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Enforced Separations:

A Qualitative Examination of how Latino Youth Cope with Family Disruption Following the
Deportation of a Parent

A dissertation proposal submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Social Welfare

by

Kristina K. Hermann

2017

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Enforced Separations:

A Qualitative Examination of How Latino Youth Cope with Family Disruption Following the
Deportation of a Parent

by

Kristina K. Hermann

Doctor of Philosophy in Social Welfare

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor Laura S. Abrams, Co-Chair

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Background and Aims. Shifts in U.S. immigration policy over the past two decades have resulted in increased deportations of unauthorized persons residing in the United States—primarily Mexican and Central American immigrants. As a result, a disproportionate number of Latino families have been subjected to forced family separations. While previous studies have focused on the effects of parental deportation on young children, this study uniquely contributes to the literature by exploring how youth experience and cope with family separation, as well as how deportation adversely impacts the broader family unit. This study also explores how schools and social service providers respond to these families' needs.

Methods. This phenomenological study is theoretically grounded in family systems and

ambiguous loss theories. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Latino youth (n=8) and their mothers (n=8) who had recently experienced deportation within their families. Semi-structured interview data were also collected from key informants, including school personnel and social service providers (n=11).

Results. The analysis revealed four main findings: 1) Following the deportation of a parent, youth experienced symptoms of trauma; 2) Families had to adjust to new family circumstances due to economic loss and increased family tension; 3) Families that experienced the deportation of a parent retreated from social life, which drastically reduced their social networks; and 4) Families heavily relied on informal support networks and faith-based agencies rather than government social services due to fear of further family separation. Findings further suggested youth accessed school-based and peer support, while mothers generally coped by reaching out to extended family, accessing aid through informal support networks, and relying on their faith as a coping tool.

Conclusion and Implications. This study highlights the experiences of Latino youth and their families due to the loss of a parent after deportation. Implications for practice include developing culturally-based, trauma-informed, and contextually situated (i.e., accounting for political climate) assessments and interventions for youth and families affected by deportation. It also addresses the importance of enhancing relationships with immigrant-based centers and faith-based agencies to assist practitioners in serving more families to restore their physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

The dissertation of Kristina K. Hermann is approved.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview of the Research Problem

According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2014), a record high of 400,000 undocumented immigrants were deported in 2013, continuing a streak of increased immigration enforcement resulting in more than 2 million deportations since 2008. Contrary to popular perceptions, deportees are typically not criminal offenders. In fact, most of the growth in the number of deportees has resulted from reasons other than a criminal conviction (Human Rights Watch, 2010). One of the many unnoticed aspects of deportation is its impact on the family members who are left behind. Many undocumented immigrants live in families with spouses and children (Dreby, 2014). Specifically, more than 100,000 of the individuals deported between 1998 and 2007 were parents of U.S.-born children (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of the Inspector General, 2009).

Fears concerning the deportation of immigrants today is likely to have a profound impact on U.S. families, including children (Abrego & Menjivar, 2012; Capps, Castaneda, Chaudry, & Santos, 2007; Dreby, 2014). Before the mid-1980s, migration to the U.S. from Latin America and particularly Mexico was predominantly composed of seasonal male sojourners whose families remained abroad (Durand & Massey, 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). Past deportations often removed an immigrant male from his workplace and sent him back to his family in his home country (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). Over the past 20 to 30 years, however, strict U.S.-Mexico border policies have made it more difficult and costly for immigrants to engage in temporary/circular migration (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). As it has become more difficult for migrants to return to families in Mexico and Latin America, many either bring their families with

them or form families here (DeGenova, 2010; Dreby, 2014, Hondagneu, 1994; Kanstroom, 2007).

Immigration Policies and Family Separation

Due to current U.S. immigration policies and the changing political landscape of 2017, undocumented immigrants are vulnerable to detention and deportation procedures in which parents are forcibly removed from their spouses, relatives, and children (Dreby, 2012; Passel & Cohn, 2011). Upon the loss of a family member (often the breadwinner) due to deportation, the family members left behind must contend with a myriad of resulting problems. These problems often include economic instability, decreased mobility, social isolation, and fear (Abrego & Menjivar, 2012; Chaudry, Capps, Pedroza, Castaneda, Santos & Scott, 2010; Dreby, 2014; Wessler, 2011). These problems are particularly concerning when the affected family members are children (Dreby 2007; 2012; Rodriguez & Hagan, 2004).

