Economic, Social, and Health Effects of Discrimination on Latino Immigrant Families

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Executive Summary

State-level legislation aimed at cracking down on illegal immigration has fueled anti-immigrant sentiment and consequently increased encounters that the foreign born in the United States have with discrimination. This report focuses on the experiences of Latino immigrants (i.e., those with origins in Mexico, Central America, and South America), who compose nearly half of all U.S. immigrants, and their children. Numerous studies suggest that Latino immigrants encounter discrimination across the United States, with one national survey from 2009 finding Latinos supplanted African Americans as the ethnic group facing the most discrimination in the United States.

Latino immigrant families’ day-to-day interactions often involve hostile interactions with community members and social institutions. The cumulative effects of such interactions place Latino children at increased risk for a range of negative outcomes such as emotional stress, limited financial opportunities, and increased social isolation. This report examines Latino immigrants’ experiences with discrimination, and the economic, social, and health consequences for these families.

Numerous studies suggest that Latino immigrants encounter discrimination across the United States.

A. How Is Discrimination Manifested?

Discrimination involves harmful actions, often based on prejudice, toward members of particular groups or nationalities; these harmful actions often involve denying these members equal access to resources and opportunities. Discrimination is observed both at the individual level, in daily interactions with community members, and at the structural or institutional level. The sociopolitical climate around immigration may be used to legitimize the poor treatment of immigrants, regardless of their actual legal status, as individuals are often targeted based on their ethnicity and language abilities. (Latino ethnicity, for example, is often conflated with unauthorized status.) At the same time, immigrants who encounter discrimination, particularly those who are unauthorized, may avoid interactions with authorities for fear of being detained or deported. Such discriminatory activities can have costly effects on the economic, social, and health well-being of immigrant families.

B. The Consequences of Discrimination

Institutional discrimination—for example, within the workplace or in the housing market—can negatively affect the economic well-being of immigrant families. For example, when discriminatory practices at work mean parents make less money, children of immigrants are more likely to be raised in poverty, which is linked to poor developmental, health, and educational outcomes. Immigrant families are more likely to be living in poverty than the general U.S.-born population (19 percent compared with 15 percent), and this difference is particularly pronounced among two-parent immigrant families with children under age 18 (17 percent compared with 6 percent). Although the reasons for poverty are complex, discriminatory and exploitative practices in the workplace and housing market leave immigrant families vulnerable to the deleterious consequences of poverty.

Latino immigrants tend to live in ethnic enclaves. This segregation may result from housing discrimination or immigrants’ own choice to live in ethnically homogeneous communities. The literature is mixed on the benefits and risks of living in segregated communities. While immigrants may feel safer in their daily interactions in ethnic enclaves, they may face barriers to accessing services and resources as well as experience linguistic and social isolation. Thus, living in segregated communities can foster further insti-
tutional discrimination and can be associated with individual-level discrimination in the form of microaggressions—everyday words or behaviors that communicate prejudice—when immigrants step out of the enclave.

Such forms of discrimination at the individual level may heighten recipients’ risk for health and mental-health problems; institutional discrimination, too, heightens the need for services—while also creating barriers to their access. The cumulative impact of discrimination as seen through economic stress and social isolation is manifested in poor health outcomes and further heightened by barriers to access.

A review of the literature indicates that discrimination affects the parenting practices of Latino immigrants. Immigrant families are often unprepared to approach discrimination or discuss it with one another. Immigrant parents may need to address this topic with their children even as they simultaneously learn to contend with experiences of discrimination themselves. Parents may struggle to motivate and encourage their children to pursue goals and do well in school in a context of high levels of stress, psychological distress, and social isolation. Evidence suggests that a strong and positive ethnic identity buffers the effects of discrimination; any parental efforts to inculcate pride in Latino culture and language should be encouraged.

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**Discrimination affects the parenting practices of Latino immigrants.**

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### C. Recommendations

Further research can shed light on the long-term consequences of chronic exposure to discrimination, as well as families’ coping strategies and sources of strength. In turn, interventions are needed to support Latino families coping with discrimination, as well as to help institutions be aware of potential discriminatory practices reflected in their services.

- **Family-level interventions.** Policymakers should take steps to help parents better identify mechanisms of discrimination, access available resources, and communicate with children about issues of race, inequality, and discrimination. These interventions should stress how children can be taught about inequality and discrimination in ways that encourage positive outcomes, such as staying in school, rather than living in fear or engaging in risky behavior.

- **Institutional-level interventions.** Training is needed to educate front-line workers and administrators in education, social service, and other systems about the mechanisms and consequences of discrimination. Interventions can provide administrators with the tools and strategies to avoid discriminatory practices, and to better include and serve Latino families.

### I. Introduction

Anti-immigrant sentiment has been fueled in some states by the passage of legislation designed to crack down on illegal immigration. As a result, the experiences of immigrants (or those perceived to look foreign born) with discrimination have increased. This report focuses on Latino immigrants (i.e., those with origins in Mexico, Central America, and South America), who compose nearly half of all U.S. immigrants.

A 2009 national survey revealed that Latinos had supplanted African Americans as the ethnic group per-

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ceiving the most discrimination. The Latino subjects of numerous studies report being unfairly targeted by recent immigration policies, regardless of legal status. Emerging evidence indicates that Latino immigrants experience discrimination across the United States—in both traditional receiving states and new destinations alike. Latino immigrant families’ day-to-day interactions often involve hostile interactions with community members and social institutions. The cumulative effect of such interactions place Latino immigrant families at increased risk for negative outcomes like limited financial opportunities, increased social isolation, and emotional stress.

