

# The Impact of Detention and Deportation on Latino Immigrant Children and Families: A Quantitative Exploration

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## Abstract

Children of Latino immigrants, many of whom live in “mixed-status” families, are a rapidly growing group in the United States. It is widely accepted that their development is affected by multiple and complex factors, including those in their distal context (e.g., laws, institutions, policies). Despite the enormity of the deportation system and its vigorous implementation in recent years, little research has investigated how this particular component of the distal context affects Latino immigrant families. The present survey was designed to statistically explore the impact of detention/deportation on Latino immigrant parents and children ( $N = 132$ ). Regression analyses indicated that (1) parents with higher levels of legal vulnerability report a greater impact of detention/deportation on the family environment (parent emotional well-being, ability to provide financially, and relationships with their children) and children’s well-being (child’s emotional well-being and academic performance) and (2) parents’ legal vulnerability and the impact of detention/deportation on the family predict outcomes for children. Implications for practice and policy are discussed.

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It is widely accepted that immigrant children's development is influenced by proximal context (e.g., peer, family, extended family) as well as distal context (sometimes called "macrosystems"; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998), which include laws, institutions, social structures, and policies. Research has documented that this distal context contributes to several specific developmental challenges for children from immigrant families in general and from Latino immigrant families in particular. For example, researchers have demonstrated that poverty affects all children's development, contributing to, for example, lower developmental scores on a range of instruments (Aber, Bennett, Conley, & Li, 1997). In 2005, 28% of all children living in low-income families in United States were born into immigrant families (across nationalities; Capps & Fortuny, 2006); currently, 34% of first-generation Latino children live in poverty, compared with 26% of those in the second generation (Fry & Passel, 2009). While immigrant parents (across nationalities) are likely to be working, they tend to be employed in low-skilled jobs with lower wages and no benefits (Hernandez, 2004).

Across nationalities, children of immigrants, particularly when their parents are undocumented, are less likely to have health insurance (Capps & Fortuny, 2006) and less likely to participate in public programs (e.g., Temporary Assistance to Needy Families [TANF], Medicaid, food stamps; Capps, Hagan, & Rodriguez, 2004). Even when the children are U.S. citizens, their undocumented parent(s) may fail to understand their child's eligibility and/or fear that seeking help puts them at risk for deportation (Capps et al., 2004). Prior research has found that undocumented parents, particularly those from Latin America, experience higher levels of food insecurity compared with their U.S.-born parent peers (Kalil & Chen, 2008). Research has also found that children of immigrants (across nationalities) are at risk for slower cognitive and language development as well as poorer academic performance, in part because their parents' limited English language ability complicates their efforts to read to their children, help with homework, and get involved in children's schools (Capps, Fix, Murray, et al., 2005). Finally, research has documented the potential challenges posed to children of Latino immigrants by English language learning; discrimination and racism; adjusting to a new peer group, culture, and society; and negotiating between the norms of their parents and those of their peer groups (Fry & Passel, 2009; Gil, Wagner, & Vega, 2000; Guarnaccia & Lopez, 1998).

Parents' legal status is an understudied, but important, component of the distal context that affects children of Latino immigrants' development (Yoshikawa & Way, 2008). Policies that define who have access to the benefits of citizenship influence children's development indirectly, through the family's economic status and parents' psychological functioning (Fuligni & Yoshikawa, 2003). Yoshikawa, Godfrey, and Rivera (2008), for example, found that Mexican and Dominican immigrant parents who lacked access to resources that required identification as a legal U.S. resident (i.e., drivers licenses and financial services) were more likely to experience economic hardship and psychological distress, which, in turn, predicted lower levels of cognitive ability in children at 24 months of age on standardized assessment.

While previous research suggests that children in Latino immigrant families face a number of developmental challenges specific to their social and cultural contexts, research has not explored how the shifting policies and attitudes toward immigrants in the United States have affected the children born into these families. Such research is particularly important in light of recently increased implementation of policies that restrict the rights and opportunities of undocumented immigrants (Kremer, Moccio, & Hammell, 2009) and the growing numbers of children, most of whom are U.S. citizens, with at least one parent who is undocumented (Capps & Fortuny, 2006).

