

The Effect of Hostile Immigration Policies on Children's Mental Health

Fatima Avelica, a thirteen year old girl in Los Angeles, can be heard sobbing in the backseat of her car, as she takes a video of her father being pulled over and detained by immigration officials about six blocks away from dropping her younger sister off at school.¹ Unfortunately, Fatima is not alone in her distress. Pediatricians are reporting increased anxiety and panic attacks among children in immigrant families who are fearful that their parents may face deportation or whose parents have already been detained.² Teachers' descriptions of students experiencing stomachaches, or leaving their class in tears because they fear their moms will be taken away from them, are far too common.³ Schools around the nation are gathering emergency contact information from families in case parents are detained or deported.⁴



Multiple anti-immigrant executive orders, heightened immigration enforcement activities, and uncertainty over the future of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program under the Trump Administration have created a hostile environment for immigrant communities in California and throughout the United States. These actions have put immigrant families on high alert and have forced many immigrants back into shadows. This brief aims to inform advocates and policymakers about the effects of hostile immigration policies on children and the need to continue to work to ensure that children in immigrant families in California are healthy, feel secure, and continue to thrive.

The Growing Influence of Children in Immigrant Families

► **Children in immigrant families are an integral part of the fabric of California and the nation.** One in four children in the United States (18 million) live in immigrant families, and the share is growing.⁵ An estimated 5.1 million children live in families where one or more of their parents are undocumented immigrants.⁶

- In California, half of all children (about 4.5 million) live in immigrant families.⁷ In two Assembly Districts in Southern California, four out of five children live in immigrant families.⁸
- Nearly all children in the U.S. are citizens (97 percent), a small amount (2 percent) are lawfully residing immigrants, and very few children (1 percent) are undocumented immigrants.⁹
- The vast majority of children in California are U.S. citizens (96 percent), a small amount (2 percent) are lawfully residing immigrants, and very few children (2 percent) are undocumented immigrants.¹⁰
- About one in six children in California have at least one undocumented immigrant parent.¹¹

In California, the majority of immigrant children's families come from Mexico, Asia and Central America, but California is also home to immigrants from Europe, South America and the Caribbean and Africa.¹² California has also become home to more than 20,000 unaccompanied immigrant youth in the last three years, who are particularly vulnerable as survivors and witnesses of gang violence, domestic abuse and exploitation in their home countries who seek safety in the United States.¹³

► **In California and across the nation, children in immigrant families will be an increasingly large share of the state's workforce and the economy as a whole.** Although the vast majority of undocumented immigrants work,¹⁴ those without legal status have lower wages¹⁵ and nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of families with an undocumented immigrant are low-income.¹⁶ Even though immigrants participate in the workforce at higher rates than non-immigrants, full-time immigrant workers have median annual earnings of about \$36,800, which is substantially below the \$52,600 earned by U.S.-born Californians.¹⁷ As adults, the children

of immigrants are among the strongest economic and fiscal contributors in the U.S. population.¹⁸ The children of immigrants grow up to be a significant economic driving force. California's, and the nation's, future depends on the children of immigrants who will be an increasingly large part of the workforce.¹⁹

► Children of immigrants are among the strongest economic and fiscal contributors in the U.S. population.

Impacts of Immigration Policy and Actions on Children's Wellbeing

► **A hostile immigration enforcement environment harms the children of immigrants, even if parents are not yet detained or deported.** Although undocumented immigrant parents may try to protect their children from adults' worries, children are highly cognizant of the implications of immigration status on their everyday lives.²⁰ Even if family members are not actually detained or deported, immigrant families live in constant fear of being separated from loved ones that keeps them from fully participating in American society.²¹ In times of increased immigration enforcement activity, immigrant parents are afraid to take their children to the doctor, drive a car, or visit public places like parks

► Children of undocumented parents showed significantly higher risks of internalizing behavioral problems.

