

Family Unity, Family Health:

How family-focused immigration reform will mean better health for children and families
Special Supplement: Nebraska Survey Findings

*As part of a larger study examining the effects of immigration policy on health and well-being, we surveyed adults in mixed-status families using a convenience sample. The goal was to explore how the threat of detention and deportation impacted their everyday lives. In this special supplement, we present survey data for respondents living in Nebraska.**

Introduction

For the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States, the vigorous national debate on immigration reform will determine their future – whether they are allowed to stay, work and become citizens. According to the Pew Research Center, in Nebraska alone, there are approximately 45,000 undocumented immigrants whose futures are in jeopardy (2009-2010 estimate).

Nationwide, an estimated 4.5 million children who are U.S. citizens by birth live in families where one or more of their parents are undocumented. These children will grow up to be our future family members, neighbors and co-workers – and their health and well-being as children today will translate into their health and well-being as adults, ultimately shaping the health of our communities. However, these children and their families live with anxiety about the future, fearful that arrest, detention or deportation will tear their families apart.

Findings: Community Health

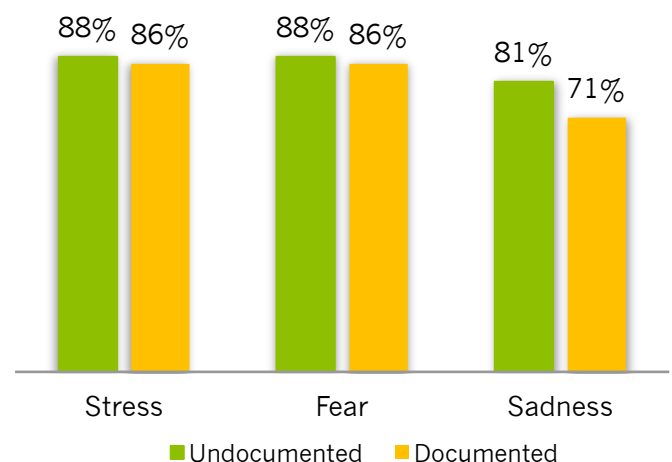
A policy of detention and deportation creates a climate of fear among immigrant families that can disrupt community cohesiveness and well-being. Among all Nebraskan immigrants who took our survey, regardless of their status, the majority (89.5%) stated that the city where they live currently did not support immigrants. *All of those* who were undocumented indicated that they perceived their city in that light. Similarly, all undocumented immigrants said that their city felt only “somewhat” safe. An environment of fear and anxiety can lead to long-term impacts on mental and physical well-being.

Findings: Adult Health

Nebraskan immigrants may suffer from poor physical and mental health, which can lead to premature mortality.

Both undocumented and documented immigrants reported that they experienced mental health problems due to living under the threat of detention and deportation; a comparable proportion experienced fear and stress, and a slightly larger proportion of undocumented immigrants reported sadness.

Due to threat of detention and deportation, I experience:



Similarly, our survey finds that Nebraskan undocumented (81%) and documented (86%) immigrants expressed difficulty accessing medical care that can improve and protect their health. An individual’s access to health services can impact the health of the greater community. Without access to health services, a person with communicable diseases can be left undiagnosed or untreated, potentially contributing to the spread of disease to their workplace or home.

*The small sample size of our Nebraska surveys limits the ability to draw general conclusions about the total population of Nebraskan immigrant families and may influence the survey findings.

This Nebraska-specific supplement is part of a nationwide research project conducted by Human Impact Partners in collaboration with an Advisory Committee of immigrant and health organizations to understand how a continued policy of detention and deportation will impact the health and well-being of mixed-status families. For more information about this project, including the full report and research citations, go to: www.familyunityfamilyhealth.org.



Findings: Adult Health (continued)

These Nebraska-specific findings were part of our study across 10 states, which found that overall a larger proportion of undocumented immigrants experienced mental health problems than documented immigrants. For example, 92% of all undocumented immigrants respondents reported that they felt stress because of their legal status and current immigration policy, in comparison to 64% of documented survey respondents. The health and well-being of immigrant parents is important not only for themselves but their families and children.

Findings: Child Health

Protecting a child's health is crucial as it shapes their future health as an adult. However, children's health and well-being may be at increased risk due to a policy of detention and deportation that targets their family members.

Our nationwide study reveals that children in mixed-status families suffer from physical and mental health problems due to the threat of detention and deportation. Larger proportions of children of undocumented parents experienced stress, anger, fear, withdrawal, and sadness. Most significantly, **three-fourths** of undocumented parents observed **symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder** in their children.

Results from Nebraska included 20 parents. When comparing responses between undocumented (N = 13) and documented (N = 7) parents, the numbers were too small to draw broad conclusions. However, results showed that within each of these groups of parents, a handful observed mental health problems in their children due to the parent's legal status and the threat of detention and deportation.

Table 1. Demographics of Adult Survey Respondents, Nebraska only

Gender (N= 20)	
Male	10%
Female	90%
Average Age in Years (N=17)	
37	
Place of Birth (N= 21)	
U.S.	0%
Latin American Country	100%
Other	0%
Years Lived in the U.S. (N=19)	
0-4 years	0%
5-9 years	79%
10-14 years	16%
15+ years	5%
Highest Level of Education (N=19)**	
High School or Less	47%
High School Diploma/GED	47%
Some College or Higher	5%
Annual Household Income (N=19)	
\$0-\$10,000	0%
\$10,001- \$20,000	42%
\$20,001- \$36,000	53%
\$36,001- \$50,000	0%
\$50,001- above	5%
Average Household Size (N=23)	
4.2	
Adults with Child under Age 18 (N=22)	
90%	
Detention and Deportation have Affected me by (N=23):***	
A family member has been detained or deported	17%
A friend/acquaintance has been detained or deported	13%
My status puts me at risk for detention or deportation	70%
I have been detained or deported	0%
None of the above	0%
<i>**may not total 100% due to rounding</i>	
<i>***could choose more than one response</i>	

Conclusion

Not only in Nebraska, but across the nation, undocumented immigrants and their children experience real and measurable changes to their health and well-being due to the continued policy of detention and deportation. In this context, and given the release of the "Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act," (S.744) any immigration reform must prioritize protecting and promoting the health and well-being of these children and their families, and must not create a host of new, unintended consequences. Immigration reform that preserves and protects family unity will advance the conditions essential to the health and well-being of millions nationwide, and ultimately to the well-being of our country as a whole.

To read our detailed recommendations, visit: www.familyunityfamilyhealth.org.