### *Children of Undocumented Parents*

Most immigrants are not U.S. citizens and many are undocumented. In the United States, in 2005, 30% of the foreign-born population was estimated to be undocumented, 28% were legal permanent residents, and 31% were U.S. citizens by naturalization (Passel, 2006). The majority of undocumented immigrants come from Mexico and Central American countries (Passel, 2006). The vast majority of the children born into immigrant families, however, are U.S.-born citizens. In 2005, 80% of children born to immigrant families were born as U.S. citizens (Capps & Fortuny, 2006). Many of these children are born into "mixed-status" families, in which at least one parent is undocumented, while the child is U.S.-born and hence a citizen with all the rights and privileges that citizenship carries (Capps, Fix, Ost, Anderson, & Passel, 2005; Capps & Fortuny, 2006). Among children of Latino immigrants, about 4 in 10 second-generation immigrant children have at least one undocumented immigrant parents and hence live in a mixed-status family (Fry & Passel, 2009).

The mixed-status family faces a difficult dilemma when faced with policies and practices that threaten the deportation of an undocumented parent: (1) the entire family may leave the United States, including the children who

are U.S. citizens, uprooting all from their familiar cultural, social, and linguistic environments; (2) the undocumented parent may leave, creating a single-parent family in the United States or leaving the child with other caregivers; or (3) the intact family may remain in the United States but with the chronic risk of being caught and deported (Fix & Zimmerman, 2001). These dilemmas have become more challenging for mixed-status families in the wake of a changing climate for undocumented immigrants in the United States, which will be discussed next.

### *A Changing Climate for Undocumented Latino Parents*

Legislation passed in 1996—the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act—and in 2001—the USA PATRIOT Act—and vigorously implemented in recent years, has profoundly altered the climate for undocumented immigrants living in the United States (Kanstroom, 2008). These laws expanded the offenses for which a person can be deported from the United States. They also restricted judicial discretion in deportation cases and limited judicial review formerly available to those facing deportation. These laws further made it more difficult for noncitizens to stay in the United States if issued an order of deportation and made it harder for noncitizens to reenter the United States (Fix & Zimmerman, 2001; Hagan, Eschbach, & Rodriguez, 2008). Additionally, some local and state police have been ordered to be involved in enforcing these laws in their communities (as an example, see Carcieri, State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations Executive Order 08-01, 2008).

Largely as a result of the implementation of the aforementioned legislation, the number of cases before immigration courts increased 30.6%, from 282,396 in 2001 to 368,848 in 2005; the percentage of noncitizens ordered to be removed from the United States increased from 78% in 2001 to 84% in 2005 (Office of Planning, Analysis, & Technology, 2006). In 2008, Immigration Customs Enforcement apprehended 792,000 noncitizens, detained more than 397,000, and deported more than 359,000 of them; this was the sixth consecutive year with a record high number of deportations (Office of Immigration Statistics, 2008). The majority of deportees migrated from Latin American countries: Mexican nationals accounted for nearly 89% of those apprehended in 2008, while the next largest source countries were Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Cuba, and Brazil (Office of Immigration Statistics, 2008). A 2006 report found that 70% of individuals in formal removal proceedings had lived in the United States for more than a decade, and the

median length of residence was 14 years (TRAC Immigration, 2006). Many deportees leave U.S.-born children behind; the U.S. Immigration Customs Enforcement agency reported that more than 100,000 parents of U.S. citizen children were deported between 1997 and 2007 ("108,000 people deported," 2009). A recent report issued by the University of California Berkley and Davis Schools of Law found that between 1997 and 2007, 88,000 U.S. citizen children (44,000 of whom were less than the age of 5 years) lost a legal permanent resident parent to deportation (Baum, Jones, & Barry, 2010). How the risk and experience of detention and deportation affect Latino immigrants and their children is largely understudied.