Immigration related family separations are a controversial topic in the current debates concerning border control (Abrego, 2014; Hagan, Castro & Rodriguez, 2010; Kanstroom, 2007). Within the last decade, undocumented and mixed-status families, meaning families whose members include individuals with different citizenship or immigration statuses, have appeared more frequently in the public eye (Abrego, 2014). Legislation passed within the last two decades, including the *Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act* (1996), stipulates that deportees may be detained and kept separate from their families for up to two years (National Immigration Law Center, 2015). This legislation has made undocumented immigrants with families more vulnerable to family disruption and trauma (Wessler, 2011). Furthermore, in 2001, *The USA PATRIOT Act* increased border enforcement, made it more difficult for immigrants to obtain legal permanent residence or access social services, and

eliminated legal mechanisms previously available to fight deportation (Pew Hispanic Center, 2013). Such policies have also made legal permanent residents deportable (even retroactively) for a vastly expanded set of noncriminal offenses (Dreby, 2012). These new policies have significantly altered the social, political, and legal landscape for undocumented immigrants and families living in the United States (Kanstroom, 2007). Consequently, deportations have markedly increased every year since 1996 (Brabek & Xu, 2010; Wessler, 2011). In this manner, detaining and deporting parents disrupts families and endangers children that are left behind, who must cope with loss, economic challenges, and the trauma of separation (Dreby, 2014).

In recent years, both state and federal legislators have attempted to minimize the risks of these family separations through policies, most notably Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA). For example, in 2014, President Obama announced a deferred action program, which would allow unauthorized immigrant parents who have lived in the U.S. at least five years and have children who are U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents to apply for deportation relief and a three-year work permit (Pew Hispanic Research Center, 2014). However, DAPA and similar laws are highly contested as confirmed by persistent opposition from members of state and federal government, resulting in increased difficulty for these laws to be implemented. In fact, in November 2015, the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans upheld an earlier ruling of *Texas v. United States*, which temporarily blocked the implementation of President Obama's executive actions related to immigration reform (National Immigration Law Center, 2015). If implemented, the executive actions of President Obama will provide deportation relief through the expansion of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program as well as the creation of the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) program. These policies

posit that individuals will not be able to apply for DAPA until a court issues an order that allows the initiative to go forward (National Immigration Law Center, 2015). Yet, under these proposed policy changes, which are currently under threat by the Trump administration, many undocumented family members may still not be eligible and will therefore not be afforded the protection conferred by these laws.

Furthermore, within weeks of being inaugurated in February of 2017, President Trump and the Department of Homeland Security Secretary, John Kelly, issued a memo that places undocumented families further at risk of deportation and separation. Under this new memo, there has been an expansion of the categories of individuals classified as “priorities for removal.” This encourages Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials to drastically increase deportations beyond the annual 400,000 individuals occurring during President Obama’s administration. Federal agents can now seek to deport undocumented individuals who have been convicted of any crime, including minor offenses such as driving with a broken tail-light on a car. ICE can also deport undocumented immigrants immediately after being charged with a crime—even those who have not been prosecuted, and can also deport individuals who have committed an act for which they could potentially be charged, such as migrating to the U.S. without authorization (Vinick, 2017). Another focus of the President Trump’s policy has been to further secure the southern border by enhancing surveillance, building a larger border wall, and increasing the number of Customs and Border Protection agents and ICE officers. Consequently, across the United States, schools and daycare centers are reporting a decline in attendance by Latino immigrant youth and families; while social service agencies and medical clinics are also noticing a decrease in service utilization among Latino immigrants due to the fear of being apprehended (Fernanda, 2016; Lowrey, 2017).

Socioemotional Effects of Family Separation

Family separation has profound effects on families by increasing anxiety, stress, depression, and fear for those who live in communities often targeted by immigration raids (Abrego, & Menjivar, 2012; Chaudry, et al., 2010; Dreby, 2014; Wessler, 2011). The climate of deportation threats also reinforces social isolation and generates a mistrust of government among immigrant communities (Chaudry et al., 2010; Dreby, 2012; Hagan, Rodriguez, & Castro, 2011; Rodriguez & Hagan, 2004). Immigration enforcement strategies can even cause documented parents to withdraw from public life, discouraging families from fully incorporating into their respective communities (Rodriguez & Hagan, 2004). Although mixed-status families with members who are born in the United States (most commonly children) are granted the rights and privileges associated with being a U.S. citizen, those who are not (most commonly one or more migrant parents) can be detained and/or deported at any time, thereby creating a constant state of threat and stress for the entire family (Capps & Fortuny, 2006).