The purpose of this report is to examine Latino immigrant families’ experiences with discrimination, and the economic, social, and health-related consequences. Such consequences are likely to affect the nation as a whole, considering the size of the Latino population. Latino families and children comprise nearly 17 percent of the U.S. population—of which, around one-third (6 percent of the total population) are foreign born. More than 10 million children in the United States are children of Latino immigrants. Fifty-five percent of these children have noncitizen parents, and approximately 10 percent are immigrants themselves. It is estimated that at least 9 million people live in “mixed-status” families, with at least one unauthorized adult and at least one U.S.-citizen child. This report sheds light on the many challenges immigrant families face as a result of discrimination, including those related to family structure, parenting, and health risks.

II. How Is Discrimination Manifested?

Prejudice is a generalized belief, a preconceived notion based on emotions and feelings that is applied to all members of a particular group. Discrimination involves harmful actions, often motivated by prejudice, toward members of particular groups or nationalities. Often this involves denying them equal access to resources and opportunities. Discrimination may occur at (1) the individual level, in daily interactions with community members, and (2) the structural or institutional level.

At the individual level, immigrants experience discrimination through incidents of microaggression—defined as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities...that com-
municate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults.” Individuals may also experience discrimination in their interactions with members of their own ethnic or racial group (i.e., horizontal, or intragroup, discrimination). For instance, more-established Latino immigrants may blame new immigrants for increasing discrimination against Latinos generally. Further, they may internalize the discrimination they themselves have experienced and turn it against recent immigrants as a means of asserting a dominant position.

Discrimination becomes structural or institutional when public policies and practices marginalize entire communities. Examples of structural discrimination include community and workplace raids by police departments that target predominantly Latino immigrant communities. In Arizona, racial profiling (i.e., targeting Latino individuals who appear to be unauthorized) has been used during such raids. Structural discrimination is also seen in the education system, when schools ignore the needs of those they serve—due to either prejudice among educators or lack of resources in systems serving large, segregated Latino populations. Another example of structural discrimination occurs when front-line workers at social service agencies request the identification of both children and parents before processing requests for services, or deny child services because of parents’ limited English proficiency (LEP). As a result, children who are born in the United States and reside in mixed-status households may be prevented from accessing health care or other basic services to which they are entitled as U.S. citizens. Thus, the impacts of structural discrimination may vary from families being split apart by detention and deportation to being silenced by the educational system or turned away from public services.

**Discrimination becomes structural or institutional when public policies and practices marginalize entire communities.**

Physical features and English-language proficiency influence the extent to which immigrants experience discrimination. Specifically, ethnicity-based discrimination, or racial profiling, involves assumptions about an individual’s character or legal status based on physical traits and language abilities. Evidence suggests that dark-skinned Latinos experience more discrimination than their light-skinned peers. Among Latino adults, discrimination due to skin tone has been found to lead to differential wages, with one study reporting that dark-skinned Latino immigrants earned on average $2,500 less per year than light-skinned Latino immigrants.

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11 Cohen and Merino Chavez, “Latino Immigrants, Discrimination, and Reception in Columbus, Ohio.”


15 Ayón and Becerra, “Latino Immigrant Families under Siege.”

16 Menéndez Alarcón and Novak, “Latin American Immigrants in Indianapolis.”


lighter-skinned Latino immigrants. Among Latino youth, those with darker skin are more frequently stopped by police officers than their light-skinned counterparts. Skin tone is also associated with horizontal discrimination; that is, Latino youth with lighter skin discriminate against their peers with darker skin. Discrimination grounded on language ability potentially also affects a significant number of individuals: estimates of the number of LEP Latino immigrants range from 34 percent to 57 percent.

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**Evidence suggests that dark-skinned Latinos experience more discrimination than their light-skinned peers.**

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The use of physical features and language abilities as targeting indicators, supported by recent research, suggests that Latinos are discriminated against regardless of their legal status. Moreover, there is also a problem of conflation: any U.S. citizen or otherwise lawfully present person who “looks” like an unauthorized immigrant may experience the same discrimination. Further, the social and political climate around immigration may be used to legitimize the poor treatment of immigrants regardless of their legal status. At the same time immigrants who encounter discrimination—particularly those who are, in fact, unauthorized—may not seek help from law enforcement for fear of being hassled, detained, or deported. These and other issues surrounding experiences of discrimination have costly effects on the economic, social, and physical well-being of immigrant families.

### III. Economic, Social, and Health Consequences of Discrimination

#### A. Workplace and Housing Exploitation

Institutional discrimination within the workplace can negatively affect the economic well-being of immigrant families. When parents make less money because of discriminatory practices at work, children of immigrants are more likely to be raised in poverty. Here, the role of discrimination is significant: immigrant families are already more likely to be living in poverty than the general U.S.-born population (19 percent compared with 15 percent). This difference is particularly acute among two-parent immigrant families with children under the age of 18 (17 percent of whom live in poverty, compared with 6 percent of the general U.S.-born population). Furthermore, a recent study in New York City revealed that unauthorized immigrant fathers from Mexico earned significantly less than other, non-Mexican ethnic minorities ($8-$10 per hour versus $10-$15 per hour) and tended to work longer and more hours a week than their non-Mexican counterparts (54.5 hours versus 40.2 hours per week, on average). Poverty is linked to poor developmental, educational, and health outcomes for children, while parents’ long and irregular work hours have been linked specifically to children’s poor developmental outcomes, particularly in

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20 White, “The Salience of Skin Tone.”
21 Córdova and Cervantes, “Intergroup and Within-Group Perceived Discrimination.”
24 MPI, “State Immigration Data Profiles.”
Although the reasons for poverty are complex, discriminatory and exploitative practices in the workplace and housing market increase immigrant families’ susceptibility to the deleterious consequences of poverty.