### *Impact of Deportation Policies on Children of Immigrants*

Scholars (e.g., Capps & Fortuny, 2006; Suarez-Orozco & Carhill, 2008) have called for research that explores the effects of deportation policies and practices on immigrant parents, families, and children. The research generated thus far has either been primarily descriptive, has focused on the impact of deportation on parents, or has used a simplified definition of legal vulnerability (i.e., documented vs. undocumented). The National Council of La Raza (NCLR; 2007) studied three communities where large-scale workplace raids occurred, affecting almost exclusively undocumented Latino workers. They reported that in the immediate aftermath of the raids, a total of 500 children, mostly U.S.-born citizens, were temporarily or permanently separated from parent(s). Consequences for children and families included feelings of abandonment, symptoms of trauma, fear, isolation, depression, and family fragmentation (NCLR, 2007). Financial hardship following deportation was also found to be a harsh consequence for family members left behind (Kremer et al., 2009). In one quantitative study that focused on legal status, but not specifically on impact or experience of detention and deportation, Cavazos-Regh, Zayas, and Spitznagle (2007) surveyed 143 Latino adult immigrants and found statistically significant relationships between legal status, concern regarding deportation, and a heightened risk of negative emotional and health states (particularly anger) as well as increased stress associated with low-paying jobs and limited opportunities for employment promotion. Hence, previous research, despite the limitations identified above, has suggested a link between vulnerability to and experience of deportation, negative financial consequences, and poor outcomes for parent and child emotional well-being. The study discussed here expanded on this prior research to statistically explore the impact of deportation (as a threat and direct experience)

on Latino immigrant families and their children, among families with parents of differing legal statuses.

### *Purpose of the Current Study*

The purpose of the current study was to statistically explore the impact of parents' legal vulnerability and threat and experience of detention and deportation on family environment (defined as parents' perceptions of their own emotional well-being, ability to provide financially for the family, and parent-child relationships), and child well-being (defined as parent's perceptions of child's emotional well-being and of child's academic performance).

### **Method**

A survey was conducted between March and May 2009, as a part of a larger community-university collaborative project. The findings presented here represent a quantitative exploration of themes that arose in a participatory action research (PAR) project of the Post-Deportation Human Rights Project (PDHRP), an initiative of the Center for Human Rights and International Justice at Boston College (for a description of the PDHRP's PAR project and previous qualitative research, see Brabeck, Lykes, & Hershberg, in press). The questions explored in the present survey were informed by the PDHRP's PAR activities, including previous qualitative interviews that explored Central American immigrants' experiences related to detention and deportation, ongoing reflection and dialogue with participants, and action steps identified and enacted (e.g., participatory community-led Know Your Rights workshops). Moreover, this previous and ongoing work of the PDHRP facilitated the authors' relationship building with community leaders, who helped the researchers access a population that is difficult to reach and ask sensitive questions, for example, regarding legal status.

The present survey aimed to document the impact of the policies of detention/deportation and the threat they pose on a sample drawn from the entire Latino immigrant community (not solely undocumented immigrants) and to compare the different impacts for individuals with varying degrees of legal vulnerability. Criteria for participation included: (1) immigrants from a Latin American country, (2) 18 years or older, and (3) parent of at least one child less than the age of 18 years living currently in the United States. Participants with more than one child less than the age of 18 years were asked to consider only one child when answering survey questions that referenced the participant's child.

## Hypotheses

This study tested the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1:* Parents' legal vulnerability, while controlling demographic variables, would predict the impact of detention and/or deportation on family environment (defined as parents' perceptions of emotional well-being, perceived ability to provide financially, and parent-child relationship).

*Hypothesis 2:* Parents' legal vulnerability, while controlling demographic variables, would predict the impact of detention and deportation on parents' perception of child well-being (defined as parents' perceptions of child's emotional well-being and academic performance).

*Hypothesis 3:* Parents' legal vulnerability and the impact on family environment, while controlling demographic variables, would predict the impact of detention and deportation on child well-being.

Hypothesis 3 is based on the literature (e.g., Gelfand & Teti, 1990), which indicates that a healthy family environment is critical to child's psychological, academic, and social well-being and development.

