

Journal of Applied Research on Children: Informing Policy for Children at Risk

Volume 1
Issue 1 *Latino Children*

Article 11

2010

Predicting the Past and Forecasting the Future

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Recommended Citation

Fuentes-Afflick, Elena (2010) "Predicting the Past and Forecasting the Future," *Journal of Applied Research on Children: Informing Policy for Children at Risk*. Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 11.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58464/2155-5834.1014>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu/childrenatrisk/vol1/iss1/11>

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The history of Latinos in the United States (U.S.) is an intriguing story that is still unfolding. In the inaugural issue of the *journal*, Dr. Adolfo Santos focuses on important issues regarding Latino children. In the last fifty years, there has been a dramatic, sustained, and unprecedented change in the demographic profile of the U.S. population. Specifically, the proportion of Asian/Pacific Islanders and Latinos in the U.S. has increased substantially, and these demographic changes are even more striking among childbearing women. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, Latina women represented 15% of childbearing women in 1990; by 2005, the proportion of Latina women had increased by 60%, to 24% of all childbearing women.¹ As a pediatrician, I have witnessed this population transition, which has widespread implications for education, health, politics, and society.

Dr. Santos highlights the lack of research on Latino children and describes the implications of the lack of scholarship in this area. Much of our understanding of Latino health has focused on perinatal outcomes, which could be interpreted as a lack of interest in pediatric outcomes. However, I believe that the emphasis on perinatal outcomes reflects the availability of comprehensive data on the birth certificate rather than a lack of appreciation for or interest in child health. There are several data sources that focus on child health but the study samples are often targeted populations rather than nationally representative. Clearly, it is important to develop broadly representative, longitudinal studies of child health that collect information about some of the unique issues that affect Latinos, such as birthplace and acculturation status. To fully understand the spectrum of health issues that affect Latino children, it is imperative to train researchers to conduct these types of studies and develop funding mechanisms to support such studies. As Dr. Santos points out, it is critical that we use data to identify needs and develop interventions.

I was fascinated by the figures in Dr. Santos' article, which presented the number of scholarly publications that focused on Latino children as a function of time. Although Dr. Santos points out that there is relatively little scholarship in this important area of study, I am encouraged by the recent trend, which suggests that there is a growing body of researchers who focus on Latino health. Dr. Santos also highlighted the growth in the proportion of Latinos who receive doctoral degrees and the proportion of Latino authors of scientific papers, which is encouraging. The study methods may have undercounted the number of Latino researchers since name may not be a valid indicator of ethnicity, but the observation that the number of doctorally-prepared Latinos is increasing is encouraging. In terms of research, I believe that Latino and non-Latino

researchers will continue to undertake scholarly work to address the health, educational, and social issues which affect Latinos.

Dr. Santos highlighted the broad range of issues affecting Latinos and I believe it is essential that we collaborate across fields of study to achieve meaningful improvements in health and other types of outcomes. For example, the health issues that affect Latino children cannot be fully addressed by health professionals. To address the challenges of adolescent pregnancy and high school drop-outs, health professionals need to work with educators, politicians, and policymakers in order to develop innovative programs. The historical data presented by Dr. Santos offers an intriguing explanation for understanding why we have relatively little research on Latino children and the data suggest that we will soon have enough researchers and data to address the compelling health needs of Latinos and mitigate health disparities. Working together and thinking creatively, we can develop new strategies to improve the health of Latino children.

Reference

1. Martin JA, Hamilton BE, Sutton PD et al. Births: Final Data for 2006. Nat Vital Stat Rep 2009;57:1-104.