

Family Unity, Family Health:

How family-focused immigration reform will mean better health for children and families
Special Supplement: Texas 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 Texas.**

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 Texas alone, there are 1.65 million undocumented immigrants whose futures are in jeopardy, the second largest number of any state.

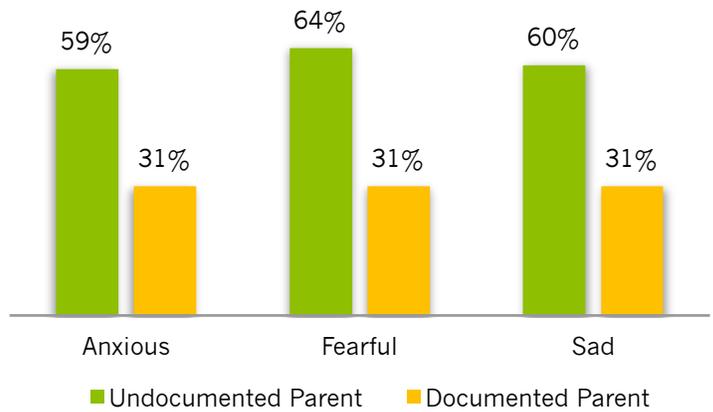
Nationwide, an estimated 4.5 million children who are U.S. citizens by birth live in families where one or more of their parents are undocumented. These children will grow up to be our future family members, neighbors and co-workers – and their health and well-being as children today will translate into 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), 55% of Texan undocumented parents reported that their child had experienced **symptoms of PTSD**, compared to 44% of documented parents. Also, a larger proportion of undocumented parents indicated that their children experienced **mental health problems**, such as anxiety, fear and sadness, than documented parents.

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

- 45% reported their child had been **withdrawn**, compared to 31% of documented parents
- 41% reported their child had been **angry**, compared to 31% 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 Texan parent survey respondents, **three times** as many undocumented parents than documented parents reported their child had difficulty focusing on school. **Twice as many** indicated that their child was less willing to go to school.

* The small sample size of our Texas surveys limits the ability to draw general conclusions about the total population of Texan immigrant families and may have influenced survey findings.

This Texas 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.

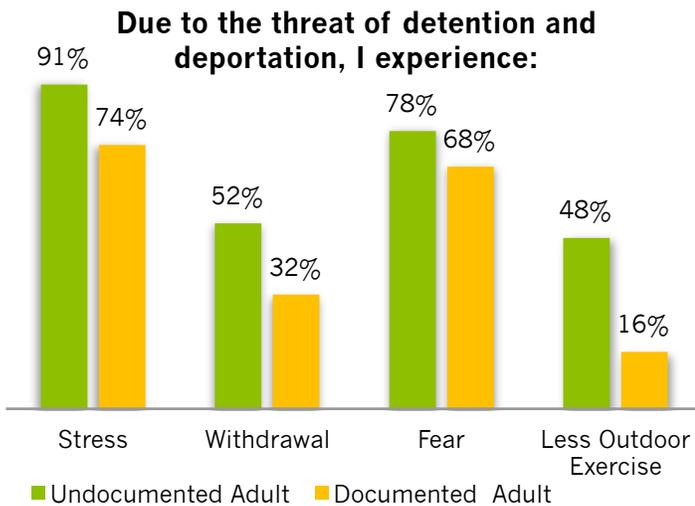


Findings: Adult Health

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 findings included that undocumented Texans had slightly more difficulty getting medical care than those who were documented (68% and 61%, 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.

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



Findings: Household Health

Mixed-status families suffer from economic hardship. Undocumented Texan immigrants indicated that they had slightly more difficulty buying food (43%) and medications (61%) than documented adults. **Twice as many** undocumented parents reported that their child ate less well than documented parents.

Table 1. Demographics of Adult Survey Respondents, Texas only

Gender (N=41)	
Male	34%
Female	66%
Average Age in Years (N=40)	
	33.6
Place of Birth (N=42)	
U.S.	0%
Latin American Country	100%
Other	0%
Years Lived in the U.S. (N=41)**	
0-4 years	5%
5-9 years	30%
10-14 years	32%
15+ years	34%
Highest Level of Education (N=41)	
High School or Less	85%
High School Diploma/GED	15%
Some College or Higher	0%
Annual Household Income (N=39)	
\$0-\$10,000	26%
\$10,001-\$20,000	33%
\$20,001-\$36,000	23%
\$36,001-\$50,000	18%
\$50,001- above	0%
Average Household Size (N=42)	
	4.17
Adults with Child under Age 18 (N=42)	
	93%
Detention and Deportation have Affected me by (N=42):***	
A family member has been detained or deported	40%
A friend/acquaintance has been detained or deported	38%
My status puts me at risk for detention or deportation	52%
I have been detained or deported	19%
None of the above	14%
<i>**may not total 100% due to rounding</i>	
<i>***could choose more than one response</i>	

Conclusion

Across the nation, not just in Texas, 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.