and playgrounds.²² A study in California showed that children of undocumented parents showed significantly higher risks of internalizing behavioral problems like anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, withdrawal,

or a need for attention; and also externalizing behavior problems such as rule breaking and displays of irritability and aggression.²³ Both types of behavioral problems are linked to adverse outcomes such as poor school performance, and high dropout rates.²⁴ The ever-present possibility of detention or deportation of family members also leads children to fear and distrust the police as people who could take away family members, which threatens their overall safety.²⁵

► **A parent's detention or deportation causes an increase in depression and anxiety, interrupting a child's healthy development.** One-fifth to one-quarter of the 3.7 million people deported from the U.S. in 2003 to 2013 were parents of US born children.²⁶ Family members have reported that

witnessing the apprehension of a parent at home is particularly traumatic for children.²⁷ Children who have had a parent detained or deported experience an increased occurrence of social isolation, depression, and anxiety.²⁸ Because of symptoms of mental distress, children have refused to eat, pulled out their hair, or had persistent stomachaches or headaches.²⁹ School aged children became withdrawn and aggressive, had deteriorating school performance, and often fought with peers or teachers, putting them at risk for difficulties later in life.³⁰

► **When parents are taken away, children left behind face dramatically reduced incomes, housing and food insecurity and an increased risk of entering the child welfare system.** When a parent is detained or deported, the loss of parental income results in housing and food insecurity, which are predictors of poor social and educational outcomes for children later in life.³¹ Deportation and detention can also cause the remaining parent to suffer from depression, social isolation and instability, which can heighten the negative effects experienced by children.³²



And, when a parent is taken away from the family, children are at risk of entering the child welfare system, after which the child faces significant barriers to reunifying with his or her parents.³³

- ▶ **Immigrant families already faced barriers to enrolling in programs and accessing services for children before the Trump Administration's actions.** Many immigrant parents—whether undocumented immigrants or lawfully residing—are ineligible for federal programs designed to support low-income working families, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.³⁴ Even if citizen or lawfully residing children are eligible

for programs, parents often do not apply because they fear that enrolling a child in public programs could affect their application for legal status or could allow personal information to be shared with immigration authorities.³⁵ This leads to lower program participation rates for children with immigrant parents. Less than half of children with *foreign born* parents received SNAP and more than two-thirds of low-income families with U.S. born parents received SNAP in 2008 and 2009.³⁶ Many states have much lower Medicaid enrollment rates for eligible citizen children living in *immigrant* families than for eligible citizen children in *non-immigrant* families.³⁷

The Federal and State Policy Context

- ▶ **California has made gains in health coverage for immigrant children and families, but faces additional barriers to keeping children enrolled and accessing services in an anti-immigrant environment.** In 2016, California used state funds to expand Medi-Cal to undocumented immigrant children, and successfully enrolled 175,000 children in the first nine months.³⁸ Less than a year later, families have expressed a desire to disenroll their children because they fear it could be used by immigration officials to separate them from their children or deny them legal status.³⁹ In addition, many children in

▶ One in three children in need of mental health treatment or counseling did not receive it in 2011-2012.

California face challenges in accessing mental health care. One in three children in need of mental health treatment or counseling in California did not receive it in 2011 to 2012.⁴⁰ Children in immigrant families

already faced additional barriers to accessing mental health care given language barriers, and cultural stigma about mental health care.⁴¹ Given existing barriers and immigrant parents increased fear of seeking services, school-based and other community-based mental health services will be even more essential partners in connecting children to care.

- ▶ **In addition to changes in immigration policy, California may face unprecedented cuts in federal funding for programs, which children and families rely on for services.** The push to repeal the Affordable Care Act, and the release of the Trump Administration's budget that eliminates funding for a wide array of programs that help

low-income children, also demonstrates a lack of concern for the needs of immigrant families and their children. The American Health Care Act's \$880 billion in cuts to Medicaid would have meant that individual states like California—where more than 5.6 million children rely on Medi-Cal to access healthcare today—will bear the responsibility of funding critical gaps in healthcare for children.⁴² And, the Trump Administration's budget proposal threatens many programs that support children, including grants for K-12 education, after school and summer programs, and food assistance for women infants and children. In addition, with increased detention and deportations, more children may find themselves involved in California's child welfare system, stretching a system where the existing numbers of children are unable to receive the services and supports they need.⁴³



