transitions in the same way. The number of family transitions seems to vary by ethnicity with low-income African American families experiencing the most transitions compared with their low-income White counterparts (Aughinbaugh, Robles, & Sun, 2013; Cancian & Haskins, 2014; Karberg, Cabrera, Fagan, Scott, & Guzman, 2017; Manning, Brown, & Stykes, 2014; Wildsmith, Scott, Guzman, & Cook, 2014). Some of these studies find that changes in family structure among Latinos resemble their White counterparts while other studies find that they resemble their Black counterparts. Thus, it is unclear how Latinos, a heterogeneous group who make up 17% of the U.S. population, experience changes in family composition. This information is important to develop better theoretical models of the family as well as for programs and policies interested in tailoring programs to this population.

Acknowledging the importance of considering the sources of heterogeneity in the Latino population, we focus on nativity status because it has significant implications for all aspects of family life (Wildsmith et al., 2014). Studies show that native-born Latinos are different from foreign-born Latinos

on key characteristics such as levels of education, household income, parenting as well as issues related to mental health and the degree to which they endorse central cultural beliefs such as familism (Karberg, Cabrera, et al., 2017; Karberg, Guzman, Cook, Scott, & Cabrera, 2017; Rodriguez, Mira, Paez, & Myers, 2007). Thus we ask whether nativity status is related to family structure changes. And, if so, whether ecological risk, including parental education, household income, mental health, and father involvement—moderate this association. Specifically, we ask: (1) What is the association between Latino nativity status and family structure changes? and (2) how do indicators of ecological risk, such as maternal education and household income, maternal depressive symptoms, and levels of father involvement, moderate the association between nativity status and family structure changes. We focus on the first 5 years of life because changes in family structure and, consequently, living arrangements during this period are most likely to lead to long-term negative impacts on children's development (Brown, 2010; Cabrera, Hofferth, & Hancock, 2014; Cavanagh & Huston, 2006; Ryan, Claessens, & Markowitz, 2015). We test our research questions with data from the Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study (FFCW).

Latino Families in the United States

The Latino population in the United States is richly diverse in terms of race, religion, and socioeconomic status (Sáenz, 2004). The number of Latinos in the United States more than doubled between 1980 and 2000, accounting for 40% of the growth in the country's population during that period. Importantly, almost all Latino children younger than 5 years are born in the United States and are likely to live in two-parent families (Wildsmith et al., 2014). The impact of the Latino population on the cultural life of the United States goes beyond demography, to include cultural influences (e.g., food, music, language) and political, economic, and social contributions. As Sáenz (2004) argues, these attributes make the bilingual and bicultural Latino population a valuable resource in this country.

There are other aspects of Latinos in the United States that are particularly important for the well-being of children and families. According to recent estimates, although 30% of children in immigrant families live below the federal poverty level, compared with 19% of children with U.S.-born parents, 66% of children in immigrant families live with at least one employed parent, only three percentage points less than children with U.S.-born parents, at 69% (Hernandez & Napierala, 2012). More than half of low-income Latino women older than 20 years are in a coresidential living arrangement with their child's father (Wildsmith et al., 2014). Low-income Latinos have high

rates of marriage (48% vs. 49% for non-Hispanic Whites) and tend to have children within a coresidential relationship (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

However, Latinos are a heterogeneous group, and there are important differences between them by nativity status (Wildsmith et al., 2014). Low-income foreign-born Latinos are more likely to be married than U.S.-born Latinos (Wildsmith et al., 2014). Thus, nonmarital childbearing is less common among foreign-born Latino families than among U.S.-born (Hummer & Hamilton, 2010). Close to 80% of foreign-born Latinos have a child in two-parent unions compared with 68% of U.S.-born Latinos (Wildsmith et al., 2014). These statistics, combined with a deeply rooted cultural belief in the importance of the family and the value of preserving it suggest that changes in family structure and stability among Latinos may not be as common as they are in other ethnic groups. It also suggests that the prevalence of family transitions might be related to nativity status.

