

Family Unity, Family Health:

How family-focused immigration reform will mean better health for children and families
Special Supplement: National Domestic Workers Alliance Surveys

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 served by National Domestic Worker Alliance (NDWA) organizations, including: Damayan, Tenants and Workers United, Somos Tuskaloosa and El Centro Humanitario.

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 Pew Research Center, unauthorized immigrants make up 23% of the workforce in private household employment, which encompasses domestic work.

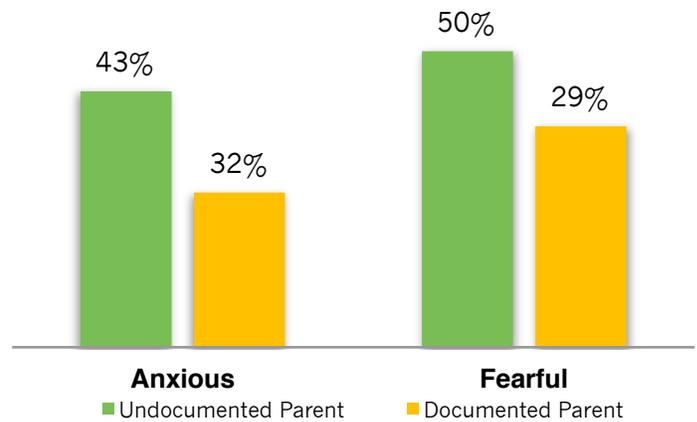
Nationwide, an estimated 4.5 million children who are U.S. citizens by birth live in families where one or more of their parents are undocumented. These children will grow up to be our future family members, neighbors and co-workers – and their health and well-being as children today will translate into 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 is at increased risk due to a policy of detention and deportation.

Maintaining healthy behaviors protects a child's well-being. Among NDWA parents who took our survey, **twice as many** undocumented than documented parents reported their child **had not eaten or slept well** due to the threat of detention and deportation.

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



Larger proportions of undocumented parents indicated that their child experienced mental health problems, such as anxiety and fear, than documented parents. Also, using an abbreviated checklist to screen for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), **59%** of undocumented parents reported that their child had experienced **symptoms of PTSD**.

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. Nearly half (48%) of undocumented parents reported that their child had been **angry**, compared to 24% of documented parents. However, a similar proportion of undocumented parents observed that their child had been withdrawn compared to documented parents (33% versus 29%, respectively). This may be due to our limited sample size.

Educational attainment influences future employment opportunities, life skills and social connectedness, all of which affect health in adulthood. Yet a child's school performance can suffer due to the detention or deportation of their caregiver. In NDWA survey findings, more undocumented adults (46%) noted that their child was unwilling to go to school than documented (29%).

This National Domestic Workers Alliance 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



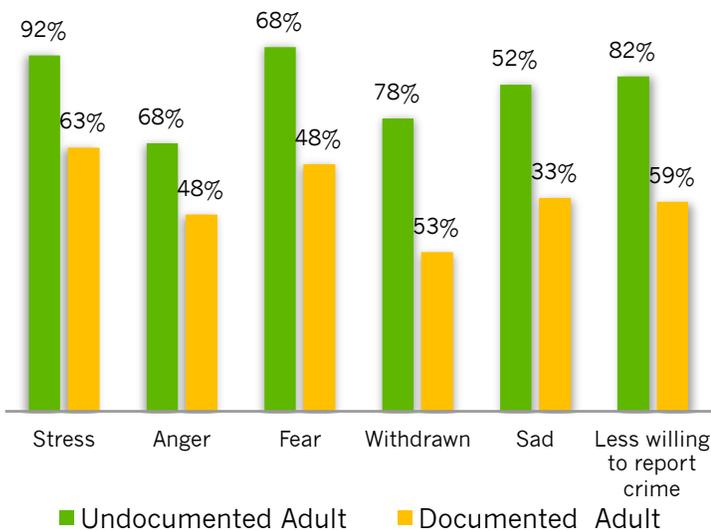
Findings: Adult Health

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

Accessing health services is necessary to improving and protecting health. Our survey findings show that NDWA undocumented immigrants reported more difficulty getting medical care than those who were documented (70% and 45%, respectively).

They also 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:



Among NDWA-affiliated respondents, a larger proportion of undocumented immigrants reported financial hardship, which is intrinsically linked to health outcomes for themselves and their households. The loss of a primary earner due to deportation would only exacerbate their economic state.

- 77% indicated **difficulty paying rent** compared to 34% of documented immigrants
- 70% indicated **difficulty paying utilities** compared to 41% of documented immigrants

Table 1. Demographics of Adult Survey Respondents, NDWA only

| | |
|---|-----|
| Gender (N=103) | |
| Male | 24% |
| Female | 75% |
| Other | 1% |
| Average Age in Years (N=99) | |
| 40 | |
| Place of Birth (N=102) | |
| U.S. | 3% |
| Latin American Country | 70% |
| Other | 27% |
| Years Lived in the U.S. (N=102)* | |
| 0-4 years | 9% |
| 5-9 years | 33% |
| 10-14 years | 20% |
| 15+ years | 39% |
| Highest Level of Education (N=98) | |
| High School or Less | 45% |
| High School Diploma/GED | 26% |
| Some College or Higher | 29% |
| Annual Household Income (N=96) | |
| \$0-\$10,000 | 41% |
| \$10,001- \$20,000 | 28% |
| \$20,001- \$36,000 | 24% |
| \$36,001- \$50,000 | 7% |
| \$50,001- above | 0% |
| Average Household Size (N=103) | |
| 2.4 | |
| Adults with Child under Age 18 (N=103) | |
| 51% | |
| Detention and Deportation have Affected me by (N=103):** | |
| A family member has been detained or deported | 19% |
| A friend/acquaintance has been detained or deported | 44% |
| My status puts me at risk for detention or deportation | 46% |
| I have been detained or deported | 4% |
| None of the above | 18% |
| <i>*may not total 100% due to rounding</i> | |
| <i>**could choose more than one response</i> | |

Conclusion

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.