

# The Psychosocial Impact of Detention and Deportation on U.S. Migrant Children and Families

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Approximately 4.5 million U.S. citizen children live in mixed-status families, in which at least 1 family member is an unauthorized migrant and therefore vulnerable to detention and deportation from the United States (Passel & Cohn, 2011). This article critically examines the current state of the literature on the psychosocial consequences of detention and deportation for unauthorized migrants, mixed-status families, and their U.S.-born children. In particular, drawing on social and psychological theory and research, we (a) review the impact of parents' unauthorized status on children; (b) summarize the literature on the impact of detention processes on psychosocial well-being; (c) describe the dilemma faced by a mixed-status family when a parent faces deportation; (d) examine the current social scientific literature on how parental deportation impacts children and their families; and (e) summarize several policy recommendations for protecting children and families.

**J**ulia,<sup>1</sup> a Guatemalan indigenous Mayan woman, was detained in a raid at a Massachusetts factory where she was manufacturing backpacks for U.S. soldiers in Iraq (Brabeck, Lykes, & Hershberg, 2011). Julia's 2-year-old son was with a babysitter when his mother was detained; he was waiting by the windowsill, as was his habit, for his mother on the day she did not return from work. Julia was transported to a Texas detention center. She was prohibited from placing a phone call to her family for the first few days there. She pleaded with immigration officials: Her son had asthma, a condition for which he had previously been hospitalized, and the babysitter didn't know how to operate his oxygen machine. Julia recalled that she was threatened by immigration officials that her children would be taken from her if she continued to ask for "special treatment," and was informed that her

processing could take anywhere from 1 month to 1 year to complete. Julia was separated from her son for 9 days during her detention. According to Julia, the raid and resulting separation precipitated her son's tantrums and nightmares; difficulty sleeping, eating, and speaking; and extreme separation anxiety.

Approximately 4.5 million U.S. citizen children, like Julia's, live in families where at least one member of the family is an unauthorized<sup>2</sup> migrant (Passel & Cohn, 2011). Families like Julia's are characterized as mixed-status families, that is, at least one member is authorized to reside and work in the United States, and at least one member is not (Passel & Cohn, 2011). Lawyers and advocates have argued that children living in such families are threatened by U.S. policies and their enforcement endangers unauthorized parents (Thronson, 2010). In this article, we review psychological and social theories and social scientific research in support of this claim. In particular, we critically examine the current state of the literature on the psychosocial consequences of detention and deportation for unauthorized migrants, mixed-status families, and their U.S.-born children. Drawing on this research, we conclude with ideas to inform existing and alternative policies to protect these children and families.

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<sup>1</sup>Pseudonyms have been used to protect participant confidentiality.

<sup>2</sup>The language that is used in much public and media discourse to describe noncitizens in the United States, that is, "illegal alien," "illegal immigrant," "illegal," creates a blurring of boundaries between the "immigrant" and the "criminal," and is not neutral, reflecting rather the U.S.'s history with immigration, race, and ethnicity. In this article, we use "unauthorized," although it is acknowledged that others who share the concerns articulated here use the term *undocumented*. No single term fully reflects the complexities articulated and discussed in this article.

## Policies and Enforcements Aimed at Unauthorized Migrants

### Demographic Profiles of Unauthorized Migrants, Deportees, and Their Children

The Pew Hispanic Center estimated that as of 2012, approximately 11.7 million undocumented migrants lived in the United States, a number that has nearly tripled in the last two decades (Passel, Cohn, Gonzalez-Barrera, 2013). An increasing number of children in the United States live with individuals and/or in families with complicated immigration statuses; as a result, many of these children grow up “in the shadows” (Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi & Suárez-Orozco, 2011). To be more specific, 10% (1.7 million) of the current undocumented population are children themselves (Capps, Bachmeier, Fix, & VanHook, 2013). In addition, 82% of children born to unauthorized migrant parents are U.S.-born citizens; this amounts to 4.5 million children (Passel & Cohn, 2011). Although mixed-status family members who are born in the United States (most common, children) are granted the rights and privileges that result from being a U.S. citizen, those who are not (most common, migrant parents) can be detained and/or deported at any time, thereby creating a constant state of threat and stress for the entire family (Capps & Fortuny, 2006).

