

Facing Our Future

Children in the Aftermath of Immigration Enforcement

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This report examines the consequences of parental arrest, detention, and deportation on 190 children in 85 families in six locations, providing in-depth details on parent-child separations, economic hardships, and children's well-being. The contentious immigration debates around the country mostly revolve around illegal immigration. Less visible have been the 5.5 million children with unauthorized parents, almost three-quarters of whom are U.S.-born citizens. Over several years, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) intensified enforcement activities through large-scale worksite arrests, home arrests, and arrests by local law enforcement. The report provides recommendations for stakeholders to mitigate the harmful effects of immigration enforcement on children.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United States is engaged in an intense debate about immigration policy, particularly with regard to unauthorized immigrants. Debates rage about the economic contributions of immigrants to the U.S. economy, job competition, tax payments and fiscal costs, and the integration of immigrants in communities and the larger society. Largely absent from the discussion are the children of immigrants. Today there are an estimated 5.5 million children with unauthorized immigrant parents, about three-quarters of whom are U.S.-born citizens. The nation builds its own future by investing in the futures of children, spending billions of dollars annually on education and health care, preventing abuse and neglect, and supporting when necessary their basic needs for housing and food. Yet, unlike other children in this country, the children of unauthorized immigrants live with the fear that their parents might be arrested, detained, or deported. The federal government spends billions each year to arrest, detain, and deport immigrants, many of whom are parents. By one estimate, in the last 10 years, over 100,000 immigrant parents of U.S. citizen children have been deported from the United States.

This report examines the consequences of parental arrest, detention, and deportation on 190 children in 85 families in six locations across the country. Building on our 2007 report *Paying the Price: The Impact of Immigration Raids on America's Children*, the current study documents the effects on these children after their parents were arrested in worksite raids, raids on their homes, or operations by local police officers. We researched impacts on children in the days and weeks after parental arrests, in the intermediate and long term while parents were detained or contested their deportation, and in some cases, after parents were deported.

We interviewed arrested parents or their spouses shortly (2 to 5 months) after arrest, in the long term (9 to 13 months after arrest), and sometimes twice, both shortly after arrest and in the long term. We used semi-structured protocols that included standardized assessments of child behavior, parental mental health, family food sufficiency, housing characteristics, and other conditions. We also interviewed community respondents in each site, including public officials, teachers, social workers, attorneys, consular officials, and staff at community organizations. Our study populations included immigrant families mostly from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Haiti. We recruited families to reflect a range of circumstances and experiences.

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