Family Structure Change Among Latinos

Our study is informed by social integration and cultural theories. Social integration theory proposes that individuals' norms, beliefs, and values form a type of collective consciousness that binds people together—socially integrates them or socializes them to live in a shared space (Beresneviciūtė, 2003). Individuals' marital bonds and family cohesion become reinforced when couples and families embed themselves in larger social networks (Landale & Ogena, 1995; Landale, Oropesa, & Bradatan, 2006). Couples and families who are not well integrated into social networks and communities have higher rates of dissolution (e.g., divorce) than those who are deeply embedded. Migration from one country to another is akin to migrating from one social network to another and may weaken both traditional family values as well as norms and expectations about family life because there is a lesser sense of shared consciousness and greater individualism that can result in marital dissolution (Landale et al., 2006; Lee & Bean, 2004).

Given the large rise in immigration from Latino countries in the past 30 years and the projected number of Latinos in the United States in the next 30 years (Colby & Ortman, 2015), the immigration experience is central to understanding Latino families' family circumstances. Social integration theory offers a theoretical and empirical foundation for examining how nativity status—being born in the United States or being foreign-born—has important consequences for family formation and living arrangements (Clark, Glick, & Bures, 2009). If immigration means that one becomes less integrated into a social network, then it will result in greater disruption in family life (e.g., higher degree of family structure change) among the foreign-born than

among the U.S.-born, who would be most integrated. Social integration theory would lead us to hypothesize that more changes in family structure occur among foreign-born, who are less socially integrated, than among U.S.-born families.

In contrast, a cultural perspective might suggest a lower likelihood of family structure changes. A cultural perspective suggests that because Latinos strongly value and believe in the importance of the family (familism; Halgunseth, Ispa, & Rudy, 2006; Leyendecker, Harwood, Lamb, & Schölmerich, 2002), the well-being of the family comes before the needs and well-being of individual members (Coohey, 2001; Romero & Ruiz, 2007). This view coupled with a strong adherence to Catholic and Evangelical teachings on the sanctity of marriage, makes a strong argument for the maintenance of marriage and against dissolution (Ellison, Wolfinger, & Ramos-Wada, 2013). Accordingly, Latino families would be less likely to break up because of their strong belief in the sanctity of the family and increased perception of social support (Halgunseth et al., 2006; Leyendecker et al., 2002). This might be especially so for foreign-born families (also known as immigrant) who might have stronger cultural beliefs about a range of issues including the centrality of the family in their lives than U.S.-born families (Almeida, Molnar, Kawachi, & Subramanian, 2009).

The degree to which Latinos adhere to values and beliefs about the family are believed to change over time as immigrant families acculturate to different family norms and expectations in the United States (Rodriguez et al., 2007). Although cultural theories that use acculturation as an explanatory variable are limited because they do not acknowledge structural factors such as discrimination (Zambrana, 2011), they are helpful in broadly explaining some life choices. The process of acculturation may weaken cultural beliefs about the value of the family. So that compared with immigrants who have resided in the United States for a long period of time, recent immigrants may be particularly likely to adhere to familial norms, especially when they face economic stress (Parrado & Flippen, 2005). Theoretically, if acculturation is defined as the amount of time spent in the United States, then Latinos born in the United States are more acculturated than foreign-born Latinos. Studies have found that U.S.-born Latinos are less family oriented than foreign-born Latinos (Almeida et al., 2009; Knight et al., 2011; Rodriguez et al., 2007; Updegraff & Umaña-Taylor, 2015), suggesting that they would be more likely to break up a marriage or partnership than foreign-born Latinos. Based on cultural theories and this review, we hypothesize that family transition is more likely to occur among Latino families born in the United States than among foreign-born Latinos.

We thus test two competing hypotheses. Based on social integration theory that families who are born in the host society are also more integrated into social networks with norms for establishing and maintaining family structures and relationships, we would expect that family structure changes are more likely to occur among foreign-born Latinos than among native-born. In contrast, based on acculturation theories that more acculturated individuals would have weaker cultural beliefs about the importance of family cohesion, we would expect that family structure changes are more likely to occur among native-born Latinos than among foreign-born.