In 2011, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) deported a total 392,000 documented and undocumented migrants (Passel et al., 2013). The number of these *removals* (a term used by the DHS), has progressively increased since 1990 (Passel et al., 2013), resulting in separations among an alarming number of migrant family members. Between July 2010 and September 2012, 205,000 deportees reported having at least one U.S.-citizen child, amounting to an estimated annual average of approximately 90,000 parental deportations (Wessler, 2012). Moreover, a study conducted by the Immigrant Rights Clinic at the New York University School of Law found that between 2005 and 2010, 87% of processed immigration cases of noncitizens with citizen children resulted in deportation (New York University School of Law Immigrant Rights Clinic, 2012).

### Policies Contributing to Deportations

These deportations are the result of federal policies that began over two decades ago as well as more recent state legislations. The Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA) of 1996, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996, and the U.S.A. Patriot Act of 2001 profoundly changed the lives of unauthorized migrants and their families (Kanström, 2008). Together, these laws made it more difficult for noncitizens to stay in the United States and reenter if deported, increased the offenses that were punishable by deportation, restricted the range of judicial discretion in deportation hearings, and granted immigration officials and local police more authority when arresting someone they suspect as unauthorized (Kanström, 2008). Subsequent years revealed an increase in cases that appeared in immigrant courts as well as those cases that ended in deportation (Kanström, 2008).

In the post-September 2011 era, and after significant economic insecurity was felt throughout the United States because of the economic recession, additional punitive immigration enforcement

initiatives have been implemented. Increasingly, the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and state and local agencies collaborated through programs such as the Criminal Alien Program (CAP; Hagan, Rodriguez, & Castro, 2011). The CAP provides ICE updated lists of arrestees from local, state, and federal prisons. CAP also grants ICE officials access to interview individuals who are suspected of being unauthorized in any of these facilities (Guttin, 2010). Likewise, the Secure Communities Program (SCP) purportedly intended to deport migrants with violent criminal convictions; data confirms that half of those deported via SCP had either no criminal conviction or a minor conviction such as a traffic offense (Kohli, Markowitz, & Chavez, 2011). As part of this process, SCP authorized local law enforcement to send fingerprints of all those charged with any type of crime to ICE. SCP also allowed ICE to run fingerprints on every person in a local jail and quickened deportation processes of those who are unauthorized (Kohli et al., 2011). Per their website, ICE expected to have SCP activated in all states by the end of 2013 ([http://www.ice.gov/secure\\_communities/faq.htm](http://www.ice.gov/secure_communities/faq.htm)). The SCP has resulted in the deportation of thousands of migrants, more specifically 111,000 in the year 2009 and 84,000 in the year 2011 (Capps, Rosenblum, Rodriguez, & Chishti, 2011). Finally, the 287 (g) Secure Communities Act mandates training of state and local law enforcement officers to assist with immigrant enforcement (Capps et al., 2011; Kohli et al., 2011).

In summary, laws and policies that began in the 1990s and established more recently have resulted in record numbers of annual deportations; approximately 400,000 per year during the Obama Administration (DHS, 2013). As social scientists, we ask: What are the psychosocial implications of such policies and enforcements on the affected individual and on the family members, including U.S.-citizen children? The following is a summary of an increasing body of social scientific literature, which includes both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, that documents the adverse impact of these immigration policies and their enforcement on migrant families and children residing in the United States and transnationally. In particular, drawing on social and psychological theory and research, we (a) review of the impact of parents' unauthorized status on children; (b) summarize the literature on the impact of the detention process on psychosocial well-being; (c) describe the dilemma faced by a mixed-status family when a parent faces deportation; (d) examine the current literature on how parental deportation impacts children; and (e) summarize leading policy recommendations for protecting children and families and offer our own suggestions for policy reform.

## Unauthorized Migrants and Their Children: A Population at Risk and Under Stress

### Social Ecological Perspective

Scholars have used social ecological models to understand how a parent's legal vulnerability might impact a child (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). Social ecological models of child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) posit that multiple contexts, from individual to societal, interact to influence children's development. Children experience both risk and protective factors at different layers of context, from the distal (policies, parents' work conditions) to the proximal (family processes). Distal factors such as economic stress

and parents' employment stress can impact proximal factors, such as parent mental health and parenting, and thereby affecting children (Conger et al., 1990; Ramírez García, Manongdo, & Ozechowski, 2014). Through the social ecological lens, when a parent is unauthorized, and therefore at risk of deportation, a child is impacted via the multiple other contexts that are affected by the parents' vulnerability: The parent may experience suboptimal work conditions, higher economic stress, and higher psychological distress, while the family may be subject to housing instability and low-performing schools (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011; Yoshikawa & Kalil, 2011). At the same time, the child may benefit from protective factors in various contexts; for example, a strong marital or parent-child relationship may buffer the otherwise adverse impact that the parent's unauthorized status may have on the child.

