

Child Sexual Abuse

Removals by Child Generation and Ethnicity



FINDINGS FROM TEXAS

THE URBAN INSTITUTE

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Child sexual abuse rates have fallen dramatically in the United States since the early 1990s. Between 1992 and 2000, substantiated sexual abuse reports dropped from 150,000 to 89,500 cases, a decline of 40 percent (Finkelhor and Jones 2004). Much of this decline may be attributable to a declining pool of older, previously unreported cases of child abuse that came to light in the late 1980s with rising public awareness but were largely investigated by the mid-1990s. However, similar declines in self-reported sexual abuse provide evidence that at least a portion of the change represents a real decline in child sexual abuse, rather than increased caution on the part of Child Protective Services (CPS) agencies that investigate and substantiate abuse

KEY FINDING

Latin American immigrants in out-of-home care in Texas are three times more likely to be removed because of sexual abuse than children of U.S.-born parents.

allegations. Despite this encouraging national trend in child sexual abuse, administrative data from Texas suggest that the share of Latin American immigrant children in out-of-home care who were removed for sexual abuse is three times as high as the share of children of natives removed for sexual abuse.

About the Series

The *Identifying Immigrant Families Involved with Child Welfare Systems* brief series provides estimates of Latin American children in out-of-home care and describes the experiences of these children in state child welfare systems. This brief compares four groups of children living in out-of-home care in Texas: Latin American immigrants, Latin American children of immigrants, Hispanic natives, and non-Hispanic natives. Latin American immigrants—often called “the first generation”—($n = 200$) are children born in Mexico, Central or South America, or the Caribbean who have immigrated to the United States. These children are distinguished from Latin American children of immigrants—“the second generation”—($n = 1,697$) who were born in the United States and had at least one parent born

in Mexico, Central or South America, or the Caribbean. Nearly 90 percent of the children we identify as Latin American immigrants or children of immigrants are from Mexico or have parents from Mexico. Natives are children who have at least one parent born in the United States and no foreign-born parents. We identify Hispanic and non-Hispanic natives ($n = 6,589$ and $n = 11,920$, respectively).¹ We do not identify non-Hispanic immigrants or other children of immigrants because their numbers in the data are too small for reliable analysis.

One key factor to note: we find evidence of underrepresentation in the child welfare system for the two Latin American populations. Latin American immigrants represent approximately 1 percent of all children in care, but they made up 7 percent of all children in Texas in 2005. Similarly, approximately 8 percent of all children in care are Latin American children of immigrants, who made up nearly 20 percent of all children living in Texas in 2005.²

Third-generation Hispanic children (children of native-born Hispanics), on the other hand, are *overrepresented* in the child welfare system. While approximately 33 percent of the children in care in Texas are Hispanic natives, they only represent 22 percent of all children in Texas.³