Potential Moderating Influences of Family Structure Change Among Latinos

Scholars have underscored the importance of testing the universality of models among different racial and ethnic groups rather than assuming that one model fits all (Coll et al., 1996; Mistry, Vandewater, Hutson, & McLoyd, 2002; Hill, Bush, & Roosa, 2003), especially in the context of prevention, intervention, and policy-relevant research. A way to understand how certain contextual characteristics might differentially result in different outcomes for certain groups is to take a risk perspective. A risk perspective suggests that certain psychological or social factors increase the likelihood that an individual will experience poor outcomes (Harvey & Delfabbro, 2004). Ecological risks, including low maternal education, low household income, poor mental health, and low levels of father involvement have been found to be strong correlates of changes in family structure. In this study, we test whether these indicators of ecological risk moderate the association between parents' nativity status and family transitions (Aughinbaugh et al., 2013; Brown, Bulanda, & Lee, 2005; Fagan & Palkovitz, 2011; Meadows, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008).

Lack of resources such as education and income pose a risk for family functioning because they are likely to increase stress and dissatisfaction (Jiang, Ekono, & Skinner, 2014). Ecological risk that includes low levels of education and income may take a greater toll on Latino families, especially on families who experience challenges associated with immigration status and language barriers (Rodriguez et al., 2007; Rodriguez, Myers, Mira, Flores, & Garcia-Hernandez, 2002). While there is little information on how risk is related to family change among Latinos, we know that parents with higher income and education are less likely to break up and more likely to stay in stable relationships than parents with lower income and education (Carlson & Furnstenberg, 2006; Manlove, Logan, Ikramullah, & Holcombe, 2008). Studies have found that couples with lower levels of education more

often face economic hardship such as unemployment or poverty and have fewer resources to overcome such hardship, increasing the risk of divorce and breakups (Manlove et al., 2008).

Maternal depression is also considered a significant risk factor because it can lead to general social dysfunction, including poor health, employment absenteeism, reduced productivity, and unemployment (Lépine & Briley, 2011). Depression can also disrupt family formation and lead to separation or divorce. The studies that have examined associations between mental health and family structure changes among Latinos are scarce. Studies of clinically depressed patients have found that couples in which both partners were depressed had a significantly higher divorce rate than couples in which only one member was depressed (Merikangas, 1984). In normative samples, a study with Black and White populations showed that maternal depression is associated with more family dysfunction and instability (Lépine & Briley, 2011). A study that analyzed data from the National Latino and Asian American Study to examine the association between marital status and psychological distress among Latinos in the United States found that the experience of family change among Latinos (e.g., separated, divorced) was associated with higher levels of psychological distress compared with being married (Darghouth, Brody, & Alegria, 2015). However, this study did not examine whether couple's mental health led to the breakup or whether there were differences by nativity status.

Another potential risk factor that can lead to changes in family structure is the level of father involvement (Brody, Murray, Kim, & Brown, 2002; Burchinal, Vernon-Feagans, & Cox, 2008). Studies have shown that mothers whose partners are involved in their children's lives also report high-quality relationships with their partners and consequently more stability in their relationships (Fagan & Palkovitz, 2011). There is evidence to suggest that father involvement varies somewhat by race and ethnicity, favoring Latino fathers (Cabrerera, Mitchell, Ryan, Shannon, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2008; Hofferth, 2006; King, Harris, & Heard, 2004). Fathers, including Latinos, who are more engaged in their children's lives, are more likely to stay involved and resident than fathers who are less engaged (Cabrerera, Fagan, Wight, & Schadler, 2011). Thus, if Latino fathers are more involved in their children's lives, their partners might be more satisfied and therefore less likely to break up. Whether father involvement varies by fathers' nativity status is an open empirical question. We therefore explore whether the association between nativity status and change in family structure is moderated by levels of father involvement.

However, there is no clear consensus on whether ecological risks, including education, income, mental health, and father involvement, have an impact

on family composition among Latinos as they do among other groups. Because Latinos, as a group, endorse family cohesion and loyalty, they might be more likely to stay involved and engaged with their children even in the face of adversity and risk and, consequently, would be less likely to dissolve their relationship to maintain the integrity of the family (Halgunseth et al., 2006; Leyendecker et al., 2002). If this is the case, we should expect that in the face of risk foreign-born parents would be more “family oriented” and therefore remain more loyal to the family than U.S.-born counterparts. In this study, we ask whether the nativity status of Latino couples is related to changes in family structure when faced with various risk factors. Because we are testing competing hypotheses for the effects of nativity status of Latinos on family structure changes, we cannot suggest a moderation hypothesis.