### Risk and Stress Perspective

From the cumulative risk perspective (Rutter, 1979), adverse effects from a single event, such as a parent's deportation, are more likely to result in negative outcomes when they occur against the backdrop of multiple risk factors; put simply, the more risk factors (e.g., poverty, parent psychological instability) a child is exposed to, the more likely it is that an event will have a negative impact (Appleyard, Egeland, Dulmen, & Sroufe, 2005). Adverse experiences resulting from these risk factors that upset a child, parent, and household, can result in biological, neurological, and psychological changes in the developing child (Shonkoff, Boyce, & McEwen, 2009). Deportation most typically occurs within the context of exploitation, stigma, discrimination, economic disadvantage, and social marginalization. These factors contextualize the lives of many unauthorized migrants and mixed-status families in the United States and have been found to have multiple negative effects on the child (Henderson & Baily, 2013).

Research has documented risk factors that are common among mixed-status families. In particular, although the majority of unauthorized adults (especially men) are employed, unauthorized families are typically low-income or poor, with 32% of adult parents and 51% of children in 2011 living below the federal poverty level (FPL), and 44% of unauthorized adult parents and 63% of children living below 138% FPL, the cutoff for Medicaid eligibility.<sup>3</sup> Only 30% of unauthorized adults are English proficient, and the vast majority (71%) lack health insurance (Capps et al., 2013). Unauthorized immigrant adults (compared to authorized) are more likely to experience economic hardship (Kalil & Chen, 2008), occupational stress (Yoshikawa, 2011), social isolation (Yoshikawa, 2011), decreased ability to access social service programs (Capps & Fortuny, 2006; Cleveland & Ihara, 2012), psychological distress (Furman, Ackerman, Iwamoto, Negi, & Mondragon, 2013; Human Impact Partners, 2013; Sullivan & Rehm, 2005), and acculturative stress (Arbona et al., 2011). Migrant adults who fear deportation (regardless of legal status) are more likely to experience employment challenges, physical health problems, psychological distress, acculturative stress, and decreased access to services (Arbona et al., 2011; Cavazos-Rehg, Zayas, & Sptznagel, 2007; Hacker et al., 2011). They are also less willing to report a crime (Hacker et al., 2011), more likely to avoid public spaces (e.g., churches, organizations, schools; Menjivar, 2011), and more likely to experience discrimination and racial profiling (Human Impact Partners, 2013).

### Research Documenting Effects of Parental Status on Child Development

More and more, research has confirmed what social ecological and cumulative risk theories predict: A parent's unauthorized status is a predictor of multiple adverse outcomes for children, including emotional well-being, academic performance, and health status (American Psychological Association Presidential Task Force on Immigration, 2012; Brabek & Xu, 2012; Dreby, 2012a and 2012b; Human Impact Partners, 2013; Suárez-Orozco, 2011). Some research has found that children of unauthorized immigrants are more likely to report anxiety, fear, sadness, posttraumatic stress symptoms, anger, and withdrawal (Human Impact Partners, 2013; Potochnick & Perreira, 2010). In a nationally representative birth cohort study, Yoshikawa (2011) followed children of low-income mothers from birth to age 6 years. Although all low-income mothers experienced significant challenges, Yoshikawa (2011) found that stressors that were more associated with unauthorized status (e.g., occupational stress, psychological distress, lower social support, lower access to center-based childcare) affected children's cognitive development at 24 and 36 months of age. Other researchers have found that children of unauthorized parents are at a greater risk for developmental delay (Fuller et al., 2009; Ortega et al., 2009) and school readiness (Crosnoe, 2006). U.S.-citizen children with two undocumented parents or an undocumented mother are estimated to have 1.18 fewer years of education (Bean, Leach, Brown, Bachmeier, & Hipp, 2011). Children of unauthorized parents are also less likely to be medically insured (Capps et al., 2013; Ku & Jewers, 2013); less likely to have seen a physician in the past year (Human Impact Partners, 2013); less likely to be reported as being in good health (Human Impact Partners, 2013; Kalil & Ziol-Guest, 2009); and less likely to have good eating, sleep, and exercise habits (Human Impact Partners, 2013). Even when children are eligible for services, unauthorized parents may be reluctant to apply for public assistance or seek medical care for them (Ku & Jewers, 2013) because of the fear of disclosing their status and being deported.