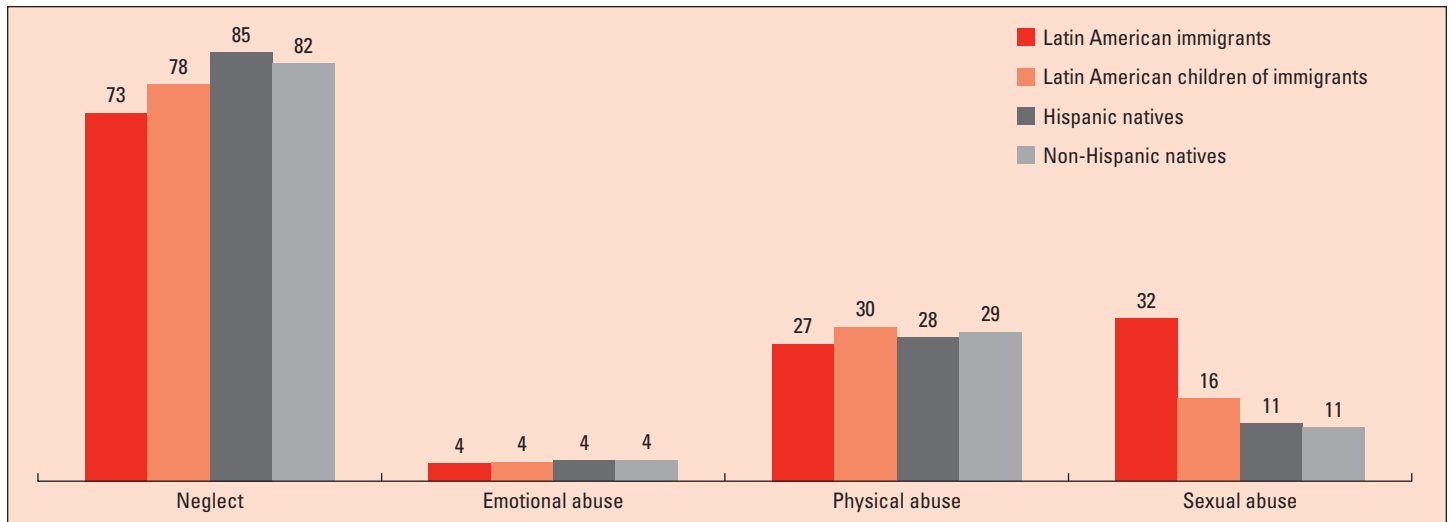
While immigrant children are underrepresented in the Texas child welfare system, the number of Latin American immigrants increased 178 percent from 1980 to 2005, and the number of Latin American children of immigrants increased 240 percent. These increases suggest that we can expect to see more Latin American immigrants and immigrants’ children coming into contact with CPS.⁴

Differences in Sexual Abuse for Immigrants and Nonimmigrants

The share of children removed from their homes for emotional and physical abuse was similar across all child generation and ethnicity categories. However, Latin American immigrants were removed for sexual abuse more often than Latin American children of immigrants or native children (figure 1). While 32 percent of Latin American immigrants in out-of-home care in Texas were removed because of a sub-



FIGURE 1. Removal Reasons for Texas Children in Out-of-Home Care, March 31, 2006 (percent)



Source: Urban Institute tabulations of child welfare administrative data (March 31, 2006) and Texas birth certificate administrative data (1988–2004).

Notes: Estimates do not include children born after December 31, 2004, born outside the United States in a non-Latin American country, or born out of state, and all children not matched with vital statistics records. Bars do not add up to 100 percent because removal reasons were not mutually exclusive; a child could be removed for multiple types of abuse.

Significance: Significance was determined using a least squares means test, which also controlled for age. Differences were assessed at the 95% confidence level. **Neglect:** all differences statistically significant except difference between Latin American immigrants and Latin American children of immigrants. **Emotional abuse and physical abuse:** no differences statistically significant.

Sexual abuse: all differences statistically significant except difference between Hispanic and non-Hispanic natives.

stantiated case of sexual abuse, only 11 percent of Hispanic and 10 percent of non-Hispanic natives in the child welfare system were removed for sexual abuse. A moderate share, 16 percent, of Latin American children of immigrants were removed from their homes because of sexual abuse. Conversely, the share of children removed for neglect was significantly lower among Latin American immigrants and children of immigrants than native children.