## Instrument

As previously noted, the present survey was heavily informed by analyses of previous PDHRP qualitative research and PAR project (see Brabeck et al., in press). Additionally, the survey was based on a review of other relevant research literature and consultation with the Latino immigrant community organization/program leaders who participated in the survey. These leaders made suggestions to clarify wording, simplify the survey, and reduce discomfort that might arise from answering questions about sensitive topics such as legal status. After an agreed upon list of survey questions was arrived at, the survey was translated by a native Spanish speaker and back-translated by a native English speaker until an adequate translation was accomplished. Finally, two additional native Spanish speakers from different countries made minor suggestions to the Spanish language materials to ensure that the language was comprehensible across nationalities. The survey was pilot tested with a sample of eight participants before commencement of the study.

Informed consent was explained to participants who, for confidentiality reasons, were asked to provide only their verbal consent. They were assured

of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. Bilingual researchers were present to answer questions or help complete the survey as participants filled out the questionnaire at the site of the community organization. Each participant received a \$15 gift certificate to a local store for completing the survey. Survey completion took between 15 and 40 minutes.

### *Recruitment of participants*

Survey participants were recruited through Latino immigrant community organizations in metropolitan areas in the northeast region of the United States. As noted, the previous and ongoing PAR work of the PDHRP facilitated the process of building relationships with these community organizations. Five community organizations, including three English as Second Language (ESL)/Adult Education Programs, which work closely with Latino immigrants, assisted participant recruitment for the study. All five organizations are community-based Latino immigrant organizations and offer a variety of programs and services on site. Ultimately, 132 Latino immigrants completed the survey. The coauthors met initially with organization/program leaders and explained the purposes of the project and the procedures for informed consent and confidentiality. Subsequently, either the coauthors or the organization/program leader explained the purposes and procedures of the project to potential participants, who were invited to participate at a later date. The majority of surveys were administered to groups of participants; anyone requesting individual assistance met with a research assistant individually to complete the survey.

### *Measures*

Based on state demographics of the local Latino immigrant population, previous PHDRP qualitative research (Brabeck et al., in press), discussion with community leaders about the characteristics of their communities, and pilot testing, the majority of the participants were expected to be monolingual Spanish-speaking immigrants working in lower skilled jobs and without experience in research. Hence, all attempts were made to make the survey as straightforward, comprehensible, and parsimonious as possible. There are few valid measures for studies involving Latino immigrants. Because the survey was based on previous PDHRP PAR work and the available literature, and was reviewed by community leaders, the survey developed for this study adds a useful tool for empirical work in this area. In addition to demographic variables (age, gender, child's age, years in the United States, marital status, and participant and partners' employment), the final survey measured the following variables:



*Parent legal vulnerability.* A series of dichotomously scored “true/false” questions assessed participants’ legal vulnerability. These questions assessed whether the participant: (1) was undocumented, (2) has a current deportation order, (3) had been detained by immigration authorities in the past, (4) was previously deported, (5) has a family member currently in detention, (6) has a family member who had been deported (7) is a U.S. citizen; and (8) is a legal U.S. resident. One variable representing “legal vulnerability” with five levels was created, with the assumption that people who lack legal documentation, who have experienced the detention/deportation of a family member, and who have personally been previously detained/deported will experience greater vulnerability to detention/deportation policies than individuals who are documented and who have not experienced detention/deportation personally or in their family. The variable “legal vulnerability” contained five levels: (1) legal U.S. residents or citizens, (2) legal U.S. residents or citizens who have had a family member detained and/or deported, (3) undocumented participants without a personal or family history of detention/deportation, (4) undocumented participants with family member previously detained and/or deported, and (5) undocumented with a personal history of detention and/or deportation and a family member’s history of detention and/or deportation. (While U.S. citizens and legal residents, e.g., green card holders, face different vulnerability under current U.S. immigration laws, these two groups were collapsed into one group based on a nonsignificant *t* test between the two groups on all dependent variables.) Higher numbers indicate greater levels of legal vulnerability.