In summary, multiple contexts—including psychological, familial, social, economic, and political—interact to impact child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and unauthorized parents and their children may experience a multitude of risk factors within various layers as a result of their unauthorized status and vulnerability to deportation. Research has documented that children who experience multiple risks (e.g., family disruption, low socioeconomic status, high parental stress) are more prone to behavioral and emotional problems later in life (Appleyard et al., 2005). From the social ecological and cumulative risk perspectives, a parent's detention and/or deportation may be expected to have an even more profound effect because it occurs against the backdrop of the challenges and risk factors described earlier (Henderson & Baily, 2013). In the next section we review existing literature on how the

<sup>3</sup>The federal poverty level is an inclusive term that connotes two measures used by the federal government: (a) the federal poverty threshold, which is used for statistical purposes, for example, to count the number of Americans living in poverty; and (b) the federal poverty guidelines, which are used to determine eligibility for certain federal programs (see: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/13poverty.cfm>).

detention experience impacts adults and children in detention, as well as the family members of the detained individual.

## Research Findings on Welfare of Children and Adults During the Detention Process

### Violations of Rights

The detention of a parent can create a state of crisis for the family, especially children, particularly because of the abruptness and lack of transparency that characterize the process. When detained, parents are typically not released pending deportation hearings, but rather, are held in detention as they await the hearing, leaving no time to see family or to make preparations, including for childcare (Androff et al., 2011). Sometimes detained migrants, such as Julia presented at the beginning of this article, are transferred to a facility far away from their family members (McLeigh, 2010). A study following workplace raids in three communities found that fear and lack of access to telephones during detention left approximately 500 children in the care of others without information on the whereabouts or conditions of their parents (Capps, Castaneda, Chaudry & Santos, 2007). This type of sudden “disappearance” of a family member can be particularly traumatic for migrants who experienced state-sponsored kidnapping and murders in their countries of origin (Brabeck et al., 2011). Family members also can experience barriers to visiting loved ones in detention because of their own unauthorized status (Brabeck et al., 2011). Following arrest, many parents are reluctant to disclose that they have children, for fear that the children will be permanently removed from their custody (Capps et al., 2007). This can create challenges to assuring that the child is receiving adequate care.

The experience of detention can be traumatizing to detained individuals, particularly because of documented instances of human rights abuses to detainees. Amnesty International, U.S.A. (2009) and the investigative branch of DHS (2006) found instances of mistreatment and neglect of detainees, for example, inadequate health care and lack of due process for reporting human rights violations. Researchers also have documented that female detainees in Arizona experienced inadequate prenatal and mental health care (Southwest Institute for Research on Women, 2009). Phillips, Hagan, and Rodriguez (2006), drawing on a random sample of Salvadoran deportees (on arrival in El Salvador following deportation from the United States), reported that 25% of the deportees reported racial slurs during arrest, 26% reported racial slurs during detention, 31% reported being denied access to adequate food and water in detention, 45% reported being denied access to a phone during detention, and 20% reported some form of force (e.g., shoving, throwing to the ground) during arrest; among these instances of force, 84% involved excessive force. According to the authors, deportees’ self-reports indicated that they were 1.5 times more likely than citizens to report force during arrest (Phillips et al., 2006).

Unfortunately, children’s basic rights may also go unprotected during arrest and detention. A report issued by the Center for Public Policy Priorities (2008) on workplace raids found that noncitizen children in deportation proceedings experienced maltreatment by ICE officials, including ICE officials’ failure to notify Child Protective Services, the denial of access to a lawyer, denial of access to country of origin consulates, being held for unreason-

able periods of time, and being removed to unsafe conditions (Benjet, Borges, Medina-Mora, Zambrano, & Aguilar-Gaxiola, 2009). Thus, the process of arrest and detention also results in negative physical and mental health consequences for detained children as well as adults.

### Research Documenting the Psychological Impact of Detention

The nature of detention, which as noted often includes human rights violations, separation from family members, and the anticipation of permanent separation resulting from deportation and uncertainty regarding length, is regarded as a major contributing factor to mental deterioration, despondency, suicidality, anger, and frustration among detainees (Physicians for Human Rights & Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture, 2003). In 2003, the Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture and Physicians for Human Rights interviewed 70 asylum seekers in U.S. detention centers. They documented high levels of psychological distress, which worsened during the course of detention, and inadequate or nonexistent mental health services within detention centers (Physicians for Human Rights & Bellevue/NYU, 2003). As discussed next, an additional factor that contributes to the detained parent’s stress is decisions that will need to be made regarding her or his U.S.-citizen children if the parent is deported.