Deportations may involve multiple trauma-inducing experiences, particularly among children who may witness the forcible removal of a parent, suddenly lose their caregiver, and/or abruptly lose their home (McLeigh, 2010). Youth who have experienced family separation due to deportation are at an increased risk for experiencing depressive symptoms, poor educational outcomes, and behavioral problems (Artico, 2003; Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002). Children's academic performance may also suffer when they are unable to concentrate in school (Chaudry, et al., 2010; Suarez-Orozco, et al., 2011). Brabeck, Lykes, and Hershberg (2011) further suggest children of deported parents also lose a sense of trust in civic authority. Moreover, although most children of non-citizen parents are U.S. citizens themselves and are thereby eligible for many government social welfare programs, the exclusion of one or both

parents from these vital services results in social marginalization for the entire family and limits access to critical economical and social resources (Capps et al., 2007).

Significance of Study

As of 2012, more than a quarter of young children in the United States were children of immigrants, and over 90% of these children were U.S. citizens (National Immigrant Law Center, 2014). The apprehension and removal of Latino immigrants today will likely continue to have a profound impact on families and children. Social workers currently and will increasingly serve immigrant adults and their children in a variety of settings including schools, community centers, child welfare agencies, clinics, and hospitals. As a result, social workers should be aware of the phenomenon of forced family separation and consider its implications as practitioners and educators. This study aimed to give a voice to youth and families who have experienced forced family separation and offers insight into the types of support needed to facilitate their adjustment to new family circumstances. To effectively create and deliver services that address these families' unique needs, social workers and social service agencies should understand how these families experience and cope with forced separations following the deportation of a family member. In response, this research fills a gap in social work literature concerning Latino immigrant populations and seeks to raise awareness about this ever-growing population in an effort to develop recommendations for social service provisions, as well as immigration policies, trainings, and research efforts that support immigrant youth and their families.

Previous research has examined the psychosocial effects of voluntary family separations among children such from transnational families that migrate in search of better opportunities; however, little is known about how youth and their families adjust to forced and sudden family separation. The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the experience of having a

family member deported from the perspectives of youth, their caregivers, and service providers. This study contributes to the emerging body of work on immigration and family separation and aims to contribute to the knowledge base by shedding light on how immigrant youth and their families experience and cope with forced a family separation. The overall goal of this study was to understand how immigrant youth ages 14-18 years; a population that has been understudied, adjust to new family dynamics following the deportation of a parent, and how social service systems can better assist these families in coping with changing and uncertain circumstances.

Research Questions

The following questions guide this study:

- 1) How do Latino/a adolescents (ages 14-18 years old) experience forced family separation due to the deportation of an undocumented parent?
- 2) How do these youth and their remaining family members adjust to new family circumstances following a deportation?
- 3) How do social service systems respond to the needs of families who have experienced a deportation related family separation?

To address these questions, this study employed a phenomenological methodology, which is an in-depth method of exploring a core experience. Participants were recruited from students attending a high school in a densely immigrant populated neighborhood in Los Angeles, California. Data collection included in-depth, semi-structured interviews with youth ages 14-18 years old, their caregivers, and social service providers in the school and surrounding community. Using family systems (Bowen, 1978) and ambiguous loss (Boss, 1999) theoretical frameworks, the study triangulated data by considering the youths' experiences in addition to the perspectives of school administrators, teachers, and the young people's families. Overall, this

study aimed to capture the lived experiences of young people during a pivotal moment in U.S. history relating to immigration policy. Lastly, the research findings offer guidance to educators, school social workers, school personnel, and related social service providers that work with immigrant youth and their families. Implications related to this research will help support social workers in the development of tools and procedures needed to address immigration-related family separations in a more culturally sensitive and effective manner.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The fields of sociology and clinical psychology have developed a growing knowledge base concerning family separations related to immigration and migration (Bernardi, 2011; Bledsoe & Sow, 2011; Donato & Duncan, 2011; Dreby, 2007, 2009; Foner, 2009; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Suarez-Orozco, 2002). Although social welfare scholars have examined family disruptions resulting from divorce, child welfare involvement, incarceration, and parental loss among other causes, there has not been in-depth focus on immigration-related family separations (Furman, Ackerman, Iwamoto, Negi, & Mondragon, 2013). This literature review will draw from a diverse body of social science literature that has examined the adverse impacts of U.S. immigration policies and their enforcement on migrant families and children. Empirical and theoretical research that examines the experiences of forced family separations and the influence of these separations on youth and families will be reviewed. Literature that examines immigrant families' access to social services will also be included. Furthermore, the summarization will discuss how the proposed research study contributes to unmet needs in this area of the social work research.