► **California must ensure that children in immigrant families are healthy, feel secure and continue to thrive, even as federal policies make achieving this goal more difficult.** California has made great strides to support and protect children in immigrant families, but that work is not over. The Trump Administration’s immigration policy, combined with the possibility of dramatically reduced funds for programs that support the health and wellbeing of children, mean that California has to take bold action. California and its counties and cities should continue to protect the privacy of information that immigrant parents share when enrolling their children in health care, food assistance and other programs or services. The state should ensure that schools, health care settings, libraries, playgrounds, other sensitive locations where children learn and develop remain safe spaces free from immigration enforcement activities. Coordinating with and investing in organizations that provide outreach, navigation, mental health, and other support for immigrant families is essential for California to ensure that children stay healthy and safe. Closely monitoring changes to our nation’s immigration policy and cuts to programs that support children must continue in order to preserve the progress California has made to support immigrant families. Additional work



is needed to assess the impact of harmful federal policy changes on the health and wellbeing of children in immigrant families today and to develop a policy agenda to ensure all children remain healthy, feel secure and continue to thrive.



The Children’s Partnership is a non-profit, advocacy organization that works to improve the lives of children where they live, learn, and play. Since 1993 we have worked to advance the health and wellbeing of underserved children in California and in the country, through meaningful community partnerships, forward-thinking research, and community-informed policy.

www.childrenspartnership.org



The California Immigrant Policy Center (CIPC) advances inclusive policies that build a prosperous future for all Californians, using policy analysis, advocacy and capacity building to unlock the power of immigrants in California.

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Endnotes

¹ A. Castillo, "Immigrant arrested by ICE after dropping daughter off at school, sending shockwaves through neighborhood," *Los Angeles Times*, March 3, 2017.

² A. Gumbel, "Doctors see a new condition among immigrant children: fear of Trump," *The Guardian*, November 25, 2016.

³ A. Kamenetz, "I Have Children Crying in The Classroom," National Public Radio, March 9, 2017.

⁴ M. Balingit, "Schools Address Deportation Fears as Families React to Trump Moves," *The Washington Post*, March 20, 2017. Schools are also connecting parents to community resources to help them prepare for potential family separation.

⁵ "Immigrant Data Profiles, United States," Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, available at <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/demographics/US/>. Viewed March 13, 2017. These estimates are based on 2015 data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey.

⁶ R. Capps, et al., "A Profile of U.S. Children with Unauthorized Immigrant Parents," Migration Policy Institute, January 2016. MPI pooled five years of Census Bureau data from 2009 to 2013 to develop this estimate.

⁷ Author's calculation based on *Children Living with One or More Foreign-Born Parent by Assembly District (2010-2014)*, Kidsdata.org, a Program of Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health, available at <http://www.kidsdata.org>. Viewed March 12, 2017.

⁸ *Children Living with One or More Foreign-Born Parent by Assembly District (2010-2014)*, Kidsdata.org, a Program of Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health, available at <http://www.kidsdata.org>. Viewed March 12, 2017.

⁹ Author's calculations, op. cit. (5); and also "Profile of the Unauthorized Population: United States," Migration Policy Institute, Data Hub. MPI's estimates are based on analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data from the 2014 American Community Survey (ACS), 2010-2014 ACS pooled, and the 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), available at <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/unauthorized-immigrant-population/state/US>. Viewed March 14, 2017.

¹⁰ Author's calculations, op. cit. (5) and op. cit. (9).

¹¹ M. Pastor, et al., "What's At Stake for The State, Undocumented Californians, Immigration Reform and Our Future Together," Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration, University of Southern California, May 2013, available at http://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/731/docs/whats_at_stake_for_the_state.pdf. Viewed March 14, 2017.

¹² "Resilience in an Age of Inequality, Immigrant Contributions to California," California Immigrant Policy Center, 2014. Data from the 2010-2014 American Community Survey.

