The Stability of Extended Family Living Arrangements:

The Case of Mexican Immigrants and Mexican Americans

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ABSTRACT

The formation and maintenance of extended family households is a dynamic process in which family members enter, exit or stay in the household based on economic need, life course events and personal preference. However, most work on extended family living arrangements, and all prior empirical work on the living arrangements of immigrants, has relied on cross-sectional data. Immigrants' high level of co-residence with extended kin is significant because extended families are widely thought to enhance well-being and recent changes in welfare and immigration policy reflect the assumption that immigrants are able to and should derive support from extended kin for sustained periods of time. In this paper, we model the stability of extended family living arrangements using longitudinal data available from the 1990, 1991, 1992, and 1993 panels of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) to examine the social and economic determinants of entry into such living arrangements.

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INTRODUCTION

High levels of co-residence with extended kin among immigrants have led researchers and policy makers to assume that extended family support is a valuable resource for immigrants. However, the prevalence of such households observed at various points in time tells us little about the social and economic value of extended family living arrangements, which is likely to depend in part on their stability. Social scientists currently know very little about the stability of extended family households and even less about the social and economic factors that underlie their stability because most work on extended family living arrangements, and all prior work on the living arrangements of immigrants, has relied on cross-sectional data. In this paper, we examine the stability of extended family households among Mexican immigrants and natives using longitudinal data available from the 1990, 1991, 1992, and 1993 panels of the Survey of Income and Program Participation.

Immigrants, particularly recently-arrived immigrants from non-European countries, are more likely to co-reside with extended kin than their native-born counterparts. Overall, in 1990, 18.5% of all immigrant households were extended family households while the prevalence was only 11.6% among the native born (Glick, Bean and Van Hook, 1997). Immigrants' lack of economic resources and their demographic characteristics (such as the presence of young children) can partially but not entirely explain the high levels of coresidence among newly arrived immigrant families (Kibria, 1993; Chavez, 1985; Tienda, 1980). While some researchers attribute this to cultural preferences for co-residence among immigrants (Chavez, 1985;

Wilmoth, DeJong and Himes, 1997, Kibria 1993; Goldscheider and Lawton 1998), others view immigrants' high levels of co-residence as a response to the stress and uncertainty inherent in the migration and settlement process (Chavez, 1990; Glick, 1999).

Immigrants' high level of co-residence with extended kin is significant because extended families are widely thought to enhance well-being through informal exchange of information and advice, dependent care, medical care and supplies, and monetary loans or gifts (e.g., Coleman 1988; Menjivar 2000, 2002; Palloni et al. 2001; Stack 1974; Lomnitz 1985; Wolf 1994). In contrast to immigrants' relatively unfavorable socioeconomic profiles (particularly among Hispanics), blocked opportunities due to race/ethnic discrimination and low returns to education, kinship networks have been viewed as one asset from which many immigrants can draw (e.g., Waldinger 1999; Massey and Espinosa 1997; Massey et al. 1987; Portes and Bach 1985; Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996; Bean, Berg, and Van Hook 1996), and thus may be an important key to immigrants' successful socioeconomic adaptation and assimilation (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993). The perspective that cultural preferences underlie immigrants' extended family households bolsters the view of such living arrangements as durable social assets uniquely available to immigrants.

In addition, recent changes in welfare and immigration policy reflect the assumption that immigrants are able to and should derive support from extended kin for sustained periods of time. For example, the changes brought about by the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act and the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) together carry the assumption that family members can and will provide financial support to newly-arrived immigrants until they become naturalized citizens (Zimmerman and Tumlin 1998). Welfare reform made newly arrived immigrants ineligible to

receive most types of federally funded public assistance. At the same time, immigrants' family sponsors are now required to sign legally binding affidavits stating they will financially support newly-arrived relatives if necessary. As financial support from the government has been increasingly withdrawn, the obligations of family sponsors have been accordingly increased.