*Impact of deportation on family environment.* Family environment typically measures the social and environmental characteristics of families and is usually constructed with several dimensions (e.g., relationships among family members, family system) and a long list of items (e.g., Moos & Moos, 1983). Because of the concern regarding participants’ level of education and cultural context, only three elements of family environment were selected, based on qualitative themes from prior literature (Brabeck et al., in press; NCLR, 2007): (1) parents’ emotional well-being in the context of deportation, (2) parents’ perceived ability to provide financially for their children in the context of deportation, and (3) parents’ perceptions of parent-child relationship in the context of deportation. These three elements were measured by self-report; participants were asked to respond to the following statements: “The existence of deportation affects my ability to provide financially for my children;” “The existence of deportation affects how I feel;” and “The existence of deportation affects my relationship with my child.” The wording “existence of deportation” was chosen after extensive deliberation and consultation with three community leaders and two additional native Spanish speakers because

it encompasses both direct and indirect effects, that is, those participants who have not personally experienced deportation might still be affected by its existence in their communities. Participants responded on a 3-point Likert-type scale where 1 = *yes*, 2 = *somewhat*, and 3 = *no*. (Note that although variability was reduced by reducing the Likert-type scale options, the items were shortened after extensive discussions with community organization leaders and pilot testing to increase comprehension among this community sample.) The impact of deportation on family environment was assessed by adding the three items together; higher numbers indicate lower levels of agreement with the statements. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to be .69.

*Impact of deportation on child well-being.* Measures of immigrant children's well-being include cognitive, psychological, academic, and physical development (Birman & Chan, 2008). Based on previous descriptive research (NCLR, 2007) as well as the PDHRP qualitative interviews, experience and risk of detention and deportation affect children largely in their psychological and academic functioning; hence, in the present study, children's well-being was composed of two elements: (1) parents' perceptions of child's emotional well-being in the context of deportation and (2) parents' perceptions of child's academic performance in the context of deportation. These two elements were measured by parents' self-report; participants were asked to respond to the following statements: "The existence of deportation affects how my child feels" and "The existence of deportation affects how my child performs in school." Again, participants responded on a 3-point Likert-type scale where 1 = *yes*, 2 = *somewhat*, and 3 = *no*, and higher numbers indicate lower levels of agreement with the statements. The impact of deportation on child well-being was created by adding the two items together; Cronbach's alpha was calculated to be .85.

## Analysis

Multiple hierarchical regression models were then used to test the hypotheses that predicted the impact of detention and deportation on the family environment and children's well-being, after controlling the demographic variables.

## Results

### *Participant Demographics*

Among the 132 Latino immigrants, more than two thirds (70.5%) of the participants were women, and the mean age was 36.7 years ( $SD = 8.11$ ). Ages of

target child (i.e., the child considered by the respondent when completing the survey) were almost equally distributed across age categories: 32% of target children were less than 6 years old, 31% were ages 6 to 12 years, and 37% were ages 12 to 18 years. Most participants (60.6%) were employed, working on average 34.87 hours per week ( $SD = 10.78$ ). Most participants (80.3%) had a partner. Among participants' partners, 81.13% were employed, working on average 37.32 hours per week ( $SD = 7.96$ ). Twelve participants (9%) reported that neither they nor their partners were employed.

The greatest number of participants migrated from Guatemala (37.2%), followed by Colombia (17.8%), the Dominican Republic (14.0%), El Salvador (10.9%), Mexico (10.1%), and Honduras (3.9%); 6.2% of participants indicated "other Latin American country." Slightly more than 21% of participants were recent immigrants who had been in the United States for less than 5 years, while 48.8% were long-term residents who lived in the United States for more than 10 years.

Across participants, the vast majority (73.5%) had children who were born in the United States, while 41.7% had children born in their country of origin. All participants had at least one child currently living in the United States (this was one criterion for participation), while 14.4% of participants also had children currently living in their country of origin. Among the 50 undocumented participants, 76% reported that they had U.S.-born children (10% reported no U.S.-born children, while 14% did not answer the question).