¹³ Author's calculations based on "Unaccompanied Children Released to Sponsors By State," Office of Refugee Resettlement, An Office of the Administration for Children & Families, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/programs/ucs/state-by-state-uc-placed-sponsors>. Viewed March 17, 2017. Data from October 2013 to January 2017;

and Elizabeth Kennedy, "No Childhood Here: Why Central American Children Are Fleeing Their Homes," American Immigration Council, July 2014, available at <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/no-childhood-here-why-central-american-children-are-fleeing-their-homes>. Viewed January 19, 2017.

¹⁴ Op. cit. (9).

¹⁵ The average annual income for undocumented immigrant workers was \$22,029 in 2014, less than half of the wage of all U.S. workers, and placing a family of four relying on these wages under the poverty level. See "The Economic Effects of Administrative Action on Immigration," Council of Economic Advisers, Executive Office of the President of the United States, November 2014, Updated February 2015.

¹⁶ Op. cit. (9).

¹⁷ Rodney, Jon, Sanchez, Jared, Scoggins, Justin, "Resilience in an Age of Inequality: Immigrant Contributions to California, 2017," Retrieved from the California Immigrant Policy Center, at https://www.scribd.com/document/337336889/Resilience-In-An-Age-of-Inequality-Immigrant-Contributions-Report-2017-edition#from_embed. Viewed March 20, 2017.

¹⁸ *The Economic and Fiscal Consequences of Immigration*, The National Academies Press, September 2016, available at <http://www.nap.edu/23550>. Viewed March 14, 2017.

¹⁹ Latinos grew from 22 percent of the working age population in 1990 to 29 percent in 2006 and are projected to grow to 40 percent by 2020. D. Reed. *California's Future Workforce. Will There Be Enough College Graduates?*, December 2008.

²⁰ All members of immigrant families are deeply cognizant of the frailty of their legal situation, even if they have a temporarily legal status (like Temporary Protected Status or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals). See C. Menjvar et al., "Legal Violence in the Lives of Immigrants," Center for American Progress, December 2012. The impact of deportation fear was experienced across different immigrant groups regardless of their country of origin, immigration status, or language spoken. See K. Hacker, et al., *The Impact of Immigration and Customs Enforcement on Immigrant Health: Perceptions of Immigrants in Everett, Massachusetts, USA*, Social Science & Medicine, August 2011. Children who have not had first-hand experience with immigration, have often seen or heard stories about raids or people being deported on television or on the radio. See J. Dreby, "How Today's Immigration Enforcement Policies Impact Children, Families, and Communities," Center for American Progress, 2012, available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/DrebyImmigrationFamiliesFINAL.pdf>. Spanish language news is more likely to focus on more immigration than English-language news. See R. Branton et al., "English and Spanish Language Media Coverage of Immigration: A Comparative Analysis," *Social Science Quarterly*, 2009.

²¹ Op. cit. (20).

²² S. Satinsky et al., "Family Unity, Family Health, How Family-Focused Immigration Reform Will Mean Better Health for Children and Families, Human Impact Partners," June 2013. The fear of deportation affects health-seeking behavior as well as emotional and physical health. K. Hacker, op. cit. (20).