Family Separations

Family separations occur for several reasons including divorce, military deployment, incarceration, child welfare involvement, and death. Increasingly, immigration and deportation related family separations are becoming more common.¹ Although family separation among migrants has occurred for decades, the prevalence of immigration related family separations has increased during the last two decades because of stricter U.S. immigration policy enforcement (Brabeck & Xu, 2010).

The vast majority of research on family separations among immigrants has focused on families formed through the “voluntary” (if constrained) decisions of parents to migrate to another country (Dreby, 2014). Several scholars have studied the short- and long-term psychological consequences of family separation on child well-being (Chaudry et al., 2010, Dreby, 2012; Garcia Coll & Magnuson, 2005; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Suarez-Orozco, Bang, & Kim, 2011). Suarez-Orozco et al. (2002) conducted a study of 385 early adolescents from China, Central America, the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Mexico and found that among participants, 85% had experienced an immigration related family separation from one or both parents. The findings indicated that children who were separated from their parents were more likely to report depressive symptoms than immigrant children who had not been separated from their family members during migration (Suarez-Orozco, et al., 2002). Findings from this study also indicated that children who were separated from both parents had a higher level of reported emotional symptoms with girls in particular being more likely to report depressive symptoms than boys (Suarez-Orozco, et al., 2002).

¹ An estimated 2 million families have been separated by immigration raids and deportations since 2008 (Pew Research Center, 2014).

A growing body of research on transnational families describes the adjustment process among children who are left behind and later reunified with their families (Abrego, et al., 2012; Borraz, 2005; Dreby, 2007; Parrenas, 2005; Schmalzbauer, 2008; Suarez-Orozco, et al., 2011). This research has found that children who are left behind experience long term emotional effects that directly affect their trust in caregivers and other relationships (Levitt, 2007). Parrenas (2005) found that children of migrant men withdraw emotionally from their fathers; while children of migrant mothers feel they lack intimacy and affection and have been abandoned.

When children reunite with family members after extended periods of separation, they may have a difficult time adjusting (Bernhard et al., 2006; Dreby, 2009; Foner, 2009; Menjivar, 2006; Menjivar & Abrego, 2009; Simpao, 1999). This ensuing conflict is particularly stressful for adolescents who may have trouble adapting to their parents' authority or communication styles (Artico, 2003; Menjivar, 2000; Smith, Lalonde, & Johnson, 2004). Research has also suggested that the emotional costs of separation may affect children's educational performance (Gioguli, 2004; Kandel & Massey, 2002). Overall, research has found that forced separations because of immigration causes children to lose focus on academic work resulting from the emotional stress of the family's situation.

Research on children of incarcerated parents provides some insight into the issues that families face when they contend with a forced, or involuntary separation. Studies based on nationally representative longitudinal surveys of children with incarcerated fathers show that these families are significantly more likely than families without an incarcerated parent to experience material hardship, residential instability, and family dissolution (Geller, Garfinkel, & Western, 2011; Geller et al., 2009). However, unlike children of immigrant parents, they are more likely to receive public benefits during the incarceration period. Research on incarceration-

related family separations has focused on families where legal status is not an issue, thus, for families who experience an immigration related family separation, the ability to access social services may look differently since undocumented families do not qualify for public assistance.

The literature on family separations has focused primarily on how young children and/or adults experience voluntary family separations, yet these studies have not explicitly considered how families cope with forced separations. The next section, includes an examination of social science literature on the relationships between forced family separation, economic hardship, and psychosocial well-being. Then I will consider how social service agencies respond to the needs of families who have experienced a forced separation.

