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Impacts of Immigration Actions and News and the Psychological Distress of U.S. Latino Parents Raising Adolescents

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A B S T R A C T

Purpose: U.S. Latino parents of adolescents face unprecedented threats to family stability and well-being due to rapid and far-reaching transformations in U.S. immigration policy.

Methods: Two hundred thirteen Latino parents of adolescents were recruited from community settings in a suburb of a large mid-Atlantic city to complete surveys assessing parents' psychological distress and responses to immigration actions and news. Univariate and bivariate analyses were conducted to describe the prevalence of parents' responses to immigration news and actions across diverse residency statuses. Multiple logistic regression models examined associations between immigration-related impacts and the odds of a parent's high psychological distress.

Results: Permanent residents, temporary protected status, and undocumented parents reported significantly more negative immigration impacts on psychological states than U.S. citizens. Parents reporting frequent negative immigration-related impacts had a significantly higher likelihood of high psychological distress than did other parents, and these associations were maintained even when accounting for parents' residency status, gender, education, and experience with deportation or detention. The odds of a parent reporting high psychological distress due to negative immigration impacts ranged from 2.2 ($p < .05$) to 10.4 ($p < .001$).

Conclusions: This is one of the first empirical accounts of how recent immigration policy changes and news have impacted the lives of Latino families raising adolescent children. Harmful impacts were manifest across a range of parent concerns and behaviors and are strong correlates of psychological distress. Findings suggest a need to consider pathways to citizenship for Latina/o parents so that these parents, many of whom are legal residents, may effectively care for their children.

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IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTION

In response to rapid and unprecedented changes in immigration actions and news, high proportions of U.S. Latino parents of adolescents reported recently having modified behaviors and experiencing worry. Adverse responses to immigration events were associated with more than 300% greater odds of a U.S. Latino parent's high psychological distress.

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Media reports indicate that U.S. Latina/o immigrants have experienced heightened stress and threats to family stability since the new President took office in 2017 [1,2]. However, little empirical data document how rapid changes in immigration news and actions are affecting Latina/o (hereafter, referred to as Latino) families. Adverse consequences of today's immigration climate may be pronounced for Latino parents with adolescent children. Compared with younger children, adolescents have a better cognitive understanding of the stressors their families face, experience more direct exposure to extrafamilial risks, and have spent more formative years of identity development within a U.S. context [3]. The present study describes parents' behavioral and emotional responses to recent immigration actions and news and investigates how these responses are associated with Latino parents' psychological distress. We describe how immigration-related impacts vary by residency status, conceptualized along a hierarchy from the most to least secure categories [4]. Participants included those who were U.S.-born and naturalized U.S. citizens (most secure), permanent residents, Temporary Protected Status (TPS)¹ residents, and undocumented residents (least secure).

Extensive research has described stressors experienced by U.S. Latinos [5,6], particularly the undocumented [7–14]. Latino immigrants often experience fear of deportation, exploitation by employers [8], trauma [15], distrust in public services [16], language barriers, racism [11], and financial strain [17]. These stressors are important predictors of psychological distress, indicated by anxiety, depression, and somatization [12,18,19]. The costs and burdens of psychological distress extend far beyond an affected individual. Parents' psychological distress is especially important; adolescents whose parents are depressed and/or anxious face heightened risk of poor social functioning [20], academic failure [21], and mental health problems [20].

Immigration threats have impacts well beyond the acute harm conferred to the subset of Latinos directly experiencing events such as deportation [13,22]. Informed by public health's injury pyramid, Dreby suggested that an event such as deportation severely hurts those at the top of the pyramid—Latinos experiencing deportation—but also produces less severe harm for a large number of Latinos at the bottom of the pyramid—those not directly experiencing deportation [23]. This is because politics, threats of deportation, and anti-immigrant sentiments lead to widespread fear and anxiety among Latinos not directly affected by the event [10,23,24].

Immigration actions and news likely are affecting Latino parents across diverse residency statuses. The most notable immigration policy changes in 2017 were: (1) expanded eligibility for deportation, which increased deportation of long-term residents without criminal records [25]; (2) the elimination of, and/or plans to eliminate, TPS [26–28]; and (3) an end to the Deferred

Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which has protected hundreds of thousands of undocumented Latinos brought to the United States as children [29]. Our study provides some of the first evidence to date indicating how U.S. Latino parents of adolescents cope, react, and manage emotions in response to recent immigration news and actions. Given that the adolescents of parents in this study were U.S. citizens or brought to the United States as children, our research can advance knowledge about the family context for a large and critical segment of the U.S. population.

Methods

Procedures and sample

Drawing from a mixed-method study conducted in the fall of 2017, we analyzed survey data for 213 Latina/o immigrant parents living in a suburban area of a large mid-Atlantic city in the United States. Numerous immigration policy changes took place before, during, and immediately after our collection.² The community includes a large Latino population, mostly from El Salvador and Guatemala and, to a lesser extent, from Mexico, Honduras, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic. An author of this study with expertise in data collection among this community utilized her existing network to recruit participants. Survey-only respondents were provided \$10 and those who also participated in the focus group were provided \$50. Eligibility was limited to Latino parents with at least one child aged 12–18 years. The sample was stratified so that about one-third were undocumented ($n = 69$), one-third were permanent residents ($n = 70$), and the remaining one-third included the same number of U.S. citizen ($n = 37$) and TPS parents ($n = 37$).

Data collection was conducted in Spanish by bicultural and bilingual interviewers. To protect participants' safety, we collected data anonymously, obtained oral consent only, and obtained a Certificate of Confidentiality from the National Institutes of Health. All study procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board at the institution where the research was conducted.

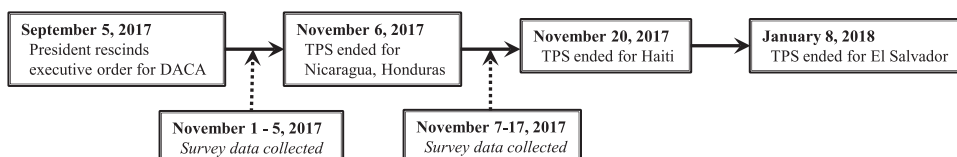
Measures

Residency status. Parents' residency status was measured by four dummy coded variables for U.S. citizen (the reference group), permanent resident, TPS, and undocumented.

Immigration impacts on parents. The 15-item Political Climate Scale was used to assess impacts of immigration news and actions [30]. The instrument opens with: "As you know, there have been stories in the news about immigrants and immigration, and there have

¹ TPS residents refer to those granted permission to live in the United States due to extraordinary and temporary conditions in the country of origin [26].

² Timeline of survey data collection and policy announcements:



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