Children and Youth Services Review 89 (2018) 198–204

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Children and Youth Services Review

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/childyouth

Being an undocumented child immigrant ☆

Lorraine T. Benuto*, Jena B. Casas, Frances R. Gonzalez, Rory T. Newlands

University of Nevada, Reno, 1664 N. Virginia Street, Reno, NV 89557, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Undocumented immigrant
Child immigrant
Immigration
Resiliency

ABSTRACT

Objective: The current qualitative study assessed the immigration experiences of eight Latinos who immigrated to the United States when they were children and who spent their childhood undocumented. While researchers have highlighted the challenges undocumented youth face in healthcare, mental health, and educational contexts, this study addresses the need for additional research on the immigration process and adaptation experiences of undocumented child immigrants.

Methods: Participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol and the interviews were transcribed and analyzed for themes using two coding cycles.

Results: The following themes arose and are discussed in detail: the immigration process, recollections of the process, experiences in the U.S., liminality, and resiliency.

Conclusion: The findings describe that undocumented youth experience many hardships such as psychological distress, concerns with educational success, and cultural vacillation, however, they continue to persevere in the United States.

1. Introduction

In 2012 there were an estimated 11.4 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States (U.S.) of which approximately one million were under the age of 18 (Baker & Rytina, 2013; Jones, 2010; Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011). Being labeled as undocumented affects immigrant children through their lived experience of new roles, rights, obligations, and identities (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011) as they must reconcile experiencing variable religious, cultural, and/or social practices or "rites of passage" (Menjívar, 2006; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). It is important that undocumented youth are not conflated with authorized immigrant youth, as the former has very different experiences and overall life outlooks than the latter because of their inability to change their legal status and exert control over their future in the United States (Degiuli, 2011). Being labeled and living as undocumented has sociopolitical consequences that may lead to experiences of liminality or a sense of non-belonging to both their culture of origin and their host culture (upon arrival to the U.S.) (Menjívar, 2006; Suárez-Orozco & Yoshikawa, 2013). For many undocumented youth, their experiences of liminality diminish their aspirations, create issues with their self-identity, and reinforce feelings of rejection and isolation (Paat & Pellebon, 2012; Song, 2010; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015, 2011). Furthermore, undocumented youth and authorized immigrant youth

1.1. Undocumented status and quality of life consequences

The quality of life of undocumented youth and their families is impacted as there can be challenges in accessing healthcare, mental health illness can ensue, and there are educational repercussions that hinder the child's ability to succeed. With regard to healthcare, undocumented immigrants continue to face disparities in access to health care (Gelatt, 2016; Gonzales, Terriquez, & Ruszczyk, 2014; Sommers & Parmet, 2015) and evidence suggests that children of immigrants and undocumented children experience more health problems in comparison to children from non-immigrant families (Chavez, Lopez, Englebrecht, & Anguiano, 2012; Gelatt, 2016; Gonzales et al., 2014).

The mental and emotional health of undocumented immigrant families is also greatly impacted by their experiences and legal status. Undocumented immigrants experience a myriad of emotions (e.g. anxiety, depression, stress, and substance abuse) from unique situations (Benuto & Bennett, 2015). For instance, undocumented immigrants fear deportation or detention because it could mean the separation of family, the loss of income, and the uncertainty of their future (Brabeck, Lykes, & Hunter, 2014; Gonzales, Suárez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguineti, 2013; Rubio-Hernandez & Ayón, 2016; Small, Kim, & Mengo, 2017; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011; Zwi & Mares, 2015). Despite that these experiences are realized and lived by every member of an undocumented immigrant family, child immigrants have their own unique

---

☆ This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

* Corresponding author at: University of Nevada, Reno, Department of Psychology, Mail Stop 296, 1664 N. Virginia Street, Reno, NV 89557, USA.
E-mail address: dr.benuto@gmail.com (L.T. Benuto).

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.04.036
Received 20 November 2017; Received in revised form 23 April 2018; Accepted 23 April 2018
Available online 24 April 2018
0190-7409/ © 2018 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

experiences because of their "1.5 generation" status (Rumbaut, 2004) that are worth examining.

The experiences of undocumented child immigrants are unique in that they are the "1.5 generation", meaning that they arrived as children to the U.S. and are the first in the family to navigate growing up in the U.S. (Rumbaut, 2004). For most undocumented children, this means attending public school and working through the challenges associated with educational attainment: learning English, completing their homework, getting good grades, making friends, planning for their future, and so forth. Many undocumented youth find the road towards educational attainment fraught with barriers: familial pressure to work and contribute to the collective income (McWhirter, Ramos, & Medina, 2013), difficulties in accessing higher education, such as limited financial aid (Rubio-Hernandez & Ayón, 2016), limited familial guidance in the educational experience due to work schedules and other barriers (Jung & Zhang, 2016; Salas-Wright, Vaughn, Schwartz, & Córdova, 2016; Sibley & Dearing, 2014; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011), and dealing with their limited access to opportunities that U.S. citizen children have (i.e. obtaining a driver's license, getting a job, or applying for college (Gonzalez, Stein, Prandoni, Eades, & Magalhaes, 2015).

