

Family Unity, Family Health:

How family-focused immigration reform will mean better health for children and families
Special Supplement: New York 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 from New York State.**

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, 625,000 undocumented immigrants reside in New York, the fourth largest population of all states.

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: Household Health

Among survey respondents in New York, a greater proportion of people in mixed-status families reported financial hardship than those in documented families; the loss of a primary earner due to detention and deportation would only exacerbate their economic situation. Financial security is intrinsically linked to health outcomes for immigrants and their families.

Among undocumented immigrants:

- 70% indicated **difficulty paying rent** compared to 40% of documented immigrants
- 50% indicated **difficulty buying medicine** compared to 32% of documented immigrants

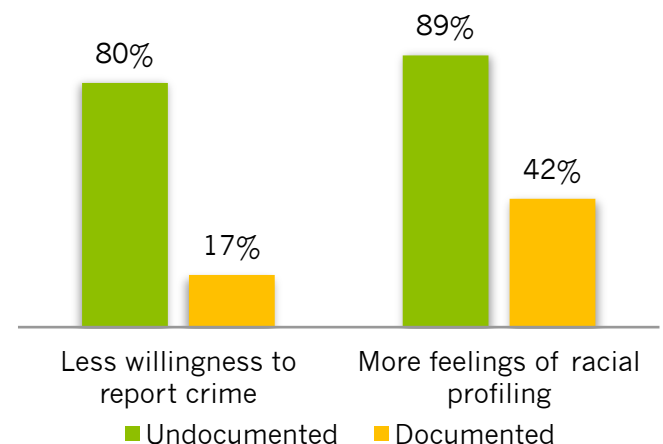
*The small sample size of New York respondents limits the ability to draw general conclusions about the total population of New York immigrant families and may influence the survey findings.

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 New Yorkers had more difficulty getting medical care than those who were documented (73% and 53%, respectively). Without access to health services, those with communicable diseases can be left undiagnosed or untreated and spread it to their workplace or home. Thus, an individual's access to health services can impact the health of the greater community.

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



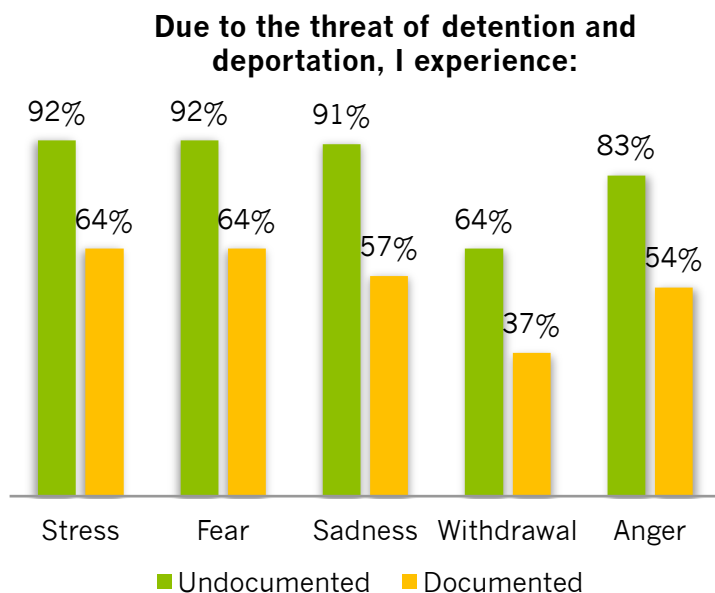
Immigration policy can cause a climate of fear that influences an individual's behavior and perception of safety. According to our New York survey findings, more than half of undocumented adults drove (55%) and walked less (58%) in public because of the threat of detention and deportation. Also, a greater proportion of undocumented immigrants were less willing to report a crime (80%) and felt racially profiled (89%) than documented immigrants (17% and 42%, respectively). This heightened anxiety and fear can result in long-term mental health impacts.

This New York State 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



Findings: Adult Health (cont'd)

Undocumented immigrants suffer from poor mental health due to the threat of detention and deportation. A greater proportion of undocumented immigrants experienced stress, fear, sadness, anger and withdrawal than documented immigrants.



Findings: Child Health

In the New York subsample, only 4 out of 32 adults reported having at least one child under the age of 18. This small sample size of families with children limits our ability to report results on child health and to make comparisons based on legal status.

However, our nationwide findings reveal that children in mixed-status families suffer from physical and mental health problems due to the threat of detention and deportation. Larger proportions of children of undocumented parents experienced stress, anger, fear, withdrawal, and sadness, then children of documented immigrant parents. Most significantly, **three-fourths** of undocumented parents observed **symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder** in their children.

Table 1. Demographics of Adult Survey Respondents, New York only

Gender (N=33)	
Male	36%
Female	64%
Average Age in Years (N=33)	
	46
Place of Birth (N=33)	
U.S.	15%
Latin American Country	9%
Other	76%
Years Lived in the U.S. (N=33)**	
0-4 years	21%
5-9 years	36%
10-14 years	30%
15+ years	12%
Highest Level of Education (N=32)	
High School or Less	0%
High School Diploma/GED	16%
Some College or Higher	84%
Annual Household Income (N=29)**	
\$0-\$10,000	17%
\$10,001- \$20,000	21%
\$20,001- \$36,000	34%
\$36,001- \$50,000	24%
\$50,001- above	3%
Average Household Size (N=32)	
	1.7
Adults with Child under Age 18 (N=32)	
	13%
Detention and Deportation have Affected me by (N=34):***	
A family member has been detained or deported	18%
A friend/acquaintance has been detained or deported	21%
My status puts me at risk for detention or deportation	32%
I have been detained or deported	9%
None of the above	44%
<i>**may not total 100% due to rounding</i>	
<i>***could choose more than one response</i>	

Conclusion

Across the nation, not just in New York, 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.