

INTRODUCTION

- ◆ In the U.S. currently, more than 4.5 million American citizen children were born to undocumented immigrants (Ayón et al., 2012).
- ◆ American citizen children living in mixed-status homes with their undocumented parents often go through psychological anguish over the fear of deportation and detention of their illegal status parents (Brabeck & Xu, 2010).
- ◆ These children also have to deal with other issues that immigrant families often encounter such as moving away from their homes and communities in which they grew up, as their parents look for job opportunities, or being separated from a parent who had to move away from home for work (Brabeck & Xu, 2010).
- ◆ One of the most significant psychological stresses that citizen-children have is the fear that their parents will be discovered by U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials and then detained and deported.
- ◆ Witnessing the arrest and deportation of their parents can worsen the citizen-child's pre-existing stress and can have a debilitating effect on the child's mental health (Zayas, 2015).

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS

- ◆ The trauma of arrest and/or deportation of parent(s) are Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) that can have life-long effects (Hughes et al., 2017). Previous research has shown a strong causal link between ACEs and behavioral and psychological issues in adulthood.
- ◆ Some of the mental implications resulting from ACEs are alcohol and drug abuse, self-injurious behavior, violence and other criminal or antisocial behavior, depression, eating disorders, and risky sexual behaviors (Hughes et al., 2017).
- ◆ Neurobiological changes in the brain were also linked to ACEs and associated with increased risk for development of schizophrenia and increased risk of behavioral disorders in individuals previously diagnosed with borderline personality disorder (Hoffman et al., 2017).
- ◆ Besides having their lives disrupted and living in the constant fear of losing their parent to deportation, citizen children often live in poverty, encounter discrimination, witness the emotional stress that their parents experience, and suffer from poor physical and mental health (Ayón et al., 2012).
- ◆ Financial hardships lead to families being unable to afford housing, resulting in living in overcrowded households and frequently moving (Ayón et al., 2012).

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS

- ◆ Children of undocumented immigrants suffer from food insecurities significantly more than children of US citizens (Kalil & Chen, 2008; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2014).
- ◆ Despite the high risk of physical and mental health issues, such families do not access health care services out of fear of having to disclose the legal status of the parents (Chavez et al., 2012).
- ◆ Citizen-children who moved to the deported parent's native country with them suffered from depression, emotional issues and physical ailments (Zayas, 2015).
- ◆ Children whose parents were detained or deported were more likely to have depression, physical illnesses, and low self-esteem. Throughout the study, children showed symptoms of anxiety disorders, including separation anxiety disorder (Zayas, 2015).

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

- ◆ It is imperative that psychologists are well equipped to provide therapy, evaluation, assessments, support, and information to handle the psychological impact these children face due to threats of or actual detention, deportation, family separation, and other immigration-related stress and trauma. These services must be provided in multiple settings such as in schools and immigration shelters (Zayas et al., 2017).
- ◆ Psychologists can also volunteer to conduct evaluations and offer professional expertise to immigration lawyers and courts for families facing detention and deportation.
- ◆ Through community outreach and advocacy mental health providers can help by supporting and encouraging a feeling of safety to these children and their families (Zayas et al., 2017).
- ◆ By staying abreast with policy changes that affect immigrants, both documented and undocumented, mental health professionals can play a crucial role in helping implement policies, guidelines and support the advocacy of informed solutions to handle trauma associated with immigration issues for children and their families.