### Untenable Decisions

When an unauthorized parent of a U.S.-citizen child is arrested that parent must make what Zayas (2010) called a “Solomonic decision” (p. 809). The unauthorized parent may move the child to a linguistically and culturally foreign environment, where the child will likely lose access to the educational, health, and other benefits afforded to them as a U.S.-citizen, or they may leave the child in the United States in the care of others (Brabeck et al., 2011; Dreby, 2012a, 2012b; Lykes, Brabeck, & Hunter, 2013). These “others” may include extended family or friends, but they also may include the child welfare system. Family reunifications are complicated by legal status, increasing the likelihood that the child will remain in the child welfare system (Wessler, 2011). Although preferable, placement with relatives also can be complicated by requirements of legal background checks for adults and careful consideration of housing conditions in a potential placement (Reed & Karpilow, 2002). Parents, then, must decide whether it is better for children to remain with the parent, but with potentially limited access to health care and educational opportunities, or to remain in the United States with its array of opportunities and supports, but without one or both parents’ present nurturing and support (Zayas, 2010).

### Research Findings on the Short- and Long-Term Impact of Parental Detention and Deportation on Children and Families

Deportation often involves deterioration of the family members and of the community of those left behind. Studies are beginning to document the short- and long-term effects of detention and deportation on children and families of the deported individual

(Dreby, 2012a, 2012b). This mounting empirical research has confirmed what social scientists, mental health professionals, and advocates have predicted, based partly on the much more established literature on the impact of parental incarceration on child and family well-being. In particular, this latter research has revealed that children with an incarcerated parent are 3 to 4 times more likely than those without an incarcerated parent to engage in delinquent behavior, and 2.5 times more likely to experience mental health problems (e.g., anxiety, depression; Makariev & Shaver, 2010). When looking at long-term effects, children of incarcerated parents are more likely to have substance abuse problems and to be unemployed (Murray & Murray, 2010), and to experience poor romantic relationships, divorce, and/or separation from their own children (Murray, 2007). In the wake of parental incarceration, family members must deal with the sequela of traumatic separation, loneliness, stigma; how to explain the separation to children, strained parenting, reduced family income, unstable childcare arrangements, and home and school instability and transitions (Murray, Farrington, & Sekol, 2012).

### The Trauma of Sudden and Imposed Family Separation

The detrimental effects of forced and unexpected parent–child separation, even when children are well cared for in a safe environment, have long been documented in the psychological and psychiatric literature (e.g., Freud & Burlingham, 1943). Unlike separations involved in voluntary migration decisions, which may include economic benefits but social–emotional costs, forced separations owing to deportation incurred the social emotional cost without the economic benefit (in fact, economic situations typically deteriorate further following deportation; Dreby, 2012a, 2012b). Deportations involve a double or triple trauma for children, who may witness the forcible removal of the parent, as they suddenly lose their caregiver and/or abruptly lose their familiar home environment (McLeigh, 2010). From the attachment theory perspective (Bowlby, 1969), a child’s sense of security is rooted in relationships with familiar caregivers; this secure base is a necessary foundation for developing social, cognitive, and emotional regulation skills that are fundamental throughout life. The physical separation between a parent and child, particularly when unexpected as in the case of deportation, disrupts this essential secure base, risking internalizing symptoms (depression, anxiety), externalizing behaviors (withdrawal, aggression), and social and cognitive difficulties (Makariev & Shaver, 2010). All learning—whether learning the alphabet, learning to wait one’s turn, or learning to tolerate frustration—happens in the context of important relationships, of which the primary caretaker–child relationship is paramount. When these relationships are disrupted, the learning processes and the establishment of the important neuronal pathways also are disrupted.

The Urban Institute and National Council of La Raza (NCLR) explored the short- (2-month), intermediate- (6-month), and long-term (1-year) impact of worksite raids on three communities where a total of 500 children (mostly U.S. born citizens) either temporarily or permanently lost their parents (Capps et al., 2007; Chaudry et al., 2010). Chaudry et al. (2010) reported that the most common short-term effects to children’s psychological well-being following a parent’s arrest included eating (e.g., loss of appetite)

and sleeping changes (e.g., nightmares). This was followed by crying and feeling afraid. Although less common, anxiety, withdrawal, anger–aggression, and clinginess also were reported by many respondents. These hardships were especially prevalent among children whose household structure and primary caregiving relationships changed after a parent’s arrest (Chaudry et al., 2010). As predicted by attachment theory, at follow-up, Chaudry et al. (2010) reported that the more frequently cited behavioral and emotional changes (eating, sleeping, crying, fear, and anxiety) reduced over time, but less frequently cited changes (withdrawal and angry–aggressive behaviors) persisted at similar or higher levels in the longer terms. Additional short- and long-term consequences for children following a parent’s arrest included developmental difficulties (e.g., speech delay) and behavioral and academic decline at school. Similar results were found by Brabec et al. (2011) who conducted interviews with Guatemalan and Salvadoran immigrant families impacted by detention and deportation.