Family Economic Hardship and Instability

Prior research has examined the direct economical and psychological effects of deportation among mixed-status and undocumented families in the U.S. (Cohen, 2004; Kandel & Massey, 2002). Parental deportation carries negative consequences for family economic stability particularly when the breadwinner is detained or deported. In Capps et al. (2007) seminal study of three communities that experienced large-scale worksite raids in Colorado, Nebraska, and Massachusetts, the authors found that families who lost a breadwinner faced enormous economic challenges. Most of these families already had few resources and were living “paycheck to paycheck” before the raids. The raids led to changes in family structure usually from two-parent, two-income households to single-parent, mostly female-headed households. Extended family members and others who took in the children of detained parents also experienced increased economic hardship. In some cases, affected children were already living in extended multifamily households, and these households lost one or more wage earners. This study found that following deportation, existing family assets and resources diminished quickly, and consequently, extended

family or kin networks often assumed significant financial and caretaking responsibilities (Capps et al., 2007).

Similarly, Dreby's (2014) study of 110 Mexican families from New Jersey and Iowa, found that for families who experienced a deportation, the remaining parent experienced difficulties paying bills, accrued increasing debts, faced housing instability, and experienced apprehension about applying for public assistance. Brabek and Xu (2010) also reported significant economic challenges for Salvadorian and Guatemalan families who experienced deportation-related family separations and found that families had to move in with extended kin in order to pool resources. Overall, these economic challenges negatively impacted family well-being.

Youth Psychosocial Well Being

Deportation also poses significant emotional and psychological consequences for deportees and their families (Hagan et al., 2010). These consequences may involve multiple trauma-inducing experiences among children who may witness the forcible removal of the parent resulting in the sudden loss of a caregiver and/or the abrupt loss of their familiar home environment (McLeigh, 2010; Suarez-Orozco, et al., 2011). Research on the psychological effects on children impacted by deportation is limited. The majority of the research has focused on the impact of immigration raids on adults and the observable changes in children's behavior such as angry outbursts, and or frequent crying following the deportation of a parent (Capps et al., 2007).

Chaudry et al. (2010) examined the psychosocial consequences of parental arrest, detention and deportation (shortly after arrest—2 to 5 months—and 9 to 13 months following arrest) among 190 children in six locations across the U.S. Through semi-structured interviews

with non-deported parent, the authors found that nine months following the forced removal of a family member, 36% of children experienced three or more behavioral and psychological symptoms such as anxiety, anger issues, and post-traumatic stress disorder. These symptoms were most severe among children whose parents were arrested in the home, children who were separated from their parent for more than one month, and in cases where the child's primary caregiver was deported. Additionally, they found that the most common short-term effects on very young children's (ages 0-3 years old) psychological well-being included eating disorders (e.g., loss of appetite) and sleeping changes (e.g., nightmares); followed by crying and feeling afraid (Chaudry et al., 2010). Brabeck, Lykes, and Hershberg's (2011) study of Guatemalan and Salvadoran immigrant adolescents similarly found that children experienced a decline in self-esteem and withdrew emotionally from their family and peers upon the experience of a forced family separation.

Researchers have also examined children's educational outcomes related to forced family separations. The Urban Institute and National Council of La Raza (NCLR) explored the two, six, and twelve-month effects of worksite raids on three communities where a total of 500 children (mostly U.S. born citizens) temporarily or permanently lost their parents (Capps et al., 2007). They reported that the most common short-term effects to children's psychosocial well-being following a parent's arrest included depression and symptoms of grief which contributed to severe disruptions in attendance, homework, and school behavior.

Community Responses to Family's Needs

The literature on family separations has also examined immigrant families' social service needs following a forced family separation. Immigrant families affected by deportation have unique social service resulting from trauma of migration, loss, and separation. These service

needs may include: school-based mental health support and tangible items such as food, shelter, and clothing (Capps et al., 2007).

Research has suggested that churches and other faith-based organizations have served as safe havens for the immigrant community and have played a critical role in the distribution of services to support these communities (Capps et al., 2007). For example, Chaudry et al. (2010) found that when a parent is arrested, deported, or released under supervision, families typically lose a breadwinner, resulting in economic hardship and a need to seek help from charities or public benefits. They also found that churches conducted fundraising, food drives and provided sanctuary to affected families. Capps et al. (2007) reported that in the days and weeks following workplace raids, informal family and community networks took on significant caregiving responsibilities and economic support of children. Neighbors, churches and community centers provided food, baby formula, diapers, clothing, and other necessities. However, researchers also found that representatives from churches, schools, and community-based organizations noticed that even with local outreach, immigrant families have difficulty opening their doors to receive basic assistance such as food baskets.

