New York City – Of the 17.2 million children in the U.S. with a foreign-born parent, 4.2 million live in poverty. These children are significantly more likely to live with parents who are married and employed than their counterparts whose parents are native born. These characteristics of immigrant families, according to analysts at the National Center for Children in Poverty, a research center at Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health, are among those explored in two new publications.

“High poverty rates among children of immigrant parents, coupled with unique social and economic challenges, make them particularly disadvantaged when compared with children of native-born parents,” writes Vanessa Wight, PhD, lead author of the NCCP brief, Poor Children by Parents’ Nativity: What Do We Know? “This poses a significant policy challenge, as poverty and other material hardships can have deleterious effects on a child’s long-term health and wellbeing.”

“More importantly,” she continues, “children of immigrant parents experience poverty that is different from poor children of native-born parents.”

Among the findings about poor children of immigrant parents:

- They are more likely than their native-born counterparts to live in households where at least one parent works full time, year round.
- They are less likely to receive food stamps (SNAP) than poor children of native-born parents (fewer than one-half receive the benefit, compared to two-thirds of the poor children in native-born households).

“These findings suggest that child poverty in immigrant families is not necessarily linked to joblessness; rather, it more closely reflects the dark side of low-wage work and the related barriers to valuable work supports,” says Wight.

Other findings:

- The percentage of children living with immigrant families is on the rise—increasing from 16.1 million in 2006 to 17.2 million in 2009.
- Most of the children in immigrant families have at least one parent who has resided in the U.S. for 10 or more years.
- While a little over one quarter of native-born poor children have married parents, twice as many poor immigrant children have married parents.
Curtis Skinner, PhD, NCCP’s director of family economic security and the author of a related paper, *SNAP Take-up Among Immigrant Families with Children*, says that “many working immigrant families are still struggling within the system to access benefits they are legally entitled to.” His report details a variety of possible reasons SNAP (or food stamp) participation is low among qualified immigrant families, including a lack of information about eligibility, complications involved with verifying qualifications for the benefit, and the overall stigma attached – especially pronounced feelings of not wanting to be a burden on society.

Skinner recommends two important policy reforms for state program administrators that could help improve the participation rate of immigrant families in the SNAP benefit:

- Increase outreach efforts to inform immigrant communities about the SNAP program. Many eligible immigrant families believe they do not qualify for this important benefit, but state efforts to reach the nearly two million eligible but non-participating children in immigrant families are modest or non-existent.
- Make it easier for working parents to participate in the program by easing burdensome administrative requirements. For example, program certification periods should be lengthened, and resource and income limits liberalized.

Each of the new NCCP publications is available free online at: [www.nccp.org/publications/index_date_2011.html](http://www.nccp.org/publications/index_date_2011.html).

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*The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) is the nation’s leading public policy center dedicated to promoting the economic security, health and well-being of America’s low-income families and children. Part of Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health, NCCP uses research to inform policy and practice with the goal of ensuring positive outcomes for the next generation.*