An additional theoretical perspective that has been used to understand the experiences of children of incarcerated parents, and also may offer a helpful framework to children of deported parents, is that of ambiguous loss, that is, the experience when a parent is physically absent but psychologically present, or physically present but psychologically absent (Boss, 2006). When ambiguity and loss are experienced simultaneously, individuals may internalize stress and experience negative psychological symptoms (e.g., depression, anxiety). Children whose parents are deported may experience confusion over whether their parent is a “criminal.” They also may get the message that the loss should be kept a secret and receive confusing explanations about what happened, all of which compound the loss and increase the likelihood for adverse psychological effects. It is unfortunate that while such adverse effects can be profound for children’s development, they may not be considered “exceptional and extremely unusual hardship” (Section 240A(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 1990). under the current immigration policies (e.g., the AEDPA, 1996; Hagan, Castro, & Rodriguez, 2010).

### Financial, Health, and Psychological Consequences for the Deported Individual

Deportees often face high levels of stigma on their return to their countries of origin. Although not always the case (McMillan, 2011), they are sometimes seen by their communities of origin or their own families as failures and as criminals, despite a lack of evidence to this effect (Brotherton & Barrios, 2011). They typically face employment difficulties and feel demoralized (Brotherton & Barrios, 2011). Research also has found that deportation is associated with more frequent drug use and less interaction with medical or treatment services (including HIV testing, medical care, and substance abuse treatment; Brouwer et al., 2009). As a result of the employment challenges and inability to fulfill the provider role, as well as the stigma, shame, and depressive symptoms, many deported fathers lose contact with their children in the United States. In this way, deportation severs paternal bonds, and forces many single mothers into very difficult positions as both family caretakers and providers (Dreby, 2012a, 2012b). For female deportees, deportation increases the risk for physical and sexual assaults and increased prostitution in the context of financial

insecurity and ineffective law enforcement (Robertson et al., 2012).

### Changes in Family Structure and Stability

As suggested earlier, a parent's deportation can lead to a permanent change in family structure and in the extreme cases, family dissolution (Dreby, 2012a, 2012b). From the perspective of social control theory and strain theory (Cullen & Agnew, 2006), a parent's detention and deportation disrupts family processes and family resources; specifically, income, parental involvement, and parental supervision all decline, while school and housing instability increase. Dreby (2012a, 2012b) found that one quarter of families in her sample that experienced deportation were unable to keep their transnational family together postdeportation. Although changing trends in migration have led to increased numbers of female deportees, overwhelming, deportees continue to be male (Brotherton & Barrios, 2011; Kohli et al., 2011). Thus, as Dreby (2012a, 2012b) pointed out, when parental deportation results in a single parent household, it's typically a single mother household, and often that single mother has a tenuous legal status herself. Unlike a single breadwinner whose husband was laid off or injured, these newly single mothers are not going to receive worker's compensation or unemployment benefits to help make ends meet (Dreby, 2012a, 2012b). Children in a single parent household are 4.2 times more likely to live in poverty, and the poverty rate is double for single mother households compared to single father households (Women's Legal Defense and Education Fund, 2011). For family members remaining in the United States, loss of the deported person's income can lead to housing insecurity, food insecurity, psychological distress, and slipping from low income into poverty. In addition, the loss of the deported parent can create a crisis in childcare, and older siblings may be increasingly relied on for care of younger siblings (Dreby, 2012a, 2012b).

### Economic Costs for Families

As alluded to earlier, caregiver detention and/or deportation have important implications for the family's economic well-being. Parents often lose employment and income, and even detained parents who are granted work release, experience subsequent difficulty finding employment. Related economic hardships include difficulty in paying bills, increasing debts, housing instability, food insecurity, inability to send remittance money to families in origin countries, and apprehension about applying for public assistance (Chaudry et al., 2010). Economic crises are especially prevalent among families who have not yet paid off the debt incurred in migration (Brabeck et al., 2011; Menjivar & Abrego, 2012).