The Present Study

The current study extends the literature on family structure changes by examining how Latino families experience these changes and whether differences in family structure changes over the early childhood period (baseline, Years 1, 3, and 5) are related to couple’s nativity status, appealing to cultural and social integration perspectives. We tested two competing hypotheses. The first hypothesis based on social integration theory states that foreign-born Latino families will be more likely to be unstable (breakup or repartner) whereas U.S.-born Latinos will be more likely to stay stable. The second hypothesis based on a cultural perspective states that foreign-born Latinos will be more likely to remain stable compared with U.S.-born Latino families who will be more likely to be unstable. We also examine the moderating effect of ecological risk—mothers’ income and education, maternal depressive symptoms, and levels of father involvement—on the association between Latino nativity status (foreign-born or U.S.-born) and family structure changes (a risk perspective).

Method

Data

The Fragile Families Child Well-being Study is a longitudinal birth cohort study including nearly 5,000 children born between 1998 and 2000 in hospitals in 20 U.S. cities with populations of 200,000 or more. Mothers of the children were interviewed in person within 48 hours of the child’s birth and again when the children were 1 and 3 years old. The response rate at baseline is 82% for unmarried mothers and 87% for married mothers. The response

rate is calculated as the percentage of all eligible mothers who provided complete interviews. Eighty-two percent of all mothers participated at all three waves (Bendheim-Thoman Center for Research on Child Wellbeing, 2008). FFCW is especially well suited to our research question because it includes contemporaneous reports on union quality for unions that have ended and for unions that are ongoing, so that we can account for changes in quality within a union over time and for multiple sources of poor union quality, issues that may be significant for children who have experienced multiple transitions in family structure. Additionally, because of the relatively disadvantaged status of the urban sample, the study includes a large sample of cohabiting unions that are likely to experience multiple union transitions (Osborne & McLanahan, 2007). The data we use come from maternal interviews from baseline, Years 1, 3, and 5 waves of data collection. We used data from the baseline and Years 1, 3, and 5 waves of data collection.

Analytic Sample

Our analytical sample consists of 1,314 urban mothers, who self-identified as U.S.-born ($n = 772$) or foreign-born ($n = 542$) Latino and who lived with their child at least 50% of the time. Most of Latinos (70%) were of Mexican origin. Of the total sample of $n = 4,898$, $n = 3,235$ (66%) were excluded because they self-identified as a race/ethnicity other than White, Black, or Latino. An additional $n = 349$ (7%) mothers were excluded because they did not live with their babies after the birth, which means that their children were not exposed to the mothers' changes in family structure.

Measures

Dependent Variable. Family structure change was measured when the focal child was 0 to 5 years old and it was calculated based on mothers' reports of their relationship status (married, cohabiting, or nonresident) at baseline and Years 1, 3, and 5. FFCW administers a questionnaire to mothers that asks "What is your current relationship with baby's father?" and "Are you currently involved in a relationship with someone other than baby's father" at baseline, Years 1, 3 and 5. Mothers who answer that they are involved in a relationship with someone other than the baby's father are also asked whether they live with their current partner. Family structure change was measured using mothers' responses to these questions across four waves (baseline to age 5) and were categorized as follows: If mothers reported cohabiting or being married at baseline (most often with the focal child's father) and at each subsequent wave, they were coded as 1 = *stable residential*. If mothers

reported that they were single at baseline and in subsequent waves, they were coded 2 = *stably single*. If they reported that they were married or cohabiting at baseline (with the focal child's father) and in at least one subsequent wave they reported being nonresident, they were coded 3 = *breakup*. If they reported that they were married or cohabiting at baseline (most often with the focal child's father) or nonresident at baseline and reported at a subsequent wave that they were married or cohabiting with a new partner, they were coded 4 = *repartner*. The reference group is stable residential for the logistic regression analyses.

