



Luchamos por nuestros hijos: Latino immigrant parents strive to protect their children from the deleterious effects of anti-immigration policies[☆]



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the strategies used by Latino immigrant parents to protect their children from the deleterious effects of anti-immigration policies. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 54 immigrant parents. Informed by constructivist grounded theory, a constant comparative approach was used between and within transcripts during initial and focused coding. Our study highlights the strength and resiliency of immigrant parents as they strive to mitigate the harm of anti-immigrant policies on their children. Common strategies to protect their children focus on securing and promoting safety and well-being (*let children live their childhood, be prepared, consejos*), enhancing their own capacity to provide (*pursue education, obtain papers*), and engaging in change efforts within their community. Parents believed these efforts could diminish the negative effects of anti-immigration policies. Immigrant Latino communities will be better served in the future if engaged professionals incorporate empowerment and strength based models within their practice.

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Latinos are the largest ethnic minority population in the United States, comprising 16.7% of the total population (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). More than 10 million children in the United States are children of immigrants (Urban Institute, 2014). It is estimated that at least 9 million people live in mixed status families, where at least one parent is undocumented and one child is a U.S. citizen (Taylor, Alarcón, Passel, & Motel, 2011); thus, the enforcement of immigration laws will likely impact millions of citizen children (Zayas & Bradlee, 2014). In approximately 10 years, 35% of Latinos who are currently children will be contributing to the nation as workers and taxpayers and they will be impacting the future economy (Pérez, 2004). It is also estimated that by 2050 there will be more Latino school aged youth residing in the United States than non-Latino white youth (Fry & Gonzales, 2008). These projections illuminate the great influence Latino youth will have on America's future and the importance of promoting their well-being. However, anti-immigration policies pose a threat to Latino youth raised in mixed documentation households. These children are likely to be negatively impacted by immigration policies, regardless of their own documentation status.

The United States has implemented restrictive immigration policies which limit public benefits, education, and social services to undocumented immigrant families (Androff et al., 2011). Popular media outlets used this population as a scapegoat for the most recent economic downturn (Becerra, 2012). In the southern border, the state of Arizona has

passed numerous anti-immigrant policies which have subjected families to discrimination as well as financial and emotional distress (Ayón & Becerra, 2013). Within this context, parents must overcome significant challenges to ensure their children's well-being. While evidence suggests Latino families demonstrate resiliency and utilize a number of resources to improve their circumstances (Ayón & Quiroz, 2013; Cardoso & Thompson, 2010), minimal research exists on the efforts of parents to mitigate the impact of immigration policies on their children. This study addresses this gap in our knowledge base by examining Latino parents' efforts to protect their children from anti-immigrant legislation and sentiment.

1. Background

1.1. Political climate in Arizona

In the last 15 years the state of Arizona has passed a number of anti-immigration policies, which contribute to the marginalization of Latino families (Ayón & Quiroz, 2013) and the rise of Latinos' experiences with discrimination (Perez, 2011). These policies impact access to education, public services, and employment opportunities as well as criminalize Latino immigrants who are undocumented. In regards to education, recently migrated youth were classified as "English Learners" and temporarily placed in English immersion programs until ready for transfer to regular English language classrooms (Proposition 203; Arizona Secretary of State, 2000). Learning English was deemed a priority over developmental appropriate content. Undocumented university students were ineligible for financial aid and required to pay out-of-state tuition (Proposition 300; Arizona Secretary of State, 2006); thus making

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higher education financially unattainable. Courses geared towards specific ethnic groups including successful ethnic studies program that increased the graduation rates of Mexican-American youth (Precious Knowledge, 2011) were banned (House Bill 2281; State of Arizona, 2010).

In order to access public services, verification of identity and immigration status of all applicants was required and service providers were required to report undocumented individuals to immigration officials (Proposition 200; Arizona Secretary of State, 2004). Subsequently, evidence suggest that citizen children were prevented from accessing care as parents were asked for proof of their own documentation status as well (Ayón, 2014). The Legal Arizona Workers Act (LAWA) prohibited businesses from hiring undocumented workers and mandated E-verify for all newly hired employees to validate their immigration status (Arizona Attorney General, nd). Although LAWA was meant to penalize business owners for hiring undocumented workers, the treatment of workers has deteriorated since undocumented employees were more vulnerable to exploitation (Ayón, Gurrola, Salas, Androff, & Krysik, 2012; Ayón & Becerra, 2013).

Senate Bill 1070 was the most draconian bill passed by the Arizona legislature. This bill mandated all individuals carry proof of legal immigration status at all times and defined the failure to do so as a crime. It permitted law enforcement officers to question an individual's immigration status if "reasonable suspicion" was present. This provision increased the probability of racial profiling to implement SB1070 (Perez, 2011). The Supreme Court struck down most of the major provisions in Senate Bill 1070. However, police officers may still question an individual's immigration status if reasonable suspicion is present. These immigration policies negatively impact the human and civil rights of immigrants by reinforcing prejudices and increasing ethnic discrimination and racial profiling (Casas & Cabrera, 2011).

