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The ACE of ICE

How Current Immigration Enforcement and Deportation Hurts Children

BY ALEXANDRA F. SIROTA, BTC DIRECTOR*

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are experiences in a person's early years that cast a long shadow over their lives. Trauma from the separation from family and relatives as well as persistent fear and economic hardship are among a list of experiences identified as barriers to children's healthy development.¹ Research finds that ACEs are linked to risky health behaviors, poor health outcomes and early death as well as a host of economic and social outcomes signaling missed opportunities for individuals and their communities.²

An emerging body of research finds that children of immigrants are experiencing trauma as a result of the threat of deportation and family separation as well as the direct experience of raids, deportation proceedings and parent removal from the United States. An increased focus on enforcement through Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) and the lack of enforcement priorities³ alongside the growing research on the harm of ACEs to children's development⁴ has led to growing concern that these experiences will reach more children — not just those directly experiencing immigration enforcement — and have a lasting impact on children and community well-being.

The Reality of Deportations and Immediate Costs

The Migration Policy Institute estimates that approximately 7 percent of children under the age of 18 live with an unauthorized immigration parent.⁵ In recent years, an estimated half a million children have experienced the apprehension, detention, and deportation of at least one parent.⁶

The data from North Carolina show the reach of deportations. In Fiscal Year 2017⁷, 71 people departed from North Carolina through ICE-executed deportation while

- 1 Sacks, Vanessa, David Murphey and Kristin Moore, July 2014. Adverse Childhood Experiences: National and State Level Practice. Child Trends, Washington, DC.
- 2 Felitti VJ, Anda RF, Nordenberg D, et al. Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. *Am J Prev Med.* 1998;14(4):245–258
- 3 American Immigration Council, March 7, 2018. The End of Immigration Enforcement Priorities Under the Trump Administration
- 4 American Academy of Pediatrics, January 25, 2017. Statement on Protecting Immigration Children.
- 5 Jie Zong, Jeanne Batalova, and Jeffrey Hallock, "Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States," Migration Information Source, February 2018.
- 6 Capps, Randy, Heather Koball, Andrea Campetella, Krista Perreira, Sarah Hooker, and Juan M. Pedroza. *Implications of Immigration Enforcement Activities for the Well-Being of Children in Immigrant Families: A Review of the Literature.* Rep. Migration Policy Institute, Sept. 2015. Web. 26 Feb. 2017.
- 7 Data was publicly released by ICE only through June 2017 of the fiscal year.

more than 1,000 were ordered removed in the same year under the Secure Communities program.⁸ Since 2008, when data first started to be collected, 7,148 women with children were in deportation proceedings from North Carolina, and 3,826 received orders of removal from the country.⁹ There have been 3,140 children under the age of 18 with removal orders from North Carolina since 2005.¹⁰

Children whose parents are detained or deported often have their lives uprooted. They may remain with a parent, enter the foster care system or are sent to live with relatives.

The immediate costs are experienced by families and their communities. First, studies have found that following the deportation of a family member, family income could decrease by as much as half.¹¹ With this decline in income, families face greater economic hardship and the associated toxic stress of poverty while also decreasing their participation in the local economy and civic life. Second, there are direct costs to taxpayers associated with apprehension, detention and deportation.¹²

There are also costs, though difficult to exactly estimate, to the systems that protect, educate and care for children. For example, the Applied Research Center report, *Shattered Families*, uses primarily stories of those affected by deportations to document the connection to the child welfare system. Researchers estimated that in 2011 more than 5,000 children were in the foster care system nationwide due to the detention or deportation of a parent.¹³

More recent work based on interviews with school leaders, social workers and other institutions found that:

- Almost 90 percent of school administrators have observed behavioral or emotional problems in immigrant students and one in four noted that this was a very big problem.¹⁴
- Early education programs have noted drops in attendance, fewer applications and decrease parent participation.¹⁵ Parents have noted their reluctance to attend school events, regular doctor visits or other activities where enforcement activities could be more likely to occur.

Finally, while it is difficult to estimate, those children who travel with their parents are likely to experience challenges as well. There are no current numbers documenting how many children follow their parents back to their home countries. One available data source, the 2015 Mexican Census, revealed that there are currently about 600,000 US-citizen students from preschool to high school living in Mexico. This accounts for 2-3 percent of the total student enrollment of that country.¹⁶ Research found that these children often face acculturation stressors, such as difficulty learning Spanish language skills and understanding the Mexican school system. Moreover, children and their parents may be returning to countries troubled by economic downturns, civil war, or community violence; all of which present serious dangers to the child's well-being.¹⁷

8 <http://trac.syr.edu/phptools/immigration/remove/>

9 <http://trac.syr.edu/phptools/immigration/mwcc/>

10 <http://trac.syr.edu/phptools/immigration/juvenile/>

11 Warren, Robert and Donald Kerwin, *Mass Deportations Would Impoverish US Families and Create Immense Social Costs*. Journal on Migration and Human Security and Capps, Randy, Heather Koball, James D. Bachmeier, Ariel G. Ruiz Soto, Jie Zong, and Julia Gelatt. February 2016. *Deferred Action for Unauthorized Immigrant Parents: An Analysis of DAPA's Potential Effects on Families and Children*. Migration Policy Institute and Urban Institute.