Independent Variables. Mothers' ethnic and immigration status were combined into one variable that was categorized as foreign-born Latina, U.S.-born Latina. The reference category is specified in each analysis below.

Moderating Variables. The following indicators of ecological risk were tested as moderators: household income, maternal education and depressive symptoms, and levels of father involvement.

Household income was measured as a continuous variable, reported by mothers at baseline. We divided the variable by 1,000 to make it more interpretable. These variables are measured at baseline and remain fairly constant for the first 3 years. *Mother's education* was measured at baseline with a dummy variable (1 = *high school degree or less*). *Mother's depressive symptoms* was measured at baseline with a dummy variable created by the FFCW researchers (1 = *meets criteria for clinical depression*, 0 = *does not*).

Father involvement, reported at age 1—the first age at which involvement questions were asked—was calculated from eight questions that ask the mother to report how many days per week (0-7) the child's father plays games, sings songs, tells or reads stories, takes child to visit relative, puts child to bed, or shows physical affection. The eight questions gather information on play, cognitive stimulating activities, and care giving. The eight items were averaged to provide a score that was then used as a continuous variable with higher scores indicating more days of involvement per week. Alpha for this scale is .76. Mother report was used because of missing data on fathers' reports of their own involvement.

Control Variables. We controlled for two sets of variables: demographic and psychosocial. *Demographic controls* include age at first birth, and number of children and were measured at baseline. Mother's age at first birth and her number of children were measured continuously. These variables are related to family structure and family structure change (Fomby & Cherlin, 2007). *Psychosocial control variables* included maternal parenting stress and

economic stress, which were also measured when the child was 1 year old. Parenting stress was measured with four items from the Parenting Stress Inventory ($\alpha = .69$; PSI; Abidin, 1995), which were answered 1 = *strongly agree* to 4 = *strongly disagree*. Items were reverse coded, summed, and divided by the total number of items; higher scores indicated more parenting stress. Economic stress was measured with the Social Indicators Survey (Meyers & Garfinkel, 1999) and the Survey of Income and Program Participation (Bauman, 1998) scales of economic hardship. We summed the 12 items (each scored 1 = *yes*) for a variable that indicated number of economic hardships. Because of lack of variability in this variable, we did not model it as a moderator, but added it as a control.

Missing Data. Missing data ranged from 0% on demographic variables such as nativity status and education to 44% on father involvement. On average there were 11% missing data on all variables (moderators and control variables). We conducted chi-square (χ^2) tests to determine whether missingness on father involvement, the only variable with concerning patterns of missingness, was related to mother's nativity status. There were no significant differences among foreign-born Latina and U.S.-born Latina mothers on missingness. We used multiple imputation in Stata Version 13 to handle missing data (see Enders, 2013, for a discussion of the merits of multiple imputation).

Analytic Plan. All analyses were conducted in Stata Version 13. We first ran descriptive statistics (means and percentages). We then used multinomial logistic regression analyses to identify factors that predict membership in one of four family structure categories: stably nonresident, breakup, repartner (cohabiting or married), and stable residential (married or cohabiting—the reference category). Multinomial logistic regression allows for the simultaneous estimation of the coefficients for nativity status, maternal education, household income, maternal depressive symptoms, and father involvement within categories of family structure change. We computed moderation variables by (1) centering continuous variables and multiplying them by mother's nativity status or (2) multiplying indicator variables (e.g., depression) by mother's nativity status. Because of a dearth of theoretical and empirical evidence on how ecological risk variables moderate the association between nativity status and family structure change, we tested each moderator independently in the logistic regression models to first determine independent statistical significance. We measure our variables at the earliest time point because early risk following the birth of a child has been

shown to have negative repercussions for family functioning throughout the early childhood years.

Our coding scheme resulted in four groups: stably residential, stably single, breakup, and repartner. Our models comparing foreign-born and U.S.-born Latino mothers' relative risk for family structure change did not converge with stably resident and single mothers in the model because the stably single group was too small ($n = 35$). We conducted sensitivity analyses comparing results when the stably single mothers were excluded from analyses versus when they were grouped with the stable resident group. Results indicated no meaningful differences between the groups; for ease of interpretation we dropped the stable single mothers from analyses. Thus, our study is a comparison of the relative risk for breaking up and repartnering versus remaining stably resident for foreign-born versus U.S.-born Latino mothers.

