Hispanic labor conference

Social scientists have in the past paid scant attention to the experience of Hispanic workers in the United States. That situation will be altered if the goals of a newly formed research group, the Hispanic Labor Research Network, are met. This network, which has ties to the Institute for Research on Poverty, plans to provide analytic studies of Hispanics in the U.S. labor market and to translate their basic findings into policy recommendations for what has come to be a sizable minority of the U.S. population.

In 1976 the Hispanic population was 11 million. By 1980 it was estimated to have grown to 14.6 million: 6.4 percent of the nation's citizens. At current rates of growth it could reach 16.5 million by 1986. Many in this large population are disadvantaged. In 1979, 20 percent of Spanish-origin people fell below the poverty line, compared with a national percentage of about 11 percent. The mean 1978 household income for Hispanics was $14,000, in contrast to $18,400 for non-Hispanic whites. Unemployment is a growing problem for Hispanics. In 1979 the unemployment rate for non-Hispanic white men was 4.4 percent, compared to 6.9 percent for Hispanic men; by 1980 the comparative figures were 6.1 and 9.7 percent.2

Despite these telling statistics, and despite the fact that other disadvantaged groups—principally blacks and women—have been the subject of intensive study by social scientists, Hispanics have not ranked high on the scholarly research agenda. To begin to remedy this neglect, Marta Tienda, a sociologist and Institute research affiliate—as well as a founder of the Hispanic Labor Research Network—and George Borjas, an economist at the University of California, Santa Barbara, co-directed a conference that brought together scholars specializing in Hispanic problems and those whose field is labor market problems. The conference, sponsored by the National Commission for Employment Policy and the Institute for Research on Poverty, was held at Santa Barbara on February 4–5, 1982.

Session 1: Wages


Relative Earnings of Hispanic Youth in the U.S. Labor Market, by Steven Myers and Randall King, The University of Akron.

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that ability, education, and success move smoothly together. Public expectations that expanding access to education is sufficient to achieve greater and greater equality of opportunity will, it appears, inevitably encounter frustration.

A Comparative Analysis of the Wages of Hispanic, Black and White American Men, by Cordelia Reimers, Princeton University.

Session 2: Unemployment

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Ethnic Differentials in Unemployment among Hispanic Americans, by Gregory DeFreitas, Barnard College and Columbia University.

Labor Market Turnover and Joblessness for Hispanic American Youth, by Stanley Stephenson, Jr., Pennsylvania State University.

Session 3: Family and work

Fertility and Labor Supply among Hispanic American Women, by Frank Bean, Gray Swicegood, and Allan King, University of Texas at Austin.

Mexico-USA Indocumentado Migration as a Settlement Process and Its Implications for Work, by Harley Browning and Nestor Rodriguez, University of Texas at Austin.

Session 4: Education


Session 5: Policy implications of Hispanic labor market research

Selected papers


Related reading


Robert Mare, “Correlates of Achievement.” Institute for Research on Poverty Reprint no. 393.

Robert Mare, “Social Background and School Continuation Decisions.” Institute for Research on Poverty Reprint no. 408.


3 Christopher Jencks et al., Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America (New York: Basic Books, 1972), pp. 52-57, has a good brief discussion of this issue.