### Consequences for the "De Facto" Deportees

Although children left in the United States face abundant challenges, children who return with parents to the host country—children Argueta (2010) called "de facto deportees"—also face a myriad of difficulties. According to the Pew Hispanic Center (2012), 300,000 U.S. citizen children have returned to Mexico alone since 2005 (Passel et al., 2013). These children often feel like exiles, and experience difficulties with language and discrim-

ination (Boehm, 2011). As noted previously, they are deprived of the benefits of U.S. citizenship, including access to health care, educational opportunities, and social service programs (Hagan et al., 2011). The transition between schooling systems can be a challenge, particularly if returning to a rural area (Zúñiga & Hammam, 2006). As a result of these cumulative experiences, children may begin to lose their aspirations and dreams, and may have lower educational and vocational readiness, as well as untreated mental health disorders (Zayas, 2010). They may be returned to living situations of extreme poverty, as documented in a 2012 article in the Guatemalan newspaper, *La Prensa*, which described the experiences of an 11-year-old U.S.-born girl who returned with deported parents to a remote Guatemalan village. As a result of the extreme change in standard of living, she began to experience health problems, dietary issues, academic regression, and loss of English fluency (Ventura, 2012).

### Impact on the Broader Community

The aftermath of deportation impacts entire communities as it instills fear of family separation and distrust of anyone assumed to be associated with the government, including local police, school personnel, health professionals, and social service professionals (Dreby, 2012a, 2012b; Menjivar & Abrego, 2012). Unauthorized adults drive less (Human Impact Partners, 2013), unauthorized crime witnesses and victims are reluctant to disclose information to the police (Hacker et al., 2011; Human Impact Partners, 2013; Sládková, Mangado, & Quinteros, 2012), and children of unauthorized parents may be kept out of school (Androff et al., 2011; Capps et al., 2007). Thus, although smaller numbers of individuals are directly impacted and suffer the worst consequences of deportation, the entire community suffers adverse effects (Dreby, 2012a, 2012b). More important, this fear extends beyond the unauthorized population, to include authorized Latino immigrants who still fear deportation, experience discrimination, and as a result, feel less optimistic about the future for their children and more mistrusting of their government (Becerra, Androff, Cimino, Wagaman, & Blanchard, 2013). Workplace raids and other deportations of large numbers of migrants also negatively affect the economic structure of entire communities where their labor has been part of the revival and/or renewal of entire towns and cities (see, e.g., AbUSed: The story of Postville, Argueta, 2010). In addition, the psychological and financial sequela of detention and deportation extend to family members living in the country of origin, who also experience the sudden panic of losing contact with their family member, and often go for weeks or months with no information regarding loved ones' whereabouts (Brabeck et al., 2011).

Finally, growing up in a climate of fear, distrust, and in the shadows impacts a child's (including U.S. citizen children's) self-concept and relationship with the United States, its government, and authorities more generally. Research has found that children in immigrant families begin to associate all immigrants with illegal status, and to associate being "illegal" with being a criminal; as a result they may reject their own immigrant heritage. Moreover, children may conflate police with ICE officials, thereby growing up seeing the police as a threat instead of as a resource (Dreby, 2012a, 2012b; Hacker et al., 2011). These mixed messages may be confounded by the ways in which adults may try to protect children, either by avoiding direct communication with children about

status, detention, and deportation, or by interpreting the events in ways that may not be entirely accurate, for example, “deported people are criminals but we are not at risk because we haven’t committed a criminal act” (Lykes et al., 2013).

### Thinking Critically and Creatively About Policy Changes

We have reviewed considerable evidence confirming that current U.S. immigration policies and their enforcement have detrimental effects for migrant adults, children, families, and communities, both in the United States and abroad. In the midst of these abundant and extreme challenges, unauthorized migrants and their families fight for family unity, improved lives for their children, and the betterment of their communities. Despite the harsh treatment they may receive, many maintain strong family ties across countries and patriotic attitudes toward the United States and its citizens (McMillan, 2011). Many migrants, including those who are unauthorized, learn to successfully navigate at a minimum two cultures, two languages, and family obligations within and beyond the U.S. border. They demonstrate resilience, as evidence in their success in stretching their income in three directions: paying off debt incurred in migration, covering bills and expenses in the United States, and sending remittance money home (Brabek et al., 2011). This section summarizes current legislative efforts toward immigration reform, scholarly and activist recommendations that are consistent with the evidence herein outlined, and our suggestions for policies that promote protection of children and families.