### *Participants' Legal Status and Experience With Detention/Deportation*

A total of 6.8% of the participants reported that they have a current deportation order, 13.6% have been previously detained, and 4.5% were previously deported. Nearly 38% ( $N = 50$ ) of the participants acknowledged being undocumented. Among the 50 undocumented participants, 14% reported a current deportation order, 26% have been previously detained, and 8% were previously deported. Almost half (40.2%) of the participants across legal status had family members who were deported. More specifically, slightly more than 37% of legal residents and 60% of undocumented participants reported a family member had been detained and/or deported. The average score for participants' legal vulnerability was 2.54 ( $SD = 1.66$ ; see Table 1 for distribution of legal vulnerability scores). (Note that six participants [4.5%] were recorded as missing data because they either endorsed "true" for all statements or did not endorse any statements as "true" or "false.") Participants with different

**Table 1.** Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Legal Vulnerability

	Frequency	Percentage
1. Documented participant (citizen or legal resident)	45	34.1
2. Documented participant (citizen or legal resident) with family member detained and/or deported	32	24.2
3. Undocumented participant	17	12.9
4. Undocumented participant, with family member detained and/or deported	16	12.1
5. Undocumented participant, with family member detained and/or deported and personal history of deportation	16	12.1
Missing	6	4.5
Total	132	100.0

levels of legal vulnerability did not differ with regards to gender, marital status, child's age, years in United States, country of origin, having a partner, or self and partner's employment status; they did, however, differ with regard to age ( $p < .01$ ), with younger participants having greater levels of legal vulnerability.

### *Predictors of Impact on Child and Family*

Three multiple regression models were run. The first two models tested Hypotheses 1 and 2, that is, the parent's legal vulnerability would predict the impact of detention and deportation on family environment and on child well-being, while controlling for demographic variables. (See Table 2 for distribution of participants' responses to five Likert-items.) The third model tested Hypothesis 3, that is, that impact on the family environment and parent's legal vulnerability would predict impact on the child well-being. (See Table 3 for results of the analysis.) In the first model, the first hypothesis was supported: Parent's legal vulnerability significantly predicted impact on family environment, accounting for 27.1% of the variance. In the second model, Hypothesis 2 was supported: Parent's legal vulnerability significantly predicted the impact on child well-being, accounting for 30.6% of the variance. The greater the legal vulnerability of the parent, the greater the reported impact of detention and deportation on family environment (i.e., perceptions of parent's emotional well-being, perceived ability to provide financially for the family, and parent-child relationship) and child well-being (i.e., perceptions

**Table 2.** Participants' Responses: Negative Impacts of Deportation

Variable: The Existence of Deportation Affects ...	Yes (%)	Somewhat (%)	No (%)
How my child feels	48.5	18.9	33.1
How my child performs at school	45.5	17.4	34.1
How I feel	69.7	7.6	21.2
My relationship with my child	39.4	9.8	49.2
My ability to financially provide for my child	53.0	4.5	40.2

**Table 3.** Regression Models: Predicting the Impact of Deportation on Children and Families

	Model 1 <sup>a</sup> (Beta/SD)	Model 2 <sup>b</sup> (Beta/SD)	Model 3 <sup>c</sup> (Beta/SD)
Age	-.133/.025	-.136/.037	.015/.019
Gender (male)	.079/.341	-.017/.479	.124/.247
Child's age <6	.087/.436	-.038/.601	.121/.309
Child's age >12	.079/.368	.127/.518	-.006/.267
Years in the United States	.007/.131	.033/.185	-.020/.095
Employment	.086/.309	.065/.436	.023/.224
Having a partner	.004/.372	.115/.517	-.076/.267
Legal vulnerability	-.521/0.96**	-.491/.131**	-.192/.078**
Impact on the family			.705/.052**

a. Model 1:  $R^2 = .271$ ,  $F(7, 104) = 6.192$ ,  $p < .01$  (Dependent variable: Impact on the child).

b. Model 2:  $R^2 = .306$ ,  $F(7, 104) = 6.558$ ,  $p < .01$  (Dependent variable: Impact on the family).

c. Model 3:  $R^2 = .641$ ,  $F(8, 100) = 22.279$ ,  $p < .01$  (Dependent variable: Impact on the child).