1. Workplace Environment and Exploitation

A number of studies have found that immigrants experience exploitation and limited opportunities for promotion in the workplace. The federal Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) requires verification of employment authorization (by social security card, driver's license, and/or passport), while the 2008 Arizona law, the Legal Arizona Workers Act (LAWA), mandates electronic verification (i.e., matching documents with Social Security Administration and other databases) to confirm work eligibility. Though both the federal and Arizona laws include provisions for sanctioning employers that hire unauthorized individuals, in practice immigrants have endured most of the impact of these laws. After the Arizona law went into effect, immigrants in the state reported many exploitative practices: they were given empty paychecks or required to work more hours for the same (or less) pay.

Similarly, other studies report that unauthorized immigrants have limited opportunities for advancement and salary increases. Employers may know an employee is unauthorized or make assumptions about his or her status based on appearance or language ability. LEP immigrants may be expected to learn new skills without the opportunity to ask questions or receive feedback. The work environment is challenging for immigrants in general—and particularly for those who are unauthorized and many may feel they have no option but to endure oppressive practices in order to provide for their families.

2. Worksite and Community Raids

Evidence suggests that worksite and community raids by U.S. immigration officers target Latino populations. In Postville, Iowa—the site of one of the most controversial workplace raids in recent years—authorities claimed that about three-fourths of employees had used false social security numbers (SSNs). This raid resulted in the detention of 10 percent of the town’s population; most subsequently were removed from the United States. Many of those arrested were Guatemalan or Mexican immigrants who were parents of young children; the majority of the children were U.S. citizens. A review of the results of employer sanctions enforcement illustrates that immigrants, rather than employers, have

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28 Ayón et al., “Intended and Unintended Consequences.”


30 Bacallao and Smokowski, “Obstacles to Getting Ahead.”


32 Hsu, “Raid on a Small Town.”

33 Of the more than 300 noncitizens who were arrested, approximately 24 received U visas due to sexual and other harassment at work, and 30 received temporary work permits for cooperating in the federal immigration case against their employer: See Ajay Chaudry, Randolph Capps, Juan Pedroza, Rosa Maria Castaneda, Robert Santos, and Molly M. Scott, Facing Our Future: Children in the Aftermath of Immigration Enforcement (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2010), www.urban.org/publications/412020.html.
borne the costs associated with enforcement actions.\textsuperscript{34} Very few businesses receive sanctions and are usually able to reopen, while noncitizens lose their jobs and are detained and deported, leaving families fractured.\textsuperscript{35} Policy enforcement can also occur in informal ways, such as the use of microaggressions—for example, in a recent study, immigrants reported being told “return to Mexico” on a regular basis by non-immigrant coworkers.\textsuperscript{36}

While worksite raids stopped at the beginning of the Obama administration, community raids continued through the National Fugitive Operations Program (NFOP). The purpose of NFOP task forces is to locate and remove dangerous aliens in an effort to improve national security. At its peak—between 2003 and 2008—96,000 individuals were apprehended. Just 27 percent of arrestees had previous criminal convictions; the remainder had “ordinary status violations” (in other words, they were unauthorized).\textsuperscript{37} In 2012 the NFOP program resulted in more than 37,000 arrests of unauthorized immigrants.\textsuperscript{38} The Secure Communities program, which brought individuals into custody after they were booked into jail by local police officers, netted almost 300,000 deportations—many following the commission of minor crimes—between its inception just before the start of the Obama administration and its end in June 2015.\textsuperscript{39} In November 2014, however, the Obama administration announced new enforcement priorities that appear likely to result in fewer apprehensions of unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. interior, as well as reduced deportations (while those with substantial criminal histories will still be prioritized for deportation).\textsuperscript{40}

3. Housing

Historically, ethnic minorities, including Latinos, have experienced high rates of neighborhood segregation, in part due to housing discrimination and other racialized practices.\textsuperscript{41} Race and income have been identified as key factors in determining levels of residential segregation: black and lower-income Latino immigrants are more likely to experience residential segregation than are lighter-skinned and higher-income Latinos.\textsuperscript{42} A study examining the factors that affect segregation among Latinos in Phoenix, Miami, and Chicago found that segregation by income was just as prominent as segregation by ethnicity.\textsuperscript{43} Living in a segregated neighborhood has serious implications for families’ socioeconomic mobility as it limits their access to good employment opportunities, high-quality schools, and economically viable social networks.\textsuperscript{44} Additionally, evidence suggests that Latinos’ residential segregation is associated with low health insurance coverage, inadequate access to a personal physician, and fair or poor self-rated health.\textsuperscript{45} In sum, there are social, economic, and health implications to living in highly segregated neighborhoods.


\textsuperscript{35} The Postville, Iowa, workplace raid is an exception to this case. The vice president and senior manager of the company involved, Agriprocessors, was convicted of 72 counts of financial fraud, and the company filed for bankruptcy. See Chaudry et al., \textit{Facing Our Future}.

\textsuperscript{36} Parents in this sample worked in manufacturing, construction, hotel housekeeping, restaurants, or poultry-processing plants; see Bacallao and Smokowski, “Obstacles to Getting Ahead.”


\textsuperscript{39} In November 2014, President Obama announced he would replace the controversial Secure Communities program, which was rescinded by hundreds of U.S. communities, with a more targeted Priority Enforcement Program; that program, known as PEP, began in July 2015; ICE, “Secure Communities,” accessed December 11, 2014, www.ice.gov/secure-communities/.


\textsuperscript{43} Lukinbeal, Price, and Buell, “Rethinking ‘Diversity’.”