Possible Reasons for Differences in Sexual Abuse Removals

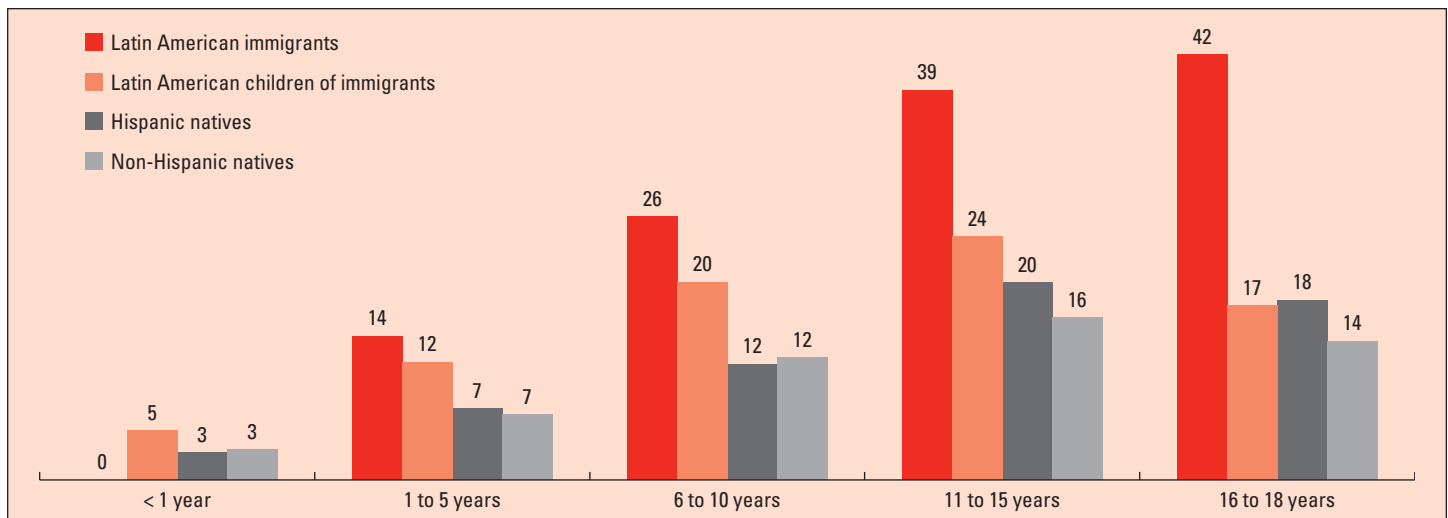
There are a variety of possible reasons that a higher share of Latin American immigrants would be removed for sexual abuse, including the age and gender profiles of immigrant children and the fear of the consequences of reporting abuse. We may also be observing unaccompanied alien minors, runaways, or victims of commercial sexual exploitation coming into contact with the child welfare system after first being involved with law enforcement agencies. We conclude, however, that age and gender are not substantial contributing factors to the disproportionate share of immigrant children removed for sexual abuse.

Age. Child sexual abuse victims are typically older than victims of other types of child abuse. While 45 percent of sexual abuse victims nationally are 12 years old or older, only 34 percent of victims of physical abuse and 22 percent of victims of neglect are 12 years old or older (U.S. Department of Health and Human

Services 2006). In the Texas child welfare system, the average age of all victims of sexual abuse at the start of their first out-of-home placement was almost 9 years old, while the average age of children removed for physical abuse was nearly 6 years old. Latin American immigrants in child welfare are, on average, older than natives and Latin American children of immigrants. The average age at first out-of-home placement (for any removal reason) for Latin American immigrants was 10 years old. Latin American children of immigrants and native children were both, on average, under 7 years old at the start of their first out-of-home placement. It might be hypothesized that Latin American immigrants are disproportionately victims of sexual abuse simply because they are disproportionately older. However, even after controlling for age, Latin American immigrants still experience sexual abuse at significantly higher rates than their second-generation and native counterparts (figure 2). For example, the share of Latin American immigrants in out-of-home care between the ages of 16 and 18 who were sexually abused is still more than twice the share of native children that age who are removed for sexual abuse.

Gender. Gender is also a well-known predictor of child sexual abuse, with females having a higher probability of being victims of sexual abuse than males (English 1998). This national trend is reflected in the Texas data, where 15 percent of all females in out-of-home care were removed for sexual abuse, compared with 8 percent of all males in care. It is not surprising, then, that 59 percent of Latin American immigrants in out-of-home care in Texas are

FIGURE 2. Texas Children Removed for Sexual Abuse in Out-of-Home Care by Child Age, March 31, 2006 (percent)



Source: Urban Institute tabulations of child welfare administrative data (March 31, 2006) and Texas birth certificate administrative data (1988–2004).