1.2. Impact of anti-immigrant policies on immigrant families and children

A debilitating consequence to Latino families of anti-immigration legislation is the detainment and deportation of undocumented immigrant parents. Between 1998 and 2007, the Department of Homeland Security found that more than 100,000 parents of U.S. citizen children were deported ("108,000 people deported", 2009). Fear of family separation fosters feelings of panic and distress in Latino families (Ayón & Becerra, 2013). Dreby (2012) finds exposure to detention and deportation in the community and through media heightens children's fears of family separation regardless of their families' documentations status. The widespread negative perceptions of Latino immigrants prompted immigrant stigma in children as they feel ashamed of their immigrant heritage (Dreby, 2012). In the process of detainment and deportation citizen children face sudden separation from parents with much uncertainty about the future (Zayas & Bradlee, 2014). These experiences place children's well-being at risk as separation jeopardizes children's attachment to their parents and the uncertainty in the outcome complicates the grieving process (Zayas & Bradlee, 2014). Furthermore, Chaudry et al. (2010) found that children who were separated from their parents due to deportation experience negative outcomes in regards to economic security, physical safety, and overall well-being. Arrests and deportations are a leading cause of children being raised in the United States without a parent, those children are left to bear the resulting secondary trauma and emotional stress (Androff et al., 2011).

1.3. Protective factors in Latino families

Latino immigrant parents rely on a number of resources to overcome challenges and elevate their family's well-being. Family unity is a critical element that drives their strengths. *Familismo* is the multidimensional cultural value that treasures strong family unit and prioritizes the needs of the family over the individual (Molina & Alcántara, 2013). Strong ties to the value of *familismo* are linked to improved health

among Latinos (Gallo, Penedo, de los Monteros, & Arguelles, 2009). The support individuals receive from family members promotes community resiliency when faced with disruptions in family functioning (Valdez, Abegglen, & Hauser, 2013). Following the passage of SB1070 in Arizona, parents reported that family unity was a fundamental factor that contributed to protecting families, overcoming obstacles, and enhancing communication, trust, respect, and support among family members (Ayón & Quiroz, 2013).

In order to maintain strong family ties, parents must draw upon their inner strengths. Their children are the source of the internal drive which motivates their efforts to overcome challenges (Ayón & Quiroz, 2013). In a study by Chavez, Lopez, Englebrecht, and Anguiano (2012), immigrant parents expressed being protective of their children as they grew up in an anti-immigrant climate and taking many risks to promote their children's well-being. In one case, an undocumented father shared he would rather risk detainment and deportation in driving his undocumented teenager to school than to have his son stay home and not receive an education (Chavez et al., 2012).

Support network agents such as family members, friends, and neighbors play a critical role in promoting Latino family well-being by helping them meet basic needs (Garcia, 2005). They also provide assistance with health issues (Yee & Simon, 2010) as well as emotional support and advice (Ornelas, Perreira, Beeber, & Maxwell, 2009). The presence of support networks correlate to improved outcomes in physical and mental health (Mulvaney-Day, Alegria, & Sribney, 2007). Furthermore, social networks help families confront experiences with discrimination and social inequities (Parra-Cardona, Bullock, Imig, Villarruel, & Gold, 2006) and promote positive parenting (Lyons, Henly, & Schuerman, 2005).

1.4. Theoretical framework

The ecological systems theory guides this study (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This framework has been utilized in previous research to better understand the risk and resiliency factors among Latino youth and the struggles of Latino immigrant families (Chapman & Perreira, 2005) and to explore the impact of unauthorized status on the development of children in immigrant families (Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011). The ecological systems theory holds that the development of children is impacted by four nested systems including the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Ashford & Lecroy, 2010). The microsystem consists of the individual's closest face-to-face interactions, such as direct contact with family members or school classmates (Trudge, Gray, & Hogan, 1997). The mesosystem refers to existing relationships between members of different microsystems. In the exosystem, individuals are impacted by larger influences they do not have direct contact with, such as the parents' workplace (Trudge et al., 1997). The macrosystem influences interactions in the other systems through social, cultural, and political ideologies (Coatsworth, Pantin, & Szapocznik, 2002). For instance, at a macro level, Latino families are impacted by the passage of anti-immigrant legislation and increased anti-immigrant sentiment (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). The impact of anti-immigrant policies and sentiment is manifested or experienced by children in their micro environments, such as schools and neighborhoods, where they may be subjected to discrimination or derogatory comments. Similarly, in their exosystem youth are exposed to negative perceptions about immigrants through the media. Latino parents, a critical member of a child's microsystem, are tasked with protecting children and securing their safety under these conditions. Latino parents regard raising their children as a primary responsibility (Parra-Cardona et al., 2006). Therefore, it is likely that they have developed strategies to mitigate the impact of anti-immigrant policies on their children. Thus, this study aimed to learn from Latino immigrant parents what efforts they engage in to protect their children from anti-immigrant legislation and sentiment.

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