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{45} Kathryn Freeman Anderson and Andrew S. Fullerton, “Residential Segregation, Health, and Health Care: Answering the Latino Question,” \textit{Race and Social Problems} vol. 6 no. 3 (2014): 262–79.
A recent study indicates that Latino immigrants continue to be subject to discriminatory practices in the housing market, including predatory lending and exclusionary zoning practices; occupancy codes are selectively enforced and there is little oversight of the Fair Housing Act.\textsuperscript{46} Predatory housing schemes place Latinos at high risk for being house-poor (i.e., when a significant portion of an individual’s income is spent on home ownership), losing their homes, and experiencing poverty. At the same time, many Latino immigrants lack the social networks or links to advocacy sources to access lending opportunities and assistance resolving predatory loans. In addition, immigrant families face a number of obstacles to securing housing, which may leave them in crowded living arrangements. Immigrants report being turned away from openly advertised rentals, perhaps because assumptions are made about their legal status based on their physical traits and language abilities.\textsuperscript{47} In some cases, immigrants are asked to provide proof of their legal status prior to submitting an application for housing.\textsuperscript{48} Immigrants who are unable to find affordable housing—a difficult feat for the poor—are susceptible to exploitation. Some Latinos rent uninhabitable dwellings such as tool sheds; many live in overcrowded situations, resulting in greater profit for housing managers.\textsuperscript{49}

Housing density is higher among foreign-born households in the United States than among the U.S. born.\textsuperscript{50} Yoshikawa finds that Mexican immigrant families tend to live in overcrowded homes, with more than two persons per bedroom and, in some cases, individuals or entire families sleeping in the living room.\textsuperscript{51} Housing density has been linked to increased risk for communicable diseases, food insecurity, psychological distress, and poor long-term health outcomes in families.\textsuperscript{52} Among a sample of Mexican immigrants in New York City, factors such as language discrimination (i.e., experiences of discrimination due to LEP status), food insecurity, and the presence of children in the household were associated with denser households.\textsuperscript{53}

\begin{quote}
\textit{Housing density has been linked to increased risk for communicable diseases, food insecurity, psychological distress, and poor long-term health outcomes.}
\end{quote}

4. Impact on Immigrant Families

Workplace and housing discrimination and exploitation have significant consequences for immigrant families’ well-being. Immigrant parents experience increased levels of stress as they worry about unemployment, job loss, or—for the unauthorized—the discovery of their status. These fears, as well as negative changes in socioeconomic status due to unemployment and wage theft, can result in poor health

\begin{itemize}
\item Menéndez Alarcón and Novak, “Latin American Immigrants in Indianapolis.”
\item Yoshikawa, \textit{Immigrants Raising Citizens}.
\item Ibid.
\end{itemize}
In families where parents have been detained or deported, children are found to experience a range of behavioral and emotional problems, including lack of appetite, disrupted sleep, anxiety, withdrawal, anger, and clinginess.\(^\text{55}\)

The detention and deportation of family members has ripple effects on entire communities.\(^\text{56}\) Fear of family separation plagues children regardless of their family’s documentation status. Learning about community members’ detention and deportation or watching TV news reports on immigration issues heightens children’s fears of family separation.\(^\text{57}\) Children may be ashamed of their parents’ lack of legal status or, lacking an understanding of immigration law, they may conflate being an immigrant with being unauthorized.\(^\text{58}\) Fear of deportation and shame over family members’ status can potentially affect children’s sense of self; they may not want to be associated with their own heritage\(^\text{59}\) and they may limit their interactions with family members feared to be unauthorized.

In families where parents have been detained or deported, children are found to experience a range of behavioral and emotional problems.

There are also consequences for family structures and functioning. Relocating for work (as done most often by fathers) and working in strict environments with odd hours and inflexible schedules leave parents with little time to spend with their children. Lost family time is associated with increases in children’s loneliness, isolation, and risk-taking behavior;\(^\text{60}\) as well as lower levels of self-esteem.\(^\text{61}\) Greater household density (multiple families per home) leaves families vulnerable to a number of poor health outcomes.\(^\text{62}\) In many unauthorized Latino families, a larger number of adults in the household does not translate into better support and supervision of children, as the additional household members work long hours and are therefore not available to supervise children.\(^\text{63}\) Parents also report a loss of efficacy,\(^\text{64}\) as they may be living with family members who have different parenting practices. Children in overcrowded households experience higher levels of stress and chaos and may lack a space to study and complete homework assignments.\(^\text{65}\)

In addition, children are indirectly affected by structural discrimination. Underpaid parents who lack upward mobility have fewer resources to secure educational opportunities to support their children’s healthy development. Children who go without books or who are unable to participate in preschool are placed at risk of beginning kindergarten at a deficit, with the educational gap only widening over the course of their elementary and secondary education. The consequences of structural discrimination are summarized in a New York City study that finds unauthorized status to be associated with poor-quality


\(^\text{55}\) Chaudry et al., \textit{Facing our Future}.


\(^\text{57}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{58}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{59}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{60}\) Ayón and Becerra, "Latino Immigrant Families under Siege;" Bacallao and Smokowski, "Obstacles to Getting Ahead."


\(^\text{62}\) Standish et al., "Household Density among Undocumented Mexican Immigrants."

\(^\text{63}\) Yoshikawa, \textit{Immigrants Raising Citizens}.

\(^\text{64}\) Ayón et al, “Intended and Unintended Consequences.”

\(^\text{65}\) Yoshikawa, \textit{Immigrants Raising Citizens}.
jobs (i.e., with lower wages and a lack of autonomy) and, in turn, with children’s poor cognitive development and relatively low enrollment in center-based child care (i.e., fewer sources outside the home to support children’s learning). Additionally, these families may reside in unsafe housing and poor neighborhoods, placing children in risky environments that in turn may foster risky behaviors such as gang involvement, drug use, and teenage pregnancy.

B. Segregation, Isolation, Inadequate Support

Latino immigrants tend to live in ethnic enclaves, segregated from the mainstream community. This segregation may result from housing discrimination or immigrants’ own choice to live in communities where they have connections or otherwise feel safe. Ethnic enclaves foster relationships, institutions, and social resources that facilitate the day-to-day survival and functioning of residents—and draw new immigrants to join them.