Notes: Estimates do not include children born after December 31, 2004, born outside the United States in a non-Latin American country, or born out of state, and all children not matched with vital statistics records.

Significance: Significance was determined using *t*-tests. Differences were assessed at the 95% confidence level. < 1 year: Latin American immigrants statistically significantly different from all other groups. 1–5 years: Latin American children of immigrants statistically significantly different from Hispanic and non-Hispanic natives. 6–10 years: Latin American immigrants and Latin American children of immigrants both statistically significantly different from Hispanic and non-Hispanic natives. 11–15 years: all groups statistically significantly different from each other except Latin American children of immigrants and Hispanic natives. 16–18 years: Latin American immigrants statistically significantly different from all other groups.


female. In contrast, only 47 percent of Latin American immigrants in the general population are female.⁵ Since the general population of immigrant children is predominantly male, the disproportionately female population of Latin American immigrants in care can only be an effect of disproportionate removal for sexual abuse, rather than a reason for higher shares of removal for sexual abuse.

Fear of the Consequences of Reporting Abuse. Another possible reason Latin American immigrants are more likely to be in care for sexual abuse is that only the most serious cases of abuse in immigrant communities are reported to or substantiated by the CPS agency. A substantial number of immigrant households are mixed-status, a combination of citizens and noncitizens. Most (81 percent) young children of immigrants live with a noncitizen parent, and nearly 50 percent live with an undocumented parent (Capps et al. 2004). Families of mixed-citizen, legal noncitizen, and illegal noncitizen status are known to underutilize public benefits because they believe they are ineligible, or because they are afraid of the consequences for their legal status (Capps et al. 2004). It is plausible that immigrant community members would also underreport cases of child abuse for the same reasons that they would underutilize other public services. It may take a very serious case of child abuse, for instance, a case of sexual abuse, to motivate members of an immigrant community to overcome their reservations about local social services and report the abuse.

Houston and Austin. While the statewide share of Latin American immigrants in out-of-home care removed for sexual abuse is high, at 32 percent, the share of these children who are removed for sexual abuse in the Houston metropolitan area (Harris, Montgomery, and Fort Bend counties) is even higher: 57 percent. The state capital, Austin, also has a high share (56 percent) of immigrants removed for sexual abuse.

However, the higher shares of immigrants removed for sexual abuse in Houston and Austin do not implicitly suggest that immigrant children in urban communities are especially at risk of sexual abuse. The share of Latin American immigrants removed for sexual abuse in the Dallas metropolitan area, by contrast, is comparable to the statewide share (35 percent); in El Paso, the share removed for sexual abuse is much lower (14 percent). Since the data suggest that age, gender, and urban residence are not important factors for explaining the disproportionately high share of Latin American immigrants removed for sexual abuse, it is useful to consider the possible factors that lead to Houston and Austin's higher shares of children removed for sexual abuse.

In 2003, the Houston metropolitan area had a population of 4.4 million.⁶ The size of the city and its long history of receiving immigrants makes Houston a “gateway” for immigrants to the rest of the nation (Singer 2004). Houston's role as a gateway city is facilitated by Interstate 10, which connects the city to the southeastern United States, where the foreign-born population is grow-



ing rapidly. Inevitably, many immigrants with intentions of traveling through Houston on their way north and east may stay in the city for an extended period.

Unaccompanied Alien Minors. It is possible that the same factors that make Houston an attractive city for immigrants may also make it an attractive destination for runaways, and an important legal subcategory of runaways: unaccompanied alien minors (UAMs). Runaways are known to be particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse because they are older, unsupervised, and in need of basic necessities like food and shelter (Estes and Weiner 2002). The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services confirms that runaways are included in the youth in care in Houston.⁷ While Texas CPS agencies cannot investigate cases of abuse where a family member is not involved, UAMs who have been abused may still be housed in foster care after being investigated by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and before their trial (Littlefield 2005). In fiscal year 2004, 58.5 percent of these pretrial, out-of-home placements of UAMs nationally were in Texas (Littlefield 2005). Although most of these children do not stay in care for a long time, those who cannot be reunified may receive child welfare services to determine a permanent living arrangement.