However, very little is known about the stability of extended family living arrangements. Rather, research has tended to focus on the determinants of living in an extended family household at a given point in time. By and large, this body of research has supported the view that explains extended family living arrangements in terms of their social and economic functions (namely, meeting the economic and care needs of family members in a cost-effective way) (Beresford and Rivlin 1966; Michael, Fuchs, and Scott 1980; Pampel 1983; Schwartz, Danziger, and Smolensky 1984; Burr and Mutchler 1992, 1993a, 1993b; Mutchler and Burr 1991; Wolf and Soldo 1988; McGarry and Schoeni, 2000). Despite the widespread treatment of immigrant extended families as important resources, we know remarkably little about the temporal stability of extended family living arrangements and thus their long-term value.

In this paper, we examine the stability of extended family living arrangements among Mexican origin individuals in the United States. We further model the determinants of the stability of such living arrangements in order to test hypotheses concerning the effects of stress and poverty on the viability of extended family and other complex household structures. Employing longitudinal data, we are able to model the extent to which recent immigrants to the United States form and stay in extended family households due to greater economic needs or needs arising from life course stage than longer resident immigrants or Mexican Americans born in the United States. Using longitudinal data permits us to distinguish between characteristics

that select individuals into these households and characteristics that accrue from residence in extended family households.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Research on extended family living arrangements has largely supported the structural functionalist view that explains extended family living arrangements in terms of their social and economic functions (namely, meeting the economic and care needs of family members in a cost-effective way). For example, extended family living arrangements are strongly associated with significant life course events (i.e., birth of a child, divorce, completion of schooling, death of a spouse, illness, and retirement), low income, and the lack of other economic resources (Beresford and Rivlin 1966; Michael, Fuchs, and Scott 1980; Pampel 1983; Schwartz, Danziger, and Smolensky 1984; Burr and Mutchler 1992, 1993a, 1993b; Mutchler and Burr 1991; Wolf and Soldo 1988; McGarry and Schoeni, 2000). Some questions persist concerning the direction of the relationship between socioeconomic status and living arrangement. For example, extended family living arrangements may reduce income if family members give up paid work to care for dependents. But the few studies that use longitudinal data (chiefly the SIPP) demonstrate that low income among the elderly leads to the formation of extended family households more than the other way around (Mutchler and Burr 1991).

The lack of attention paid to the determinants of extended family household *dynamics* is unfortunate because the factors associated with entering an extended family household may not be the same as those underlying the maintenance of these living arrangements over time (Boyd 1989). For example, even though poverty has been found to lead to the formation of extended family households (and we expect to find similar results in our proposed research), poverty

combined with economic inequality within extended family households has been hypothesized to add stress and instability to households (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Menjivar 1997, 2000; Stack and Burton 1993; Roschelle 1997). In an ethnographic study of Vietnamese, Salvadoran, and Mexican immigrants in San Francisco, Menjivar (1997) finds that the kinship networks (and extended family living arrangements) among the Vietnamese and Mexican immigrants offered more assistance and were more stable than those among Salvadoran immigrants. Menjivar's explanation is that the steady supply of resources available to the Vietnamese through refugee support and the community resources among Mexican immigrants due to their longer immigration history (i.e., long-term residents could offer support to new arrivals) help foster stronger kinship ties through the exchange of resources and practices of reciprocity. In other words, impoverished households that contain "freeloaders" may be less able to compel family members to contribute because of their inability to provide support, and may be more likely to dissolve due to conflict and bad feelings toward those not making fair contributions. Indeed, other research suggests that in order for extended family households to provide stable support, available co-residential kin must be able to provide either economic support or care for dependent family members so that the labor supply and consequently the income of extended family households can increase (Hogan, Hao and Parish, 1990; Tienda and Glass, 1985).

Drawing on theoretical and empirical evidence, we develop two competing hypotheses about the relationship of income/poverty to stability. The *structural functionalist* perspective predicts that low income and household-level income inequality leads to the formation and stability of extended family living arrangements because low-income individuals have fewer alternatives to co-residence and because households with income inequality contain both those who need help and those who can provide it. Thus extended family households are formed as

cost-effective ways for those with resources to help less fortunate family members. But from a *social exchange* perspective (e.g., Menjivar and others), poverty and inequality (particularly when poverty is combined with inequality) are expected to undermine the stability of intra-household family relationships and thus lead to the relatively rapid dissolution of extended family households after they are formed.