The literature suggests that living in segregated communities has both benefits and risks. While immigrants may feel safer in their daily interactions in ethnic enclaves, they may face barriers to accessing services and resources and to participating in the larger society. Thus, living in segregated communities can further institutional discrimination. And, since enclaves do not foster knowledge of mainstream society, residents may be more likely to encounter microaggressions—everyday words or behaviors that communicate prejudice—when they step out of the enclave.

It cannot be assumed that family members or friends facing a dearth of resources will readily provide support.

I. Segregation and Social Isolation

Immigrants who live in ethnic enclaves are able to rely on other immigrants for support, including referrals for needed services and “immigrant-friendly” institutions where they will feel at home and safe. In a study following the passage of state-level immigration legislation in Arizona, Latino immigrant parents reported receiving support from family, friends, and neighbors, as well as community resources from sources such as community-based agencies (CBAs), churches, and employers. Immediate and extended family members provided the most emotional and financial support, followed by friends and neighbors. Latino immigrant parents indicated that CBAs provided access to classes, health services and information, and, at times, emotional support and guidance. The church was also a source of support, where participants felt heard and could receive advice. Participants also reported that their bosses or coworkers provided advice and financial support, including by allowing them to work more hours. Those who were self-employed cited their consumers as a source of support. Several parents said that their support network had facilitated their emigration (i.e., by providing a place to live upon arrival and financial support as they transitioned to a new job) and access to employment. Family members who are bilingual may serve as interpreters; several parents also reported that in the event of their detention and deportation, family members or friends had agreed to care for their children. In sum, social support agents may link individuals to jobs, help navigate systems of care, provide emotional support through listening and offering guidance, and serve as caregivers for children whose parents are deported.

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66 Ibid.
68 Viruell-Fuentes, Miranda, and Abdulrahim, “More Than Culture.”
69 Negi, “Battling Discrimination and Social Isolation.”
Recent studies, however, also suggest that many of these communities are under strain, as the recent economic recession and, in some areas, a hostile political environment have increased the financial and emotional stress experienced by immigrant families and decreased the resources available to them. It cannot be assumed that family members or friends facing a dearth of resources will readily provide support, whether emotional (e.g., listening, advice, consolation) or instrumental (e.g., food, clothing, child care, and other material assistance).\(^{71}\) This may pose a problem for immigrants who have relied on informal social networks for support in the past.

In addition to this reduced support within enclaves, experiences of discrimination can limit immigrants' social interactions with the mainstream population. Immigrants may feel uncomfortable going to mainstream stores and restaurants where they could be mistreated, ignored, or accused of trespassing, with assumptions made based on their appearance.\(^{72}\) In one study immigrants reported avoiding mainstream social venues due to the stigma of being unauthorized, with one man stating “I just stay home. I don’t want the police to accuse me of stealing.”\(^{73}\)

Evidence suggests that limited English proficiency poses yet another barrier to immigrants’ social integration.\(^{74}\) Menéndez Alarcón and Novak suggest that the perceived superiority of the English language among natives leads to language subordination: that is, anyone who does not speak English well or who has an accent is not considered worthy of being heard.\(^{75}\) Immigrants may elect to live in ethnic enclaves where their native language is the norm and where they are able to openly communicate with individuals without feeling discredited.

2. Impact on Immigrant Families

Living in an ethnic enclave may also leave immigrants with poor housing options, limited school opportunities for children, and limited social networks. Social isolation has detrimental effects on immigrant families. A study of pre- and postmigration factors affecting health outcomes among Mexican immigrant parents found that living in ethnic enclaves did not protect immigrants from the harmful effects of racial and ethnic discrimination or racial tensions in the neighborhood.\(^{76}\) Living in ethnic enclaves was associated with poor mental-health outcomes, while the presence of social support was protective.\(^{77}\) In order for social support to buffer the negative impact of discrimination and social isolation, the individuals providing support needed to be dependable and trustworthy sources of emotional and instrumental assistance. Similarly, in order to navigate support services, Latino immigrant families required the help of institutions that link parents to needed services to promote the well-being of their children—by, for example, providing referrals to health, education, and community advocacy resources.

Ethnic enclaves in effect restrict immigrant families’ interaction with mainstream society, subsequently limiting their access to support services and economic opportunities. Evidence suggests that Latino immigrant families are often unfamiliar with existing sources of the support and advocacy services they require.\(^{78}\) Furthermore, within the current social and political climate, those families seeking services may face discrimination that affects their access\(^{79}\) (as when parents are refused services for a child due to their LEP status). While immigrants’ social support network may provide emotional, moral, and even material support in such cases, this network often lacks access to formal sources of support and advocacy.\(^{80}\) In


\(^{73}\) Negi, “ Battling Discrimination and Social Isolation.”

\(^{74}\) Cohen and Merino Chavez, “Latino Immigrants, Discrimination, and Reception.”

\(^{75}\) Menéndez Alarcón and Novak, “Latin American Immigrants in Indianapolis.”

\(^{76}\) Perreira and Ornelas, “Painful Passages.”

\(^{77}\) Ibid.


\(^{79}\) Ayón and Ghosn Naddy, “Latino Immigrant Families’ Social Support Networks.”

\(^{80}\) Ibid.
sum, social isolation and a limited social network are barriers to accessing needed services.\textsuperscript{91}

Being isolated from mainstream society, with limited sources of support, can take a toll on the physical and mental health of parents—and children. Those children who internalize their parents’ stress may then worry about the safety and security of their parents.\textsuperscript{82} For example, one mother shared how her three-year-old daughter pleaded, “No mamá, ya no vamos a...[la Walmart]...ahí está el sheriff.”\textsuperscript{83} (No Mom, let’s not go to Walmart. The sheriff is there.) The child was referring to Sheriff Joe Arpaio, who has led raids on Latino immigrants’ homes, workplaces, and community gathering places in Maricopa County, Arizona. In another example, the children in one family repeatedly asked their mother what they could do to help resolve her documentation status.\textsuperscript{84} While both these mothers sought to comfort their children and reduce their anxiety, it is evident that children of immigrants, particularly those whose parents are unauthorized, are carrying a huge emotional burden. This may prevent them from focusing on their school work and participating in developmentally appropriate experiences.