\*\* $p < .01$ .

of child's emotional well-being and academic performance). Results of the third model supported Hypothesis 3: Parent's legal vulnerability and impact on family environment were significant predictors of impact on child well-being. As this model accounted for 64.1% of the variance of the data, it was a substantial improvement over Models 1 and 2.

## Discussion

This study represented an attempt to statistically examine the impact of deportation policies and practices on Latino immigrant children and families. Previous research has documented risk factors specific to immigrant children. However, to date, there has been insufficient research that quantitatively

explores the impact of deportation policies and practices on immigrant families and their children. A number of important findings emerged.

First, a large portion of Latino immigrants, in this convenience sample of 132, were directly affected by detention and deportation. A substantial number of participants (38%) were undocumented, and almost half of the sample (including both undocumented and documented parents) experienced the detention or deportation of a family member. Given the potential risk from disclosing this information, it is plausible that these numbers, while substantial, are still underestimates of the participants' direct interactions with the detention and deportation system. Moreover, more than two thirds of the participants reported that the existence of deportation policies and practices affects how they personally feel. More than half reported that these policies and practices affect their ability to provide financially for their family as well as how their children feel and perform in school. Hence, a large portion of the participants in this study reported direct experience with, vulnerability to, and effects of the deportation system.

Second, the impact of detention and deportation on family environment and child well-being is associated with the level of legal vulnerability. That is, immigrant parents with greater levels of legal vulnerability reported greater impacts of detention and deportation. It may not be surprising to learn that those who are at more risk of being affected by detention and deportation (i.e., the undocumented or those themselves or whose family members have been directly affected) report greater effects of its negative affect. However, it is notable that most of these parents live in mixed-status households (nearly three quarters of the undocumented parents), and many children who are affected by the deportation policies are U.S.-born citizens.

Third, consistent with previous studies (e.g., Gelfand & Teti, 1990; Phares & Compas, 1992), parents in this study report their children are affected by parents' wellbeing. Similar to national data sets that report that 66% of children born to undocumented immigrant parents are U.S. citizen children (Capps & Fortuny, 2006), the majority of children living in families with undocumented parents in this study are U.S.-born citizens. Hence, when undocumented Latino parents suffer as a result of detention and deportation, so too do their U.S.-born children. Parents' legal vulnerability affects them in regard to emotional well-being, financial capability, and relationships with children, which in turn affects outcomes for children. The lack of variability in the data precluded the use of causal models to analyze the data. However, results from the regression models indicated that, while controlling demographic variations, parent legal vulnerability alone is a predictor of the impact of detention and deportation on child well-being; when both parent legal

vulnerability *and* impact on family environment were entered as predictors, they significantly predicted the impact of detention deportation on child well-being, and the result of  $R^2$  ( $R^2 = .641$ ) suggests a much stronger and improved model. Similar to the Family Stress Model (Conger et al., 2002), which posits that parents' economic stress affects their mental health, intra-familial relationships, and children's outcomes, we found that the combination of the parent's experience and vulnerability to detention and deportation, with the impact that had on the parent's financial, psychological, and relational well-being, affect children in a statistically significant and practically meaningful way.

Importantly, the participants in this study do not represent a homogenous group, and their various national origins suggest unique histories, psychosocial stressors, and structural barriers that influence their migration patterns and experiences of detention and deportation. For example, the majority (32.2%) of the participants in this study migrated from Guatemala, a country in which extreme poverty is tied to the longest (36 years) civil war in Central American history, which included state-sponsored violence and government repression, particularly against the indigenous population (Black, Jamail, & Chinchilla, 1984). Hence, many immigrants from Guatemala endure the long and arduous journeys through Mexico to reach United States as political refugees from the violence of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s or as economic refugees from the aftermath that these decades' violence had on their communities (Davy, 2006). Previous PDHRP research has found that Guatemalan families understand and experience the threats posed to them by the current U.S. detention and deportation systems as deeply embedded within the context of these historical forces (Brabeck et al., in press). While the scope of article does not afford a full discussion of the unique histories and contemporary challenges that shape the experiences of each national origin group represented in this survey, readers are advised to consider these distinctive factors when understanding the impact of detention and deportation policies on Latino immigrant families. Readers are further directed to research that documents Latino immigrant subgroups' unique experiences with migration and deportation (e.g., for Guatemalan and Salvadoran immigrants, see Brabeck et al., in press; Menjivar & Abrego 2009; for Dominican immigrants, see Brotherton & Barrios, 2009; for Honduran immigrants, see Sladkova, 2007).