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. It is also possible that the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC), or child prostitution, may be contributing to the high share of Latin American immigrants removed for sexual abuse, particularly in Houston and Austin. John Miller, the U.S. Ambassador at Large on International Slavery, suggests that as many as 17,500 men, women, and children are trafficked into the United States each year, including many children trafficked for CSEC.⁸ CPS agencies cannot investigate CSEC cases unless the abused child is alleged to be victimized by a relative; the investigation of these cases is the responsibility of ICE or local law enforcement. Nevertheless, CSEC victims who are not reunified with relatives may still receive child welfare services, despite the fact that law enforcement personnel investigated their cases. This would be the case when the child is found to have been abandoned by a parent, when services are needed while the parents or relatives are being located, and during efforts to reunify.⁹ However, the data used in this study cannot be used to confirm the possibility that CSEC victims are currently in out-of-home care or were removed for sexual abuse.

Summary

The data suggest that the demographic characteristics of Latin American immigrant children, such as their age and gender profiles, are not driving the disproportionately high share of these children being removed for sexual abuse. Potentially more meaningful determinants of disproportionate removal for sexual abuse seem to be associated with a child's county of removal. The Houston metropolitan area and Austin have the highest shares of chil-

dren removed for sexual abuse, perhaps due to the unaccompanied minor, runaway, or CSEC victim populations.

Data and Methodology

We linked Texas vital statistics data from birth certificate records (all births from March 1988 through December 2004) to Texas child welfare administrative data (all children in care of the state as of March 31, 2006). This linkage with vital statistics data was necessary to determine whether children in out-of-home care had foreign-born parents. With data on parental nativity, we were able to determine whether the children were second-generation immigrants or children of natives. Immigrant children were already identified in the child welfare administrative data.

We use two methods of linking records. The first method uses a probabilistic-matching software, LinkageWiz version 4.1,¹⁰ which allows for exact and phonetic/near matches across a range of numeric and character variables. Once LinkageWiz matched cases, we undertook a second round of linking records based on our review of the LinkageWiz output. Using this output, we established additional linking rules and adjusted the cutoff thresholds to determine appropriately matched cases.

Using LinkageWiz and our matching strategy, we achieved a high match rate between the child welfare administrative data and the vital statistics administrative data—92 percent (child welfare file N = 22,419; matched file n = 20,658). The denominator in the match rate excludes two groups of cases that we were unable to match because they were not in our vital statistics files: (1) children born after 2004 (n = 2,906) and (2) children born out of state (n = 2,376). In developing our matching rules, we took care to exclude as many false positives as possible.

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Notes

1. When both parents are listed in the vital statistics record but one is missing nativity status, the generation/ethnicity of the child was based on the parent whose information was available.

2. From Urban Institute tabulations of the 2005 Current Population Survey (CPS) Annual Social and Economic Supplement.
3. From Urban Institute tabulations of the 2005 CPS.
4. From Urban Institute tabulations of the 1980 Census Integrated Public Use Microdata Sets and the 2005 CPS.
5. From Urban Institute tabulations of the 2005 CPS.
6. U.S. Census Bureau. 2005. American Community Survey 2003 Data Profile. <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Products/Profiles/Single/2003/ACS/Tabular/385/38500US336233603.htm#footnotes>.
7. Daniel Capouch, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, phone interview by authors, March 21, 2007.
8. John Miller, remarks on the 2006 Trafficking in Persons Report, Washington, D.C., June 5, 2006.
9. Daniel Capouch, phone interview, 2007.
10. LinkageWiz Software. *LinkageWiz User Manual Version 4.1*, June 2004. Available at <http://www.linkagewiz.com>.

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