\textit{Being isolated from mainstream society...can take a toll on the physical and mental health of parents—and children.}

The effects of poor integration and social isolation may be long term. Children in immigrant families do not have access to the same opportunities as children who are actively engaged in mainstream society. Ethnic enclaves may not only constrain children’s opportunities to negotiate varied social environments, but may lack the social capital needed to promote children’s academic success.\textsuperscript{85} (Social capital consists of resources embedded in social relationships and structures that can be accessed, borrowed, or leveraged to increase success in purposive action.\textsuperscript{86}) For instance, children of immigrants are often the first in their families to attend college, and may lack the social capital—in the form of mentors—they need to navigate the challenges they face in higher education.

At the same time, ethnic enclaves may shield the children of immigrants from discrimination. For example, they are less likely to be shamed for speaking Spanish or practicing their cultural values. Meanwhile, evidence suggests that children who are bicultural (i.e., those who integrate both Latino and mainstream social practices and beliefs) have healthier outcomes than youth who assimilate completely into the mainstream culture.\textsuperscript{87}

C. \textit{Poor Outcomes, Poor Medical Attention, and Barriers to Care}

Discrimination at the individual level may heighten the risk of physical and mental-health problems, while institutional discrimination may heighten the need for services—while also creating barriers to their access. Discrimination and racism “produce and reproduce social and economic inequities along racial and ethnic lines, and as such, [are a] fundamental cause of disease.”\textsuperscript{88} The cumulative impact of discrimination—as seen through economic stress and social isolation—is manifested in poor health outcomes and exacerbated by barriers to accessing health services.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{81} India J. Ornelas and Kristia M. Perreira, “The Role of Migration in the Development of Depressive Symptoms among Latino Immigrant Parents in the USA,” \textit{Social Science and Medicine} vol. 73, no. 8 (2011): 1169–77.
\item \textsuperscript{82} Yoshikawa, \textit{Immigrants Raising Citizens}; Sandy P. Rubio-Hernandez and Cecilia Ayón, “Pobrecitos los Niños: The emotional impact of anti-immigration policies on Latino youth,” unpublished manuscript.
\item \textsuperscript{83} Ayón and Becerra, “Latino Immigrant Families under Siege.”
\item \textsuperscript{84} Cecilia Ayón, “¿Tu de Dónde Eres? Latino Immigrant Parents’ Efforts to Resist Discrimination,” unpublished research study.
\item \textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{88} Viruell-Fuentes, Miranda, and Adbulrahim, “More than Culture.”
\end{itemize}
1. Poor Health

Substantial evidence links discrimination to poor health and mental-health outcomes among immigrants in general and Latinos in particular. Immigrants living in fear of detention and deportation experience high rates of stress that impact their health. Experiences of discrimination have been linked to feelings of sadness and helplessness, anxiety and depression, and low self-esteem. Alongside unsafe neighborhoods, they have also been linked to trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Immigrants living in fear of detention and deportation experience high rates of stress that impact their health.

A recent study on the implementation of immigration policy in border communities found that the families living here were exposed to high rates of community violence. Immigration enforcement along the U.S.-Mexico border includes community raids, workplace raids, and “discretionary stops” that involve tactics including physical mistreatment, verbal and emotional abuse, and ethnic profiling. Families in border communities exhibit PTSD symptoms as a consequence of such enforcement tactics. Often, targeted groups minimize their victimization as a coping strategy; however, “chronic suppression of traumatic events may be internalized and manifested as stress, anxiety, and increased risk of debilitating health and mental health.”

2. Restricted Access to Care, and Poor Medical Attention

Immigrants experience limited access to health care due to the 1996 federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) and state legislation that prevents unauthorized immigrants and recent arrivals from accessing public benefits such as Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Eligibility may vary among family members, based on each family member’s citizenship, immigration status, and length of residence in the United States. For example, within mixed-status households, U.S.-citizen children are eligible for public benefits, including health insurance, while


91 Ayón and Becerra, “Latino Immigrant Families under Siege.”


94 Perreira and Ornelas, “Painful Passages;” Salas, Ayón, and Gurrola, “Impact of Anti-Immigrant Sentiment and Policies.”


96 Ibid.


98 Sabo et al., “Everyday Violence, Structural Racism and Mistreatment.”

in most states family members who have acquired lawful permanent resident status are barred from health-care services for five years. Unauthorized family members are generally barred from Medicaid and other public benefits altogether.

Evidence suggests that multiple factors—beyond eligibility for Medicaid, CHIP, and other public insurance programs—affect immigrants’ access to health benefits. The first major barrier to access is the application and eligibility verification process. Immigrant families may encounter challenges simply completing the paperwork because of their limited education, limited English proficiency, or inadequate computer literacy. Many families may have difficulty obtaining required documents such as proof of income or employment, or birth certificates for children born outside the United States. Mixed-status families are discouraged from applying for benefits when they learn that they must submit information regarding the SSNs and legal status of all family members. In some cases, the benefits application does not clearly indicate that SSNs are required only for beneficiaries, and applicants in mixed-status households may assume that they are not eligible.

Administrative factors also play a role in determining immigrants’ access to benefits. Immigrants’ documents often vary, creating confusion among staff and supervisors, and databases might not recognize the full array of immigration status documents—particularly rarer documents such as proof of application for permanent residency. Another problem is mismatched names: different documents may note names in different ways since there is no standardized way of reporting names across countries.

Perceived and actual discrimination pose challenges to immigrant families seeking access to public health insurance for their children.