### *Implications for Policy and Practice*

This study statistically explored what more descriptive and qualitative studies (e.g., Brabeck et al., in press; NCLR, 2007) have previously found: The

existence of deportation policies and practice has negative emotional, relational, financial, and academic consequences for Latino immigrant parents and their children. Parent's legal vulnerability is an important component of the distal context that affects the development of children in immigrant families. The present findings suggest that practitioners and service providers working with children in immigrant families would benefit from exploring how parents' legal status and history of detention and deportation affect the emotional and financial well-being of individual members and the family unit as a whole. Understanding whether and if so, how, parents communicate with their children about the threat of deportation, make plans for how to respond in the event that a family member (particularly a caretaker) is detained, and discuss (or not) these plans with children are important to incorporate into human-service work. Practitioners might explore how the child understands detention, deportation, and legal status and provide space to process their fears, uncertainties, confusion, and anger. When engaging in such dialogues with parents and children or facilitating parent-child communication, however, consideration must be given to the potential such conversations have for inviting significant fear and anxiety. Moreover, parents' reasons for *not* communicating with their children about legal status and policies that threaten the family should be understood and respected. Finally, communicating with and educating teachers about how parents' legal status affects their children's academic performance and emotional well-being are also indicated.

Individual efforts to help children of immigrants may be of limited effectiveness if the policies that threaten their families do not change. These findings lend support to the caution of some scholars (e.g., Kremer, Moccio, & Hammell, 2009) that policies and practices that threaten undocumented adult immigrants harm U.S.-born citizen children, who are perhaps unintended, but nonetheless real, victims in the detentions and deportations—and fear caused by the threat of these actions—aimed at their parents. It follows, then, that to act in the best interests of these children, policy makers and practitioners must address the emotional and financial toll that the threat of deportation exerts on immigrant parents.

### *Limitations*

Several limitations are notable in the present study. First, the reliance on self-report measures potentially resulted in distorted data (i.e., we relied on parent's perceptions of their ability to provide financially for their families and of their children's academic performance rather than on an objective measure of financial capacity or academic performance). Given the sensitivity



of our questions, particularly with regard to legal status, it is likely that our data may have been skewed (likely toward underreporting undocumented status). Second, the lack of appropriately validated instruments for this population limited the possibilities for measuring our dependent variables. Similarly, the fact that we shortened the Likert-type scales to make the survey more accessible and comprehensible for our sample reduced the variability in responses and precluded the use of causal statistical techniques, for example, path analysis, to analyze the data. In addition, these data were cross-sectional and hence researchers were unable to suggest any trends over time. This study was limited by the exclusion of the children of the parents surveyed; their voices might have provided rich and important perspectives on the effects of detention and deportation policies on immigrant families. Finally, the sample in this study is a convenience sample and cannot be considered as a representative sample of all Latino immigrants in the metropolitan areas of northeastern United States. Because the recruitment was done through the collaborations with five Latino immigrant community organizations, including three ESL and Adult Education programs, participants in this study were more likely to be of the low-income group and less proficient in English. Given these limitations, caution should be used when extrapolating the results to the entire Latino immigrant populations.

### *Future Research*

Future research might replicate the present study with a larger sample and use causal modeling to statistically explore the relationships among variables. For example, adaptation of the Family Stress Model (Conger et al., 2002) to include legal vulnerability as an independent variable might provide a useful theoretical framework for exploring the direct and indirect relationships among parents' legal vulnerability, economic hardship, parent mental health, family relationships, and outcomes for children. Future research might employ a longitudinal approach to explore the impact of detention/deportation on immigrant families over time. Finally, future research should also include child participants.

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