Difficulties in early educational attainment influence youth's efforts to obtain higher education. For instance, McWhirter et al. (2013) found that both actual and anticipated barriers influenced educational attainment in that Latinos who anticipated more barriers (e.g. family responsibilities, balancing work and school, not being smart or confident enough) were less optimistic about their future than non-Latinos. Further, literature shows that undocumented youth who purse higher education, often report working multiple jobs to finance their education, are unable to qualify for federal aid, are helping contribute to their family's income and going to school, have a lack of awareness of campus resources, commute long-distances, and face many other challenges (Rhoades, 2016; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). Undocumented youth express diminished educational aspirations as a direct result of their status (McWhirter et al., 2013).

1.2. Purpose of the study

Overall, being a child immigrant is unique in that the experiences of people brought to the U.S. as children are different from the experiences of people who came to the U.S. as adults (Abrego, 2011). Research suggests that being undocumented has clear implications for a child's overall well-being (i.e. health and mental health outcomes, access to resources, and future aspirations) (McWhirter et al., 2013; Small et al., 2017). However, while many researchers have highlighted the challenges undocumented youth face in healthcare, mental health, and educational contexts, there is a need for additional research on the immigration process and adaptation experiences of child immigrants who grew up in the U.S. undocumented. This type of knowledge can help us to better understand the experiences of child immigrants, which in turn can guide intervention and prevention efforts for newly arrived immigrant children. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the experiences of adult immigrants who were undocumented as children with the intent of developing an understanding of the challenges and barriers these children experience and how they overcome and adapted to these situations.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

Individuals eligible for participation (i.e. University students who had DACA status) were recruited from a city in the western United States. While during the eight-month recruitment period (September 2016 to May 2017) there were 19 participants who signed up for the study, the final sample consisted of eight individuals. There were several no shows ($n = 6$) and cancelations ($n = 2$), as well as participants who signed up for the study, but did not meet the inclusion criteria ($n = 3$). It is noteworthy that only one individual participated in the study after November 2016, as it is conceivable that eligible participants were fearful of revealing their status given the political climate. The sample consisted of mostly women, who were between the ages of 19 to 27, and who had immigrated from Mexico during childhood. This sample, while not intended to be homogenous, makes sense given the immigration pattern of Mexican origin Latinos to Southwestern states (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2014) and the national educational attainment statistics for Latinos (i.e. the National Center for Education Statistics reported 18.6% of Latina women between the ages of 25–29 received a bachelor's degree in 2013 as compared to 13.1% of Latino men). See Table 1 for additional details.

Table 1
Participant demographic data.

Participant	Age	Gender	Age of U.S. Immigration
1	19	Female	3 years
2	22	Female	2 years
3	24	Female	7 months
4	20	Female	3 years
5	27	Female	11 years
6	20	Male	1 year 2 months
7	19	Female	7 years
8	21	Female	8 years

2.2. Procedure

The initial step in this study was developing the interview protocol, using the study's research questions and the existent literature to direct its development. Next, three experts in developing interviewing protocols were contacted to review the initial interview protocol, which was then augmented based on their feedback. The final interview protocol contained 17 questions, of which 8 were examined for the current study (the data collected and analyzed in the current qualitative study was extracted from a master data set for a larger study, and the 8 questions examined for the current study were chosen based on relevance to the research questions). Once the interview protocol was finalized and IRB approval was received, the study was advertised via the distribution of flyers, in-person announcements, electronic flyers (distributed via email), and through the university's subject pool (SONA). Participants were sampled from three locations: a community college, a 4-year institution of higher education, and relevant community organizations. Interested participants volunteered to be in the study by responding to an announcement through the universities subject pool system (SONA) and confirming that they met eligibility criteria.

Participants were offered to complete the semi-structured interview in-person ($n = 7$) or via phone ($n = 1$) during the recruitment period (September 2016–May 2017). Interviews were scheduled for one hour and ranged from 17 min to 30 min (M = 22.71, SD = 5.94).

2.3. Data analysis

Each interview was audio-recorded, transcribed, and evaluated for themes. Two independent coders coded the entirety of each interview for themes. Inter-coder consistency was calculated to be 73%. When inconsistencies arose, the coders discussed the theme in contention to decide whether it belonged to a core category previously created, was unique enough as its own category, or did not fit at all (Saldaña, 2015). The interviews were analyzed in two cycles. The first cycle employed two coding methods: Initial Coding (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Glaser, 1978a,b; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and Concept Coding (Mihas, 2014; Saldaña, 2015). Initial coding involved the authors micro-analyzing the transcript line by

Download English Version:

https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6833075

Download Persian Version:

https://daneshyari.com/article/6833075

Daneshyari.com