Results

Descriptive Analyses

Table 1 shows unweighted descriptive statistics by nativity status group ($n = 1,314$). In terms of education, 64% of foreign-born Latina mothers have less than high school education compared with 41% for U.S.-born Latinos. For high school, the percentages are 19% for foreign-born Latinos, 30% for U.S.-born. Similarly, for income, average maternal report of family income for foreign-born Latinos is \$25,000 compared with \$28,000 for U.S.-born Latino. For our analytic sample, at birth 73% of foreign-born Latinos were resident (32% married) and 65% of U.S.-born resident (18% married). At age 3, 79% of foreign-born were resident with their partner (46% married); 65% of U.S.-born were resident with their partner (33% married).

In terms of changes in family structure, from birth to age 5 years, 66% of foreign-born Latinos were in a stable residential relationship compared with 38% for U.S.-born Latinos (Table 2). Three percent of foreign-born Latinos and 5% of U.S.-born Latinos were in a stably nonresident relationship. Approximately 37% for U.S.-born Latinos and 17% for foreign-born Latinos experienced family structure change in the form of repartnering (see Table 2).

In terms of maternal psychosocial functioning: Only 7% of Latino foreign-born mothers reported depressive symptoms compared with 11% of U.S.-born (Table 1). The average reported parenting and economic stress was very low across groups. Both groups reported similar average levels of father involvement (4 days of involvement per week).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics (N = 1,314).

N Variable	U.S.-born: 772			Foreign-born: 542		
	n	%	M (SD)	n	%	M (SD)
M education						
<HS	316	41		347	64	
HS	230	30		104	19	
Some college+	224	29		90	17	
F education						
<HS	304	39		331	61	
HS	262	34		89	16	
Some college+	172	22		86	16	
M HH income at birth ^a			28 (27)			25 (24)
M number of children						
At birth			1.1 (1.3)			1.1 (1.3)
At age 5			2.6 (1.3)			2.6 (1.3)
F number of children						
At birth			1.0 (1.2)			0.9 (1.2)
At age 5			2.8 (1.5)			2.6 (1.3)
M depression	81	11		37	7	
M parenting stress			2.2 (0.6)			2.1 (0.8)
M economic stress			1.2 (1.7)			0.9 (1.5)
F involvement			4.1 (1.7)			3.6 (1.5)

Note. M = mother; F = father; HH = household; HS, high school. Percentages do not add to 100 when a variable has missing data. Depression, coparenting, and father involvement measured at age 1.

^aIndicates that values are in thousands.

Table 2. Latina Mother’s Residence and Family Structure Changes by Nativity Status.

	Foreign-born Latino (%)	U.S.-born Latino (%)
Resident birth	73	65
Married birth	32	18
Resident at age 3	79	65
Married at age 3	46	33
Family change (0-5 years)		
Stable resident	66	38
Stable nonresident	3	5
Breakup	14	20
Repartner	17	37

Table 3. Correlations Among Latina Mothers' Family Structure Changes, Nativity Status, and Ecological Risk.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1. Family structure change ^a	1									
2. Foreign nativity status	0.22*	1								
3. Household income	-0.08*	-0.05	1							
4. Education	-0.01	-0.23*	-0.23*	1						
5. Depression	-0.07	-0.05	-0.06	0.01	1					
6. Father involvement	0.11*	-0.15*	0.09*	-0.09*	-0.08*	1				
7. Number of children	0.02	-0.01	-0.13*	0.09*	0.01	-0.02	1			
8. Age at first birth	0.11*	0.19*	0.18*	-0.23*	-0.02	0.03	-0.25*	1		
9. Economic stress	-0.13*	-0.11*	-0.12*	-0.02	0.16*	-0.05	0.09*	-0.14*	1	
10. Parenting stress	-0.01	-0.12	-0.07*	0.08*	0.10*	-0.13*	0.07*	-0.01	0.07*	1

Note. All variables are reported by the mother.