12 See Sirota, Alexandra Forter and Kate Woomer-Deters, July 2013. *High Costs to Local Communities of Federal Immigration Enforcement*. BTC Brief, NC Justice Center, NC.

13 Applied Research Center, November 2011, *Shattered Families: The Perilous Intersection of Immigration Enforcement and the Child Welfare System*

14 Gandara, Patricia and Joy Ee, *US Immigration Enforcement Policy and Its Impact on Teaching and Learning in the Nation's Schools* Matthews, Ulrich and Cervantes, March 2018.

16 Bryant Jensen, Brigham Young University and Mónica Jacobo, *When Families Are Deported: Schooling for US-Citizen Students in Mexico*, Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas. Date Published: February 28, 2018

17 Capps, Randy, Heather Koball, Andrea Campetella, Krista Perreira, Sarah Hooker, and Juan M. Pedroza. *Implications of Immigration Enforcement Activities for the Well-Being of Children in Immigrant Families: A Review of the Literature*. Rep. Migration Policy Institute, Sept. 2015. Web. 26 Feb. 2017.

The Long Shadow of Deportations on Children's Well-Being

Beyond the immediate and tangible harm to children's economic and emotional well-being, there is an emerging body of work that documents the harm of deportation to children's healthy development and subsequent life outcomes.

A report by the Migration Policy Institute found the threat of deportation led to psychological trauma stemming from: "witnessing their parent be arrested in the home, not knowing what happened to a detained parent, and unstable caregiving arrangements."¹⁸ A study of U.S. citizen children with at least one parent who was detained or deported found that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms were higher relative to their U.S. citizen peers without direct experience of immigrant enforcement.¹⁹ Similar findings from analysis of the consequences for children of worksite raids found changes in children's behavior in the longer-term—such as eating and sleeping patterns, levels of withdrawal and, or aggression—as well as short-term disruptions in schooling.²⁰

Research has also found an even wider impact on children and families. For example, following worksite raids in Iowa, researchers found a greater incidence of low-birth weight babies born to Latina mothers irrespective of immigration status.²¹ Similarly, analysis of behavior of Latinx families found lower utilization of preventive health care and widespread fear of health services that was generalized across the population.²²

Importance of Protective Systems and Sound Immigration Policy

The good news is that there is an important role that protective factors play in minimizing the extent to which such negative experiences may determine a young person's future outcomes. Among protective factors are both individual relationships as well as supportive systems. Schools and early childhood programs, access to health care and mental health care as well as supports for families to make ends meet are increasingly found to play a role in reducing the brute force of an adverse childhood experience.²³

In the case of the trauma related to detention and deportation, however, there remains an important role in fixing federal immigration policy to ensure that children are not unnecessarily exposed to the trauma in the first place while also minimizing state and local efforts that escalate an environment of fear for children and their families.

18 Ibid.

19 Rojas-Flores, Lisseth, Clements, Mari L, Hwang Koo, J, London, Judy. Trauma and Psychological distress in Latino citizen children following parental detention and deportation. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*. Volume 9 (3), May 2017. Pp. 352-361.

20 Chaudry, Ajay, Randy Capps, Juan Manuel Pedroza, Rosa Maria Castaneda, Robert Santos and Molly M. Scott, February 2010. *Facing our Future: Children in the Aftermath of Immigrant Enforcement*. Urban Institute.

21 Novak, Nicole L, Arline T. Geronimus Aresha M Martinez-Cardoso, January 2017. Change in birth outcomes among infants born to Latina mothers after a major immigration raid. *International Journal of Epidemiology*, Volume 46, Issue 3.

22 Rhodes, Scott, Lilli Mann, Florence M. Siman, Eunyoung Song, Jorge Alonzo, Mario Downs, Emma Lawlor, December 2014. The Impact of Local Immigration Enforcement Policies on the Health of Immigrant Hispanics/Latinos in the United States. *American Journal of Public Health*.

23 American Academy of Pediatrics. Adverse Childhood Experiences and the Lifelong Consequences of Trauma, Accessed on March 14, 2018 at https://www.aap.org/en-us/documents/ttb_aces_consequences.pdf and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Essentials for Childhood: Steps to Create Safe, Stable, and Nurturing Relationships and Environments for All Children. Accessed on March 14, 2018 at https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/essentials_for_childhood_framework.pdf