Those immigrants with limited English proficiency face many obstacles. While some documents may be available in Spanish (and other languages spoken by Latinos), many agencies lack Spanish-speaking staff. Latino immigrant families report that frequently there are no (or a limited number of) Spanish-speaking staff available, so they must endure long wait times for help. In some cases friends or children serve as interpreters, or another benefits recipient may volunteer to serve as an interpreter. As many immigrant families are not familiar with systems of care in the United States, language and literacy barriers only make the process of accessing services more complex.

A climate of fear and mistrust serve as an additional barrier to benefits for immigrants. Perceived and actual discrimination pose challenges to immigrant families seeking access to public health insurance for their children. While in some cases documentation is needed from only the applicant, immigrant families report that both parent and child documentation is requested when applying for services—documentation which for unauthorized families is unattainable. Discrimination from service providers, alongside fear of being reported to immigration officials by service providers, discourages families from

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101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid.
104 Ayón and Becerra, “Latino Immigrant Families under Siege.”
105 Perreira et al., *Barriers to Immigrants’ Access to Health and Human Services Programs*.
106 Ayón, “¿Tu de Dónde Eres?”
seeking publicly subsidized insurance or health services for their eligible children. \textsuperscript{109} As a result, immigrant families often go without care or pay out of pocket for services. These barriers to health care compromise children’s health and burden family finances. \textsuperscript{110}

When immigrant families are able to access medical attention, they are confronted with another set of barriers. Immigrant families report that they are discriminated against by health professionals because of their limited English proficiency. \textsuperscript{111} These experiences can lead to a poor quality of care, an increased risk of misdiagnosis, \textsuperscript{112} and severe delays in or exclusion from receiving services. \textsuperscript{113} Immigrants’ day-to-day experiences may involve microaggressions and structural discrimination; they are thus predisposed to anticipating poor health-care treatment. In a study on women’s health, Sawyer et al. find that anticipation of prejudice leads to increased cardiovascular and psychological distress. \textsuperscript{114}

3. Impact on Immigrant Families

In sum, discrimination puts families—both parents and children—at increased risk for poor health and mental-health problems. Several studies find that Latinos are more likely to report their health as “fair” or “poor” than are non-Hispanic whites. \textsuperscript{115} Similarly, individuals with limited English proficiency report worse health status than do English-proficient individuals. \textsuperscript{116} The many stressors experienced by immigrants include poor working conditions, poverty, limited social ties, and barriers to accessing health and other support services. These have detrimental effects on the health and well-being of immigrant families in both the short and long term. For example, an untreated condition can heighten levels of stress in a family in the short term and burden their finances in the long term. Importantly, barriers to the regular, preventative, and primary health care of U.S.-born children within mixed-status households may cost the U.S. health-care system more in treatment for serious health conditions down the road.


\textsuperscript{116} Kandula, Lauderdale, and Baker, “Differences in Self-Reported Health.”
IV. The Cumulative Impact of Discrimination on Family Functioning and Parenting

A review of the literature reveals that discrimination impacts the parenting practices of Latino immigrants. Immigrant families are often unprepared to cope with discrimination;\(^{117}\) parents and children do not know how to approach this topic or discuss it with one another.\(^{118}\)

Family members may experience discrimination while apart or together. For example, children may encounter insults from peers at school. They may also witness their parents being discriminated against.\(^ {119}\) In one example from the literature, a mother was treated poorly at a supermarket while shopping for groceries with her children. She asked a clerk a question in Spanish after overhearing the clerk speaking in Spanish to a coworker. The clerk was rude and refused to speak to her in Spanish or answer her questions. Her children asked her why the clerk was mad and refused to speak their language.\(^ {120}\)

Immigrant parents are learning to contend with experiences of discrimination themselves, while also needing to address this issue with their children. Relocating to a new social context influences their parenting, as they learn that an “important parenting task involves teaching children skills to survive in a dominant culture’s system of racial and economic oppression while maintaining one’s ethnic cultural identity.”\(^ {121}\)

Immigrant parents are learning to contend with experiences of discrimination themselves, while also needing to address this issue with their children.

Latino immigrant parents stress the importance of transferring their culture and language to their children. Parents do not want their children to lose ties to their heritage.\(^ {122}\) These efforts should be supported: studies indicate that a strong and positive ethnic identity discourages children from engaging in risky behaviors\(^ {123}\) and buffers the effects of discrimination.\(^ {124}\) In the anti-immigrant climate felt in many U.S. communities today, it is imperative for Latino immigrant parents to address issues of discrimination, inequality, race, and nativity with their children.\(^ {125}\)

The literature reveals the efforts of immigrant parents to confront discrimination and prepare their children for discrimination. Parents tell children to stand up for themselves and challenge discriminatory comments and seek help from adults. With the belief that children need to learn about living in a multi-

\(^{117}\) Bacallao and Smokowski, “Obstacles to Getting Ahead.”


\(^{119}\) Ayón, “¿Tu de Dónde Eres?”; Ornelas et al., “Challenges and Strategies to Maintaining Emotional Health.”

\(^{120}\) Ayón, “¿Tu de Dónde Eres?”


\(^{124}\) Umaña-Taylor and Updegraff, “Latino Adolescents’ Mental Health.”

cultural society, parents encourage them to be empathetic toward those who are different from them. Often, parents find it necessary to talk to their children about nativity and the rights that accompany being a U.S. citizen—as when a U.S.-born child notices he is treated differently from a noncitizen child. One parent recalled her son’s concern when his friend was not allowed to play on the school’s soccer team. The mother explained that health insurance is a requirement to play school sports, and because the friend is not eligible for public health insurance (because he is unauthorized) he is unable to play. Her son said that this is unfair because his friend really enjoys playing soccer. The mother agreed, and said that hopefully in the future he would be able to play. These types of challenging conversations are recorded throughout the author’s research, among others.