From a policy perspective, the difference between these two views is critical. If lower socioeconomic status and inequality are associated with the stability of extended family households this would buttress the view of kinship support networks as important and durable economic resources. But if lower socioeconomic status and inequality are in fact associated with instability of extended family households, this would suggest that those in most need of assistance are least likely to derive sustained support from extended kin. Such a result would challenge the largely unqualified treatment of immigrant kinship networks—and extended family living arrangements in particular— by U.S. welfare and immigration policies as important *and reliable* sources of social support.

To test these ideas, we model the relationship between indicators of social, economic, and health needs and extended family formation and continuation. We anticipate that both of the theoretical perspectives outlined above will be partially supported in our research results. We expect that the structural functionalist model—which focuses on material needs and familial norms as mechanisms leading to the formation of kinship-based co-residential groups—may more adequately explain the formation and stability of extended family households with relatives across the life course (i.e. elderly, children, disabled). That is, family members are more likely to use co-residence to fulfill familial obligations to dependent family members who are the least likely to be able to support themselves through other means such as getting a job. Since there

may be little expectation of reciprocity from these family members, "vertical" extended family households should be stable even in the face of economic constraints and income inequality within the household. These households are also more likely to occur among Mexican Americans and longer resident Mexican immigrants than among the recently arrived.

However, we expect that social exchange notions—which focus on the maintenance of interpersonal relationships through norms of reciprocity—may better explain the maintenance of "horizontal" extended family household structures. That is, households shared by family members from similar points in the life course (e.g. siblings or cousins of similar ages) will be longer lasting when all household members contribute. This is likely to be even more true for households of non-kin where familial obligations are absent. We expect "complex" households of non-relatives to be the least stable of the household types we investigate particularly when made up of recent arrivals. These households are the most likely to be formed in the interest of sharing household expenses and the least likely to put up with "freeloaders".

We focus on a single ethnic group—Mexican-origin immigrants and natives—in order to place useful limits on group-level variation in cultural preferences and migration experiences. There are several reasons for focusing on Mexican-origin persons. Mexicans are the largest single immigrant group in the United States today and they are an especially economically and politically vulnerable population. Moreover, the household formation patterns among Mexican immigrants may be distinctive from other Hispanic groups because of their pattern of circular and undocumented migration and their use of migration as part of a household survival strategy (Massey 2002; Massey et al 1990). Mexican immigrants—for example—may be more likely to live in short-lived single generation households because (1) parents or children (kin from other

generations) may be living in Mexico and not available to live with them in the United States, and (2) the circular pattern of migration may produce in highly transitory living arrangements.

We distinguish between multigenerational and single generation extended family households (Ruggles, 1987; Glick, Bean, and Van Hook, 1997). Extended family households formed by family members from the same generation appear to be more prevalent among recently arrived immigrants, and are negatively associated with time in the United States (Glick, 1999; Glick, 2000), while multigenerational households appear to be more associated with life course changes (aging) among immigrants and therefore tend to increase in prevalence with time in the United States (Glick, 2000). We expect the stability of these households to vary. Particularly among Hispanics who show a disinclination to use formal long-term care (Burr and Mutchler, 1992), co-residence of parents with adult children may be formed to provide long-term care to dependent elders or to young children and may therefore be more stable arrangements. But co-residence of siblings and cousins may be formed as responses to immediate but temporary needs arising from the immigration process and therefore be more short-lived as new arrivals become more settled or as some immigrants return to their country of origin.

