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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mujeres Latinas

by The Latino Institute

This report highlights the socioeconomic status of Latinas in Chicago. It articulates the challenges, opportunities and resiliency of the Latina community. It also defines their needs and the inequalities that exist between Latinas and the larger society. These inequalities have been and continue to be defined by race and ethnicity in our society.

What is clear from this analysis is that the challenges that confront all women—childcare, access to jobs, obtaining a better education, obtaining economic self-sufficiency—are also challenges for Latinas. The disparity between Latinas and the larger society on virtually all of these socioeconomic indicators, however, is particularly wide. At the same time, Latinas have fewer resources available to them. Language, poverty, and isolation create barriers to many existing opportunities. The challenge articulated in this report is to recognize the contributions and potential of the Latina community while working to reduce social and economic disparity.

More than one quarter of a million Latinas live in Chicago. The sheer strength of this number points to the ever increasing role they will play in the life and future viability of the city. However, census and focus group data presented in this report clearly show that Latinas are disproportionately represented in low-paying jobs and that they "feel invisible," as the pressures they face at home, in the workplace and in this society continue to multiply.

At 57.2 percent, Latinas labor force participation is slightly more than that of all women (56.6%). But Latinas are three times more likely to work as operators, fabricators and laborers (28%) than all other women (10%), and are the group least likely to hold professional or managerial positions (14% compared to 28.1% of all women). At work, these women state that they confront "ignorance and stereotypes" about Latinas, who are thought to be passive and incompetent. They also perceive a lack of support for their dual roles as homemakers and workers who need to further their education on the road to economic improvement. Many Latinas who do not work outside the home feel that their role is not sufficiently valued.
FINDINGS

Economic Development

- Despite poverty, few Latinas utilize public assistance.

One in every 4 Latinas (25.76%) lives in poverty.

At 10.3%, Latina use of public assistance is slightly less than that of all women, 11.2%.

- Puerto Rican women are the poorest of the poor among the groups analyzed.

Puerto Rican women have an income of 33 cents for every dollar of income in White female-headed families.

- Latinas are as likely to work as all women, but they work at low wage jobs.

At 57.2%, Latina labor force participation is slightly more than that of all women (56.6%).

Latinas are three times more likely to work as operators, fabricators and laborers (28.5%) than all women (9.8%), and Latinas are more likely to work in the manufacturing sector, 31.1%, than any other racial/ethnic group analyzed.

Latinas are the group least likely to hold professional or managerial positions, 13.8%, compared to 28.1% for all women.

Education

- Latina voices are not heard.

When asked, “are Latina voices and/or needs heard in society” focus group participants responded with a resounding “NO! We are invisible in society!” However, Latinas also stated that “we must empower ourselves.”

- Latina stereotypes exist.

Confronting “ignorance in the workplace” and stereotypes about Latinas as passive and incompetent were cited as concerns to focus group participants.

- Too many Latinas do not have a basic education.

Only 4 out of 10 (41.1%) Latina adults have completed high school. In contrast, 66.3% of all women have completed high school.

Only 7 out of 100 (6.9%) Latina adults have completed college, compared to one in every five (18.1%) of all women.

- A significant number of Latinas do not speak English well.

Almost 3 out of 10 Latinas indicated that they do not speak English well.

Family Related

- A significant number of Latinas have children.

Almost half (46.9%) of Latinas have children. In contrast, 29.2% of all women have children.

- Teenage pregnancy exists among Latinas.

More than one out of every ten (11.1%) Latinas aged 15-19 have at least one child. This is more than double that of white teenagers (5.2%)

Health

- Too few Latinas have health insurance.

More than one out of every four (26.9%) Latinas do not have health insurance.

Lack of access to health insurance, or partial health insurance coverage was cited as a key concern to focus group participants.

- High incident of cervical cancer.

The incidence of cervical cancer was 23.5 per 100,000 Latinas in 1992, while it was 9.0 per 100,000 women.
Latina female-headed families (FHF) have the lowest median family income ($13,175) of all racial and ethnic groups analyzed.

Latina female-headed families have an income of 48 cents for every $1.00 of income in white FHF.

Puerto Rican female-headed families are the poorest of the poor among groups analyzed.

At $8,964 Puerto Rican FHF have an income of 33 cents for every $1.00 of income in white FHF.

Among Latinas, Central American female-headed families have the highest median income of $17,101.
Half of all Latinas (50.4%) are immigrants or were born in Puerto Rico.

The proportion of Latinas who are immigrants or born in Puerto Rico is more than that of all other groups analyzed except Asians (75.9%).

Almost half of Mexican and Puerto Rican women were born abroad or in Puerto Rico.

About 3 out of every 4 Central, South American and Cuban women were born abroad.

Note: Census data, utilized as the primary source of information for this report, provide virtually no information related to health care. Consequently, other health sources were utilized to provide information on the health status of the Latino community.