^aFamily structure change was coded as follows: 1 = stable residential or stable nonresident; 2 = *breakup*; and 3 = *repartner*.

* $p < .05$.

Family structure change is significantly and positively correlated ($p < .05$) with foreign nativity status, household income, father involvement, and age at first birth. Family structure change is significantly and negatively correlated with economic stress (see Table 3). Foreign-born nativity status is negatively correlated with mothers' education, father involvement, and economic stress, and positively correlated with age at first birth.

Multinomial Logistic Regressions: Family Structure Change by Ethnic and Nativity Status

To test our first and second competing hypotheses that (1) foreign-born Latino families will be more likely to be unstable whereas U.S.-born Latinos will be more likely to stay stable and that (2) foreign-born Latinos will be more likely to remain stable compared with U.S.-born Latino families who will be more likely to be unstable, we ran multinomial logistic regressions. Across nativity status, Latina mothers with fewer children, more economic stress, less income, and less frequently reported father involvement were more likely to break up and repartner than remain stably resident. Latina mothers who were older when they had their first child were also less likely to repartner than remain stably residential. Compared with U.S.-born Latino mothers, foreign-born Latino mothers were 62% less likely to break up and 75% less likely to repartner than remain stably resident (Table 4).

Table 4. Multinomial Logistic Regression Predicting Latino Family Structure Change Birth to Age 5 (Stable Residential Reference Group).

	Family structure	
	Breakup	Repartner
	RRR	RRR
Mean number of children other than focal child (reference: 0)		
1	0.56*	0.54**
2	0.74	0.45***
M age at first birth	0.97	0.92***
M economic stress	1.59*	1.36†
M parenting stress	0.85	1.07
M nativity (reference: U.S.-born)		
Foreign-born Latino	0.38***	0.24***
M income	0.93†	0.83***
M education (reference: more than HS)		
HS or less	1.10	1.29
M depression	1.02	1.16
F involvement	0.81**	0.74***

Note. M = mother; F = father; HS = high school.

†*p* < .10. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

Moderating Effects

To address our third research question of whether the nativity status of Latinos is related to family structure changes when faced with various risk factors, we tested the effects of the following moderating variables: household income, maternal education and depressive symptoms, and father involvement. In the full model with all the variables, the moderators that were statistically significant when tested alone lost significance when modeled together. The interaction terms for education and father involvement were not significant when added alone. The relative risk ratio for education by foreign-born status was .50 (*p* = .07) and for father involvement × foreign born was 1.36 (*p* = .08). Because none of the interaction terms were significant, we removed these from the final model and we report main effects only. Although there were main effects of nativity status on family structure change among Latina mothers, there were no significant moderation effects. That is, household income and father involvement, which were significantly related to family change did not explain Latina mothers' relative risk of breaking up or repartnering differently based on nativity status.

Discussion

The most notable change in the contemporary American family has been the dramatic shift in family composition: increased rates of nonmarital childbearing and divorce and decrease in rates of marriage. Social scientists have paid attention to these changes because of the profound implications for the economic well-being of the family as well as for the well-being of children. A large limitation of this literature is that it has not examined whether family structure changes are experienced by all ethnic groups in the same way. This is an important question because the composition of the United States is very diverse and thus there is remarkable variability in how the cultural context and other variables play a role in the formation or dissolution of the family. We thus extend this literature by examining family transition patterns among Latinos, the largest ethnic group in the United States, and draw several important conclusions. We found that foreign-born Latina mothers were in relatively stable relationships, less likely to break up or repartner than U.S.-born Latinas. In contrast, more U.S.-born Latina mothers experienced more than one family structure change. If family stability contributes to the well-being of the family and of children, then we would expect foreign-born Latinos to be in a better place than their counterparts. However, foreign-born Latinos are also more economically disadvantaged (although they report better mental health outcomes) than U.S.-born, which raises the question of whether family stability trumps economic disadvantage in the short or long term, especially for children's well-being. This is an important question that merits further study.

