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Report tracks trends for Latinas

They're younger and have more children

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Latina women are younger, less educated and lower-earning than non-Latina women, according to a new statistical report issued by the Pew Hispanic Center.

The report was based on U.S. Census figures and shows that 62% of the growth in the Latino population in 2006-'07 came from births, rather than from immigration - a reversal of the growth pattern in the 1990s, when immigration primarily accounted for Latino population increases.

According to the report, one in four children in the United States younger than age 5 is Latino.

The report, titled "Hispanic Women in the United States, 2007," also shows that, of Latina women who gave birth in 2005-'06, some 50% of native-born Latinas gave birth out of wedlock, compared with 35% for Latina immigrant women and 34% for non-Hispanic women.

"That's surprisingly high and of great concern," said Enrique Figueroa, director of the Roberto Hernandez Center at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, who follows Latino demographics.

That means more children are being born into single-parent homes and often that means greater incidence of poverty for young moms, he said.

That figure tracks with other national statistics that show that 51% of Latina teens get pregnant at least once before the age of 20 - nearly twice the national average, said Nicole Angresano, associate director for community impact of the United Way of Greater Milwaukee.

Since 1995, Latinas have had the highest teen birth rate of any major ethnic or racial minority in the country, according to the report. And more than two-thirds of Latina teen moms drop out of high school, compared with 58% of teen moms overall, the report says.

In Milwaukee, the birth rate for Latinas ages 15 to 17 was second to the rate for African-American girls, but significantly higher than the city average, Angresano said.

"We know anecdotally that Latina families often are quite religious, and many don't . . . feel comfortable accessing birth control," she said.

She said a number of programs try to prevent teen pregnancies, including the Healthy Girls program at the United Community Center, funded with \$35,000 from United Way. The program is aimed at girls in eighth and ninth grades and helps them focus on school, activities and community volunteering, said Virgilio Rodriguez, the associate director for youth, health and athletic programs at the center.

The Pew report also shows:

- The median age for Latinas is 41, compared with 47 for non-Latina women.
- The fertility rate of Latinas is one-third higher than that of non-Latinas.
- Some 36% of Latinas have less than a high school education, compared with 10% for non-Latinas.
- Latinas who work full time earn a median weekly salary of \$460, compared with \$615 for non-Latinas.
- Latinas are more likely than non-Latina women to work in blue-collar occupations, such as building and landscape services, food preparation and services, and manufacturing.

On the Web For the Pew Hispanic Center's report, go to www.pewhispanic.org.

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