DATA AND METHODS:

We use the combined 1990, 1991, 1992, and 1993 Panels of the Survey of Income and Program Participation, a longitudinal survey, to study the temporal dynamics of extended family living arrangements. Conditional likelihood discrete-time hazard models (Allison 1995; Guo 1993) estimate the probability of transitioning into and out of extended family living arrangements (models of extended family formation). We use discrete- rather than continuous-time models (such as Cox proportional hazards) because our data lack precise information about

the timing of moves in and out of households; we only know whether a change occurred between interviews. In addition, discrete-time hazard models can easily handle time-varying covariates, right-censorship, and left-truncated cases (if start-times are known) (Allison 1995; Guo 1993).

The unit of analysis is the person--time-segment (each time segment is 4 months or one-third of a year). In general, the analytic samples include a person-segment for every interview in which a person is exposed to the risk of experiencing the event in question plus the interview the event is first observed (extended family formation or dissolution). The sample for models of extended family formation is restricted to persons who were not living in an extended family household at the beginning of the SIPP panel, and includes person-segments from the second SIPP interview until and including the time segment the respondent forms an extended family household or is right censored.

We define extended family households as households containing at least two related minimal household units (MHUs). Related individuals living in such households are counted as living in an extended family household. The MHU, previously relied on in research on extended family households, refers smaller identifiable units within households based on marriage and parentage of minor children (Biddlecom, 1994; Ermisch and Overton, 1985; Glick, Bean, and Van Hook, 1997; Glick and Van Hook 2002). Independent of whomever they live with, married couples, single adults age 25 and older (other researchers have chosen other ages when examining the living arrangements of young adults, e.g., Goldscheider and Waite, 1991), and parents with minor children are counted as separate MHUs.

We further distinguish among different types of extended family households depending on whether the household contains MHUs from multiple generations, such as households including adult children and their elderly parents (termed “Vertical” household structures in

Glick, Bean, and Van Hook 1997), or whether the household contains MHUs from a single generation, such as households formed by adult siblings and their young children (termed "horizontal" household structures in Glick, Bean, and Van Hook 1997). We identify the relationships among MHUs by inference based on relationship to the household head. For example, if one MHU head is identified as the "child" of the household head, and another is identified as the "sibling" of the head, we would code the first MHU as the uncle or aunt of the second MHU. This type of approach has been used successfully in other research on household structure (Glick, Bean, and Van Hook 1997; Schmertmann, et al.2000; Cutler, Coward, and Schmidt 1988). We contrast the vertical and horizontal extended households with simple households (i.e. one MHU) and other complex households (i.e. multiple non-related MHUs)

For those entering extended family living arrangements during the SIPP panel, it is straightforward to measure the date of entry into the household. However, some sample members are already living in extended family households at the time of the SIPP panel. For those in an ongoing extended family household at the first interview, we use retrospective data on place of residence to construct start times. The SIPP includes the month and year that each person age 15+ moved into the household. We use this information to reconstruct households backwards in time in order to assess how long adult (age 25+) family members had been living together. Our preliminary analysis shows that most (61%) ongoing spells were three years or less in duration at the start of the SIPP interview, with an average duration of 4.8 years. These start time estimates are only approximations and probably underestimate the duration of ongoing spells because they do not incorporate time spent in the household by extended family members who moved away prior to the first SIPP interview; they reflect only the duration of the household

composition as of the first interview. We will necessarily miss counting any extended family living spells that end prior to the first interview.

Predictor variables include economic need as measured by the logged income and income-to-poverty ratio of each person's MHU. We also include measures of life course status with age (and a squared term to account for non-linearity), education, marital status (never married, widowed, divorced/separated, married), and the presence of pre-school-aged children in the person's MHU. Disability or health care needs are measured by whether a person indicates that they need help with at least one activity of daily living (ADL) or instrumental activity of daily living (IADL). The questions on ADLs and IADLs are asked at two points during the SIPP panels (typically the 6th and the 9th interviews). Because the SIPP asks individuals with functional limitations how long they have had the limitation, we are able to "back-date" information about health care needs. That is, with the retrospective data, we are able to classify individuals as needing help with ADLS and IADLs for points in time earlier than the 6th interview. To take into account variation in living arrangements that may be associated with the settlement process, migration status will distinguish between U.S. born natives, immigrants who have been in the United States for a number of years (at least 5), and newly-arrived immigrants (arrived in the previous 5 years).