The descriptive differences between foreign-born and U.S.-born Latinos also play out in our predictive models. Across family structure changes, our control variables (i.e., age at first birth, number of children) predicted to changes in family structure. Holding these variables constant, as expected we found that foreign-born Latina mothers were less likely to break up or repartner than to be in a stable residential relationship compared with U.S.-born Latina mothers. This evidence supports a cultural explanation that foreign-born Latino parents compared with U.S.-born are more likely to stay together because of strong family values about the importance of the family, which tend to be weaker among U.S.-born Latinos (Landale et al., 2006; Lee & Bean, 2004). These findings do not support a social integration theory that foreign-born immigrants would experience greater odds of breaking up. Possibly their networks are not affected by immigration. The receiving country may offer a rich network of supports. Future research should examine the cultural theory by testing whether strong family values explain (mediate) the association between nativity status and family structure

outcomes. Similarly, it would be important to measure social networks in country of origin and receiving country as a means to examine the social integration theory.

We also found support for a main effect of risk on family structure changes. Across nativity status, Latina mothers were more likely to be in a stable residential relationship when they reported less economic stress, more income, and reported that their child's father was more involved with the child. These results are consistent with the literature showing that lack of resources such as income (Carlson & Furnstenberg, 2006; Jiang et al., 2014; Manlove et al., 2008) and low levels of father involvement (e.g., Cabrera et al., 2011; Fagan & Palkovitz, 2011) increase the risk of family structure changes. We did not find support for the association between maternal depression and family structure changes as others have done (e.g., Lépine & Briley, 201) perhaps because families in our study reported low levels of depressive symptoms and only a small percentage met the clinically depression criteria. It is possible as others have found that depression might be a consequence of family structure changes (Darghouth et al., 2015); this should be certainly of interest to future researchers. Overall, our findings suggest that ecological risk, in particular low levels of income and father involvement, are as important for Latinos as they are for other groups (Flores et al., 2002).

We expected that foreign-born Latino couples, who have stronger sense of family cohesion and loyalty, would be less likely to break up than U.S.-born Latina mothers when faced with various risk factors. We did not find support for this hypothesis. We found that ecological risk, including low levels of household income, maternal education and depressive symptoms, and father involvement, did not change the association between nativity status and family structure changes. Although risk factors such as less income and lower levels of father involvement significantly predicted Latina mothers' family structure changes, these associations did not differ for U.S.-born versus foreign-born mothers. Thus, our findings do not support the view that ecological risk (i.e., low levels of income and father involvement) takes a greater toll on families who experience challenges associated with immigration status than with families born in the United States (Rodriguez et al., 2002; Rodriguez et al., 2007). It is possible that cumulative risk—that is these ecological risks in combination—rather than single risk factors might alter the pathways of association between nativity status and changes in family structure. This is a direction of future research. Regardless, the implications of the current findings clearly point to programmatic efforts to help fathers stay involved in their children's lives and improve the economic conditions of Latino families.

Limitations

These findings should be understood in the context of some limitations. The measurement of family structure change could be better. In particular, we likely underestimate family structure change. Because we use mothers' reported residential relationship status at each wave, it is possible that mothers experience other relationship changes between waves that are not captured. For example, if a mother reports she lives with her child's father at one wave and is single at the subsequent wave, we know of one family structure change. However, she could have separated from the father, moved in with a new partner, and separated from him in the time between waves. The current coding scheme does not capture this possibility. The sample might have been biased due to missing data. Although we tested whether our data were missing at random, there were a lot of missing data on father involvement and parenting stress. It is likely that mothers who did not answer questions about their child's father or their own parenting stress are different from those that did. Our results need to be interpreted with this in mind. Another potential limitation is the lack of data on the role of structural factors (including discrimination and structural oppression) in shaping life choices that could have caused enough stress to affect family relationships. Future studies should include these constructs to understand their impact on family choices.

Conclusions

In summary, our findings showed that although foreign-born Latina mothers are less likely to separate and repartner than U.S.-born Latina mothers, ecological risk factors such as low levels of income and father involvement can exacerbate and create family stress and dissolution in all families, not just immigrant families. Programs and policies targeted at improving the well-being of Latino families need to target fathers and economic self-sufficiency as important conduits for family well-being.

Authors' Note

The contents are solely the responsibility of the National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.


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