### Recent Legislative Efforts

There is widespread consensus that the current immigration system is “broken” but considerably less agreement on how to respond. Debate is frequently polarized, with supporters pointing to the multiple economic and social contributions of the undocumented labor force while opponents argue that they are creating “anchor babies” or “living off the system.” Strategies to protect unauthorized migrants and their families have focused on a portion of the unauthorized population, for example, undocumented youth, particularly those brought here as infants or preschoolers who have had no contact with the law since arriving (i.e., the DREAM Act, 2010). Another strategy directed to this population is President Obama’s executive order, the *Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Act*, which since August 2012 has allowed many of the DREAMers the opportunity to emerge from the shadows, with permission to work for at least 2 years, with possible renewals (Batalova & Mittlestadt, 2012). Although these initiatives have helped many, some advocates judge this piecemeal approach as going after “low-lying fruit,” distracting from the important demand for comprehensive immigration reform, and perhaps more problematically, subject to reversal at the whim of a political change in the White House or the wider public. In search for a more comprehensive change, in late June 2012, the U.S. Senate approved a 1,200-page bill that would overhaul immigration laws for the first time since 1986 (*Immigration Reform Bill*, 2012). Among other things, the bill would create a path to citizenship for millions of unauthorized migrants, thus enabling many families to stay together; the bill simultaneously seeks to stop the migration

flow north by intensifying the militarization of the U.S.-Mexican border. Despite having strengths and limitations, the bill may never progress, as the U.S. House of Representatives has rejected even putting the bill to a vote and remains deeply divided over any comprehensive proposal and path to citizenship.

### Ideas From Activists and Scholars for Protecting Children and Families

Advocates and activists insist that neither side of the political immigration debate pays adequate attention to children’s rights, which, they point out, are not protected by current policies. The Women’s Refugee Commission and *First Focus*, a bipartisan advocacy organization, urged the U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary and the U.S. Congress to adopt four principles in drafting its reform initiatives. In coalition with more than 200 organizations representing children, immigrants, academia, civil rights, and religious organizations, the four principals for prochildren immigration reform included (a) a direct, clear, and reasonable pathway to citizenship for all unauthorized migrants; (b) protection and promotion of children’s fundamental rights; (c) ensuring that enforcement efforts have appropriate protections for children; and (d) keeping families together (see: <http://campaignforchildren.org/sites/default/files/House%20Immigration%20Testimony%202013-02-05.pdf>). Legal scholar Thronson (2010) proffered an innovative proposal for achieving principles two (protecting children’s rights) and four (keeping families together). He noted that U.S. citizen parents can currently extend their citizenship to their children (even if those children were born elsewhere), although this same right is not available to U.S. citizen children in mixed-status families. Current law allows children to petition citizenship for their parents only after they turn 21 years of age, that is, when they are no longer children. But U.S.-citizen children can never pass on citizenship status to their parents if their parents are “unlawfully” present in the United States. Thus the approximately 82% of children born to unauthorized parents in the United States (4.5 million U.S. citizen children) are denied the right to pass on this status to their parents (Capps et al., 2013). These children therefore risk losing their parents to deportation and experiencing the consequences summarized earlier. The failure to allow citizenship or another form of immigration status adjustment to be passed on from child to parent, or from a child to his or her transnational sibling, denies children their families, renders some wards of the state, and creates undue hardships as we have outlined in this article. The policy recommendation emergent from Thronson’s analysis is to allow U.S. citizen children the right to extend citizenship to their parents.

### Listening to Children’s Voices

Ensuring the security, health, and well-being of U.S. citizen children of unauthorized parents requires the commitment to including children’s voices in the policies and decisions that affect their lives. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (*United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights*, 1990), which was signed by President Clinton but never passed by the U.S. Senate, calls for decisions to be made in the best interests of the child (Article 3) and identifies the right of the child to

be cared for by her/his parents (Article 7). Likewise, the U.S. legal system has a tradition of acting within the best interests of the child. Based on this commitment, we suggest that the Executive Office for Immigration Review introduce a policy that demands that U.S. citizen children have a right to be legally represented in the proceedings that threaten to take away their parents. As has been reviewed, both the removal of a parent of a citizen child who stays in the United States and the forced exile of the child with the parent to the country of origin can have lasting negative impacts on the child's development and well-being. It is significant that children's interests are not explicitly represented in deportation proceedings, as they are in, for example, domestic court proceedings that impact on their lives and family systems, for example, in divorce cases. Their particular realities should be an important part of the deliberations when removing an unauthorized parent from the United States. Through centering our policy debates on the consequences for children, we are more likely to press for policies and practices that are designed with their best interests at heart, and that ensure them a life of dignity and well-being as promised in international laws and covenants, by domestic values and commitments, and because of their status as citizens of the United States.

**Keywords:** migration; children; deportation; human rights

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