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Our preliminary descriptive results show that among Mexican Origin adults living in the United States, immigrants and natives are similar with respect to the percentage living in a simple (i.e., non-extended, non-complex) household (76.7 percent of natives versus 69.9 percent of immigrants) (Table 1). However, the percentage of immigrants living in simple households

increases with time in the United States. In addition, immigrants, particularly recently-arrived immigrants, are much more likely to live in horizontally-extended household than are natives or immigrants who are long-term U.S. residents. Importantly, this is *not* due to changes in living arrangements by period-of-entry cohorts. Figure 2 displays the percentage in various living arrangements for cohorts followed over time. Even in the short time period of the SIPP panel (about 3 years), recently-arrived immigrants become more likely to live in simple household structures and less likely to live in other types of households. The levels for recently-arrived immigrants clearly start to converge to those of natives and longer-term residents in the case of simple and "other complex" household structures.

We also find that all groups exhibit similar levels of stability among those in simple and vertically-extended household structures (Table 2). However, in the case of those living in horizontally-extended and other complex households, immigrants—particularly recent arrivals—are more likely to remain in the same type of living arrangement over time than natives. In fact, among recent immigrants, horizontal households appear more stable than vertical households possibly indicating different motivations for each household type at different points in the migration process. We are interested in further examining the stability of living arrangements for immigrants and natives in the context of multivariate analysis. We will thus be able to control for the influence of other factors that may be related to immigration status and stability, and we will be able to examine the relationship between poverty, economic stress, and household stability. The multivariate results will reveal the extent to which nativity differences in household stability persist in the face of these controls.

Table 1. Household Living Arrangements Among Mexican Origin Immigrant and Native Adults By Years in the U.S., 2nd SIPP Interview

	Simple	Vertical	Horizontal	Other Complex
Total	73.2	13.6	7.6	5.5
Natives	76.7	15.7	3.2	4.5
Immigrants	69.9	11.7	12.0	6.5
By Years in US (stay)				
0-5	57.7	13.2	19.5	9.5
5-10	63.1	10.0	14.9	12.1
10-15	67.6	11.2	15.6	5.6
15-20	79.0	9.0	8.3	3.8
20+	76.3	13.2	6.1	4.5
By Years in US (since last trip)				
0-5	69.1	11.9	11.0	8.0
5-10	66.4	5.3	19.0	9.3
10-15	65.8	12.5	16.9	4.8
15-20	74.4	11.9	9.2	4.6
20+	73.5	14.0	7.0	5.5
By Years in US (most recent stay or last trip)				
0-5	59.7	12.9	17.2	10.3
5-10	65.1	9.3	16.1	9.5
10-15	67.8	10.8	15.8	5.7
15-20	80.1	10.2	6.0	3.8
20+	75.3	13.7	6.2	4.9

