

# Family Unity, Family Health:

How family-focused immigration reform will mean better health for children and families  
Special Supplement: California Survey Findings

*As part of a larger study examining the effects of immigration policy on health and well-being, we surveyed adults in mixed-status families using a convenience sample. The goal was to explore how the threat of detention and deportation impacted their everyday lives. In this special supplement, we present survey data for respondents living in California.*

## Introduction

For the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States, the vigorous national debate on immigration reform will determine their future – whether they are allowed to stay, work and become citizens. According to the Pew Research Center, in California alone, there are 2.7 million undocumented immigrants whose futures are in jeopardy, the largest number of any state.

Nationwide, an estimated 4.5 million children who are U.S. citizens by birth live in families where one or more of their parents are undocumented. These children will grow up to be our future family members, neighbors and co-workers – and their health and well-being as children today will translate into their health and well-being as adults, ultimately shaping the health of our communities. However, these children and their families live with anxiety about the future, fearful that arrest, detention or deportation will tear their families apart.

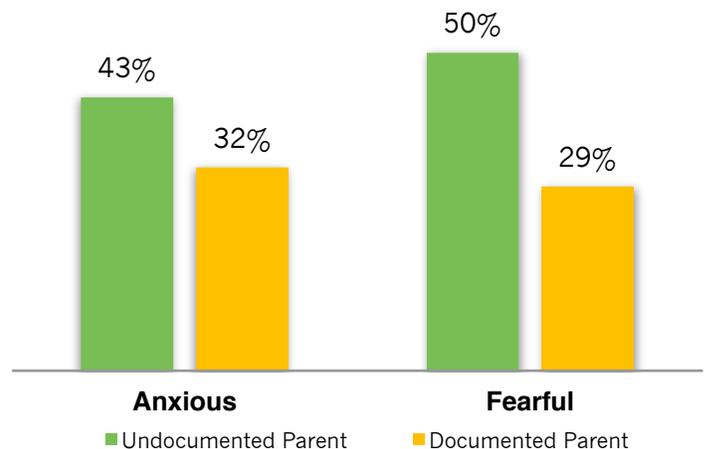
## Findings: Child Health

**Protecting a child's health is crucial as it shapes their future health as an adult. However, child health and well-being are at increased risk due to a policy of detention and deportation.**

Using an abbreviated checklist to screen for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), 81% of Californian undocumented parents reported that their child had experienced **symptoms of PTSD**. Also, a larger proportion of undocumented parents reported that their children experienced mental health problems, such as anxiety and fear, than documented parents.

This California-specific supplement is part of a nationwide research project conducted by Human Impact Partners in collaboration with an Advisory Committee of immigrant and health organizations to understand how a continued policy of detention and deportation will impact the health and well-being of mixed-status families. For more information about this project, including the full report and research citations, go to: [www.familyunityfamilyhealth.org](http://www.familyunityfamilyhealth.org)

## Due to the threat of detention and deportation, my child feels:



**Healthy socio-emotional growth for children leads to self-confidence and positive relationships as adults. The abrupt removal and absence of a caregiver traumatizes children and is associated with behavioral changes.**

In California, a larger proportion of undocumented parents observed behavioral problems in their children than documented parents:

- 38% reported their child had been **withdrawn**, compared to 24% of documented parents
- 40% reported their child had been **angry**, compared to 25% of documented parents

**Educational attainment influences future employment opportunities, life skills and social connectedness, all of which affect health in adulthood. A child's school performance can suffer due to the detention or deportation of their caregiver.**

Among Californian parent survey respondents, three times as many undocumented parents than documented parents reported their child had changed schools. Changing schools disrupts children's educational experience and can compromise academic performance.

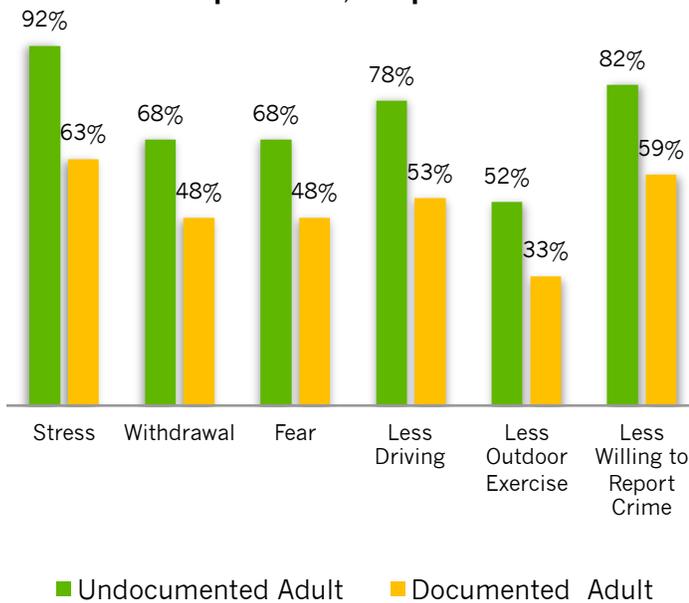
## Findings: Adult Health

**Undocumented adult immigrants may suffer from poor physical and mental health, which can lead to premature mortality.**

Undocumented immigrants have difficulty accessing health services that can improve and protect their health. Our survey findings indicated that undocumented Californians had slightly more difficulty getting medical care than those who were documented (69% and 60%, respectively). However, this could reflect a limitation of our study sample. A 2007 study of California Latinos found that a significantly lower percentage of undocumented Mexicans (66%) and other Latinos (62%) had a usual source of care compared to U.S-born whites (93%).

Undocumented immigrants indicated a high degree of mental health problems and fear-based behavior as a result of living under the threat of detention and deportation.

**Due to the threat of detention and deportation, I experience:**



**Table 1. Demographics of Adult Survey Respondents, California only**

<b>Gender (N=101)</b>	
Male	47%
Female	52%
Other	1%
<b>Average Age in Years (N=94)</b>	
42	
<b>Place of Birth (N=100)</b>	
U.S.	2%
Latin American Country	97%
Other	1%
<b>Years Lived in the U.S. (N=100)</b>	
0-4 years	2%
5-9 years	21%
10-14 years	63%
15+ years	14%
<b>Highest Level of Education (N=93)*</b>	
High School or Less	69%
High School Diploma/GED	18%
Some College or Higher	12%
<b>Annual Household Income (N=93)*</b>	
\$0-\$10,000	37%
\$10,001-\$20,000	27%
\$20,001-\$36,000	24%
\$36,001-\$50,000	11%
\$50,001- above	2%
<b>Average Household Size (N=102)</b>	
3.34	
<b>Adults with Child under Age 18 (N=102)</b>	
60%	
<b>Detention and Deportation have Affected me by (N=110):**</b>	
A family member has been detained or deported	30%
A friend/acquaintance has been detained or deported	39%
My status puts me at risk for detention or deportation	46%
I have been detained or deported	6%
None of the above	10%
<i>*may not total 100% due to rounding</i>	
<i>**could choose more than one response</i>	

## Conclusion

Not only in California, but across the nation, undocumented immigrants and their children experience real and measurable changes to their health and well-being due to the continued policy of detention and deportation. In this context, and given the release of the “Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act,” (S.744) any immigration reform must prioritize protecting and promoting the health and well-being of these children and their families, and must not create a host of new, unintended consequences. Immigration reform that preserves and protects family unity will advance the conditions essential to the health and well-being of millions nationwide, and ultimately to the well-being of our country as a whole.

To read our detailed recommendations, visit: [www.familyunityfamilyhealth.org](http://www.familyunityfamilyhealth.org).