- ²³ N. Lansdale et al., "Behavioral Functioning among Mexican-origin Children: Does Parental Legal Status Matter?," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 2015. The fear of deportation also exacerbates chronic diseases such as depression, high blood pressure, and anxiety while also producing a range of physical symptoms (hair loss, headaches) in parents. K. Hacker, op. cit. (20). Maternal depression, in particular, has been shown to interfere with children's healthy development, leading to both physical and mental health conditions later in life. See A. Chester, "Medicaid Expansion Promotes Children's Health Development and Family Success by Treating Maternal Depression," Georgetown University's Center for Children and Families and CLASP, July 2016, available at <http://ccf.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Maternal-Depression-4.pdf>. Viewed March 16, 2017.
- ²⁴ N. Lansdale, op. cit. (23).
- ²⁵ Op. cit. (20).
- ²⁶ H. Koball, et al., "Health and Social Service Needs of US-Citizen Children with Detained or Deported Immigrant Parents," Urban Institute and Migration Policy Institute, September 2015.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ A. Chaudry, et al., "Facing Our Future: Children in the Aftermath of Immigration Enforcement," The Urban Institute, February 2010.
- ²⁹ Op. cit. (27).
- ³⁰ Op. cit. (27).
- ³¹ Op. cit. (29).
- ³² Op. cit. (27).
- ³³ *Shattered Families, The Perilous Intersection of Immigration Enforcement and the Child Welfare System*, Applied Research Center, November 2011.
- ³⁴ T. Broder, et al., "Overview of Immigrant Eligibility for Federal Programs," National Immigration Law Center, revised December 2015.
- ³⁵ R. Capps et al., "Paying the Price: The Impact of Immigration Raids on America's Children," The Urban Institute, 2007. In addition, the eligibility rules are complex, and some programs are not easy to access in languages other than English. See H. Yoshikawa et al., "Unauthorized Immigrant Parents and their Children's Development: A Summary of the Evidence," Migration Policy Institute, March 2013.
- ³⁶ C. Skinner, "SNAP Take-Up Among Immigrant Families with Children," National Center for Children in Poverty, March 2011.
- ³⁷ In 2010, a study showed that 14 percent of Medicaid-eligible citizen children in immigrant families remained uninsured in 2010, and only 9.8 percent of Medicaid-eligible citizen children in non-immigrant families remained uninsured. See E. Seiber, "Which States Enroll Their Medicaid-Eligible, Citizen Children with Immigrant Parents?," Health Services Research, April 2013. In the same year, .7 million Medicaid/CHIP eligible children lived in a household with an immigrant parent in California. See S. McMorro, "Addressing Barriers to Health Insurance Coverage Among Children, New Estimates for the Nation, California, New York and Texas," The Urban Institute, May 2012, available at <http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/25366/412561-Addressing-Barriers-to-Health-Insurance-Coverage-Among-Children-New-Estimates-for-the-Nation-California-New-York-and-Texas.PDF>. Viewed March 19, 2017. With California's expansion of coverage to undocumented immigrant children in 2016, even more children eligible for Medicaid and CHIP live with undocumented immigrant parents.
- ³⁸ V. Pelham, "Will Immigration Policies Build A Wall Around Health Benefits?," *Bloomberg BNA*, February 27, 2017.
- ³⁹ This information was provided to The California Immigrant Policy Center by community-based organizations that serve immigrant families in California.
- ⁴⁰ "Receipt of Mental Health Services Among Children Who Need Treatment or Counseling," kidsdata.org., http://www.kidsdata.org/topic/1997/mental-health-services-nsch/bar#fmt=2497&loc=2_127,331,171,345,357,324,369,362,360,364,356,217,328,354,320,339,334,365,343,367,344,366,368,265,349,361,4,273,59,370,326,341,338,350,342,359,363,340,335&tf=77&sort=loc. Viewed March 19, 2017. Data from 2011-2012.
- ⁴¹ "School-Based Mental Health Services for Immigrant and Refugee Children," National Center for Youth Law, October 1, 2012, available at <https://youthlaw.org/publication/school-based-mental-health-services-for-immigrant-and-refugee-children/print/>. Viewed March 20, 2017. California also uses state funding to cover people granted Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, and other immigrants residing under color of law (PRUCOLs). Given the complexity of the state program eligibility, people in the state's immigrant communities may not know that they are eligible, and systems may not actually identify and enroll them. See *Public Health Coverage for Immigrants in California*, Community Health Councils, Inc., June 2016, available at <http://chc-inc.org/downloads/Coverage%20for%20Immigrants%20FINAL%20061316.pdf>. Viewed May 19, 2017.
- ⁴² "California: Snapshot of Children's Coverage," Georgetown University, Center for Children and Families, and the American Academy of Pediatrics, February 2017. See also, A. Schneider, "Follow the Money: CBO Shows House 'Repeal and Replace' Bill is Really 'Cap and Cut' Medicaid," Georgetown University, Center for Children and Families, March 15, 2017.
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