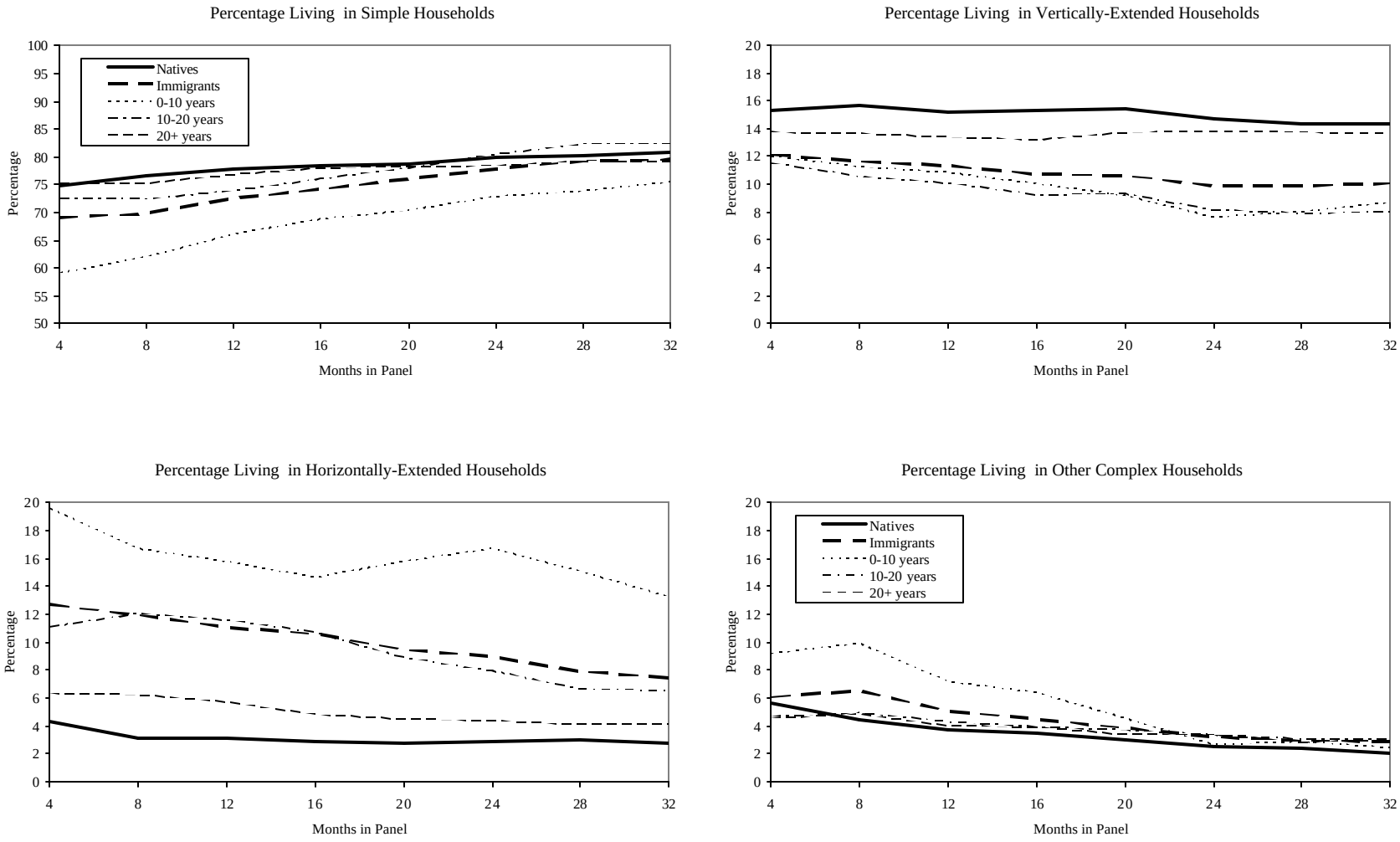
Sample: Mexican Origin adults age 25+ original SIPP respondents, Month=8
Source: 1990, 1991, 1992, and 1993 Survey of Income and Program Participation

Table 2. Stability of Household Living Arrangements Among Mexican Origin Immigrants and Natives

	Percentage in Same Living Arrangement as Previous Interview			
	Simple	Vertical	Horizontal	Other Complex
Natives	90.3	69.4	34.7	29.3
Immigrants	89.4	57.8	67.0	54.6
0-10 years in U.S.	87.5	61.6	74.7	52.0
10-20 years in U.S.	91.0	52.4	65.8	57.9
20+ years	88.9	62.0	52.6	54.8

Sample: Mexican Origin adults age 25+ original SIPP respondents, all but first interview months
Source: 1990, 1991, 1992, and 1993 Survey of Income and Program Participation

Figure 1


Percentage Living in Simple Households
Natives
Immigrants
0-10 years
10-20 years
20+ years
Percentage
Months in Panel
Percentage Living in Vertically-Extended Households
Percentage
Months in Panel
Percentage Living in Horizontally-Extended Households
Percentage
Months in Panel
Percentage Living in Other Complex Households
Natives
Immigrants
0-10 years
10-20 years
20+ years
Percentage
Months in Panel

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