Immigrant parents may encounter barriers to positive parenting as a result of discrimination. Parents may struggle to motivate and encourage their children to pursue goals and do well in school in a context of high stress and social isolation. Amid often-daily encounters with discrimination, they face a difficult task: to prioritize their family goals in challenging circumstances, while trying not to misdirect any of the resulting stress and anger against their own family members.

Meanwhile, immigrant parents’ sense of self-efficacy may be challenged. Parents may question their ability to be good parents and feel judged for not speaking English or having a “different” approach to parenting than that of mainstream families. They may feel that they have to prove themselves to outsiders. The English-language standards imposed on immigrants may “create continuous feelings of inadequacy” that last as long as they live in the United States. In addition, due to their limited English proficiency and legal status, immigrant parents may feel powerless to advocate on behalf of their children in, for example, interactions with teachers, service providers, and community members.

V. Conclusion

Discrimination has detrimental effects on the economic, social, and physical well-being of Latino immigrant families. Emerging studies find that discrimination negatively affects family functioning and structure, and diminishes parents’ ability to advocate and provide for their children. Continued efforts are needed to elucidate the impact of discrimination on these families and their coping strategies and resilience. Latinos represent a significant portion of youth in the United States; their social and family contexts thus will not only have a significant impact on their lives but also affect the United States as a whole. Interventions are needed to assist families in their efforts to challenge discrimination as well as to help institutions address and mitigate discriminatory practices.

At the family level, interventions are needed to help parents better identify mechanisms of discrimination, connect to the resources available to help them, and communicate with children about issues of race, inequality, and discrimination. These interventions should stress how children can be taught about inequality and discrimination in ways that encourage positive responses—such as staying in school and improving their future prospects—rather than living in fear or engaging in risky behavior. These interventions must also focus on raising parents’ awareness of available resources (personal, communal, and institutional) and helping them leverage these resources to protect their children. A promotoras model that involves lay workers from the Latino community could be used to further empower Latino immigrant

126 Ibid.
130 Bermúdez et al., “I Am Not Going to Lose My Kids to the Streets.”
131 Menéndez Alarcón and Novak, “Latin American Immigrants in Indianapolis.”
communities and invite parents to participate in the implementation of interventions combating discrimination.\textsuperscript{133}

At the institutional level, training is needed to educate front-line workers and administrators about the mechanisms and consequences of discrimination. For example, does the education system recognize that by ignoring the needs of immigrant parents it is compromising the education and overall emotional well-being of children? As illustrated in the documentary \textit{Precious Knowledge},\textsuperscript{134} rather than excluding children of immigrants or holding them at arm's length, educators and education administrators need tools and strategies to engage children in critical discussions about race and diversity, and to include their families in the learning process. The same applies to health, housing, and social service providers.

While the body of research concerning the impact of discrimination on Latino immigrant families is growing, several gaps in the knowledge base remain. This report articulates the need for a comprehensive approach: studying social, economic, and health issues independent of one another may not capture the cumulative effects of discrimination on immigrant families. As described in this report, these complex issues are often interrelated and linked; by focusing on just one area, the complexity of the immigrant experience is not fully captured. As presented here, substantial evidence links the implementation of restrictive immigration policies to subsequent discrimination. Future research on the health outcomes of immigrant families would do well to account for social and economic stressors, and the barriers encountered within immigrant families’ social contexts.\textsuperscript{135}

\textbf{Further research is needed on the ways parents and youth cope with discrimination in their day-to-day lives.}

The family system is fundamental to the well-being of children. Emerging studies reveal the impact of discrimination on family functioning and parents’ self-efficacy. Parents’ ability to cope with and discuss issues of discrimination and injustice with their children has a critical impact on children’s own responses. Further research is needed on the ways parents and youth cope with discrimination in their day-to-day lives. Improved coping strategies can have long-term positive effects on education, health, and emotional well-being. Future research should also explore the sources of strength that families rely on to overcome the challenges associated with discrimination. For example, existing research finds that a strong work ethic\textsuperscript{136} and sending remittances to support family members outside the United States\textsuperscript{137} are sources of pride for immigrant families. Further research might focus on how immigrant families specifically engender positive ethnic identities.

In terms of methodological recommendations, much of the available research is cross-sectional and qualitative. Longitudinal studies are needed to understand the long-term consequences of chronic exposure to discrimination among Latino immigrant families, and among children in particular. Also, more efforts are needed to include fathers’ perspectives: the majority of the available research on immigrant families is from the perspective of the mother. It is common for fathers to be the primary or sole financial provider in Latino immigrant households;\textsuperscript{138} fathers’ experiences with discrimination may thus be different from those of mothers, and daily interactions may also differ between the sexes. Researchers need to be flexible and creative when scheduling interviews with fathers, who tend to work long hours. It is also important

\textsuperscript{134} \textit{Precious Knowledge} is a documentary directed by Ari Luis Palos (Dos Vatos Production, 2011). This documentary followed Tucson high school students’ efforts to save their Mexican American studies classes.
\textsuperscript{136} Raffaelli and Wiley, “Challenges and Strengths of Immigrant Latino Families.”
\textsuperscript{137} Negi, “ Battling Discrimination and Social Isolation.”
\textsuperscript{138} Dreby, \textit{How Today’s Immigration Enforcement Policies Impact Children, Families and Communities}. 

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to expand understanding of how discrimination affects the health and parenting abilities of fathers.

In recent years, immigration legislation has served to fuel anti-immigrant sentiment, as evident in reported acts of discrimination and racism across the United States. Further research is needed on the implementation of immigration policy and its impacts—both intended and unintended—on immigrant families, parents and children alike. More research is also needed on the resources available to immigrant families who experience injustice, and the mechanisms in place to connect them to needed services and support.
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