Overall, research has suggested that immigrant families are generally reluctant to go to state or private agencies to seek mental health services because of mental health related stigma and language barriers (Fortuny, Capps, Simms, & Chaudry, 2009). Consequently, many immigrant families hide in their homes—in some cases in basements or closets—for days and weeks following a raid (Capps et al., 2007). These findings illustrate some of the barriers and difficulties associated with responding to the needs of immigrant families in the aftermath of immigration enforcement activity.

Limited research has examined the role that schools can play in providing socio-

emotional, academic, and/or psychological support to youths who have experienced a forced family separation. Capps et al. (2007) found that schools located in urban areas where administrators are aware of deportation activity may serve as a safe harbor for children and their families who have experienced the deportation of a family member. In their study, schools provided tangible, concrete support to families through food and clothing donations. However, Dreby (2012) found that schools are often limited in providing specific counseling services and trauma-related support to students and/or their families. This study also found that parents will often restrict children from returning to school following community raids for fear that they may be separated from their child during school attendance.

According to Capps' (2007) findings school psychologists and other mental health professionals noted that social exclusion and isolation following raids can induce depression and accentuate psychological distress among affected children. Many elementary school aged children absorbed the feeling of being outcasts from the broader school and or community, and even from their own previous social networks. Yet despite these identified needs, Capps et al. (2007) found some parents might not consider seeking social or psychological support from schools since the school itself may represent "authority" in their eyes. Overall, these inconclusive findings suggest that while schools in urban areas may provide tangible support to families, they may lack the resources needed to support children's range of psychosocial and mental health needs.

Summary

This literature review has examined the broad context in which family separation influences the physical, psychological, socioeconomic, well-being, and social service needs of children from immigrant families. Understanding the experiences of these youth and their

families is especially important; yet a dearth of literature exists (Abrego & Menjivar, 2012; Dreby, 2014; Hagan, Castro, & Rodriguez, 2010; Xu & Brabeck, 2012). While researchers have generated a basis of understanding of the psychosocial consequences of family separation on young children to date, no empirical investigations have examined how young people between the ages of 14-18 years old experience forced family separations and adjust to new family circumstances. Thus, the aim of this study is to understand how adolescents adjust to new family dynamics following a forced separation from a parent in order to better understand and respond to their unique social-emotional needs and academic experiences.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK & CONCEPTUAL MODEL

This study incorporates a theoretical framework that draws upon family systems theory (Bowen, 1978) and ambiguous loss theory (Boss, 1999). The literature on immigration-related family separations suggests that deportations and detentions place negative pressures on family systems and causes a strain on parent-child relationships (Artico, 2003; Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995; Sciarra, 1999). Family systems theory (Bowen, 1978) provides a useful framework to examine this phenomenon. Moreover, the literature also finds that children who have experienced an immigration related family separation suffer from an ambiguous loss (i.e., the parent is physically absent but psychologically present). Ambiguous loss theory (Boss, 2007) is thus used to understand the unique experience of children in these circumstances. Overviews of family systems and ambiguous loss theory are provided in relation to their applicability to this research study concerning forced family separations.

Family Systems Theory

Bowen's family systems theory (1978) has guided research into such areas as understanding the impact of traumatic events on individuals and family dynamics. Family systems theory emerged from general system's theory (Bertalanffy, 1928), which argues that all individuals are interrelated. Family systems theory posits that individuals and their behaviors cannot be understood in isolation from one another, but rather as a part of their family, which is the core emotional unit (Bowen, 1978; 1996).

Like most systems, families are comprised of interrelated elements, exhibit coherent behaviors, have regular interactions, and are interdependent (Minuchin, 1985). Bowen (1988) argued that all families are systems and that the family is a relational environment, wherein individual family members are interdependent, exerting reciprocal influences on each other. He further suggested that family processes—family functioning, family communication and transactional patterns, family conflict, separateness and connectedness among members, cohesion, integration, and adaptation to change—can be understood as the product of the entire system, shifting the primary focus away from individual family members to relationships among the members (Bowen, 1988).

According to Cox and Paley (1997), family systems adapt to changing conditions in their environment through a process termed *adaptive self-stabilization*. By adapting to changes in the internal workings of the system, a family has the capacity to buffer itself from the effects of difficult life circumstances. The concept of self-stabilization is particularly relevant for immigrant families who experience forced or voluntary family separations. If, for example a member of the family (such as the father) is deported, the mother and remaining children are

impacted by this loss on various levels and must readjust the family system to suddenly changed circumstances (Chang-Muy & Congress, 2009).

According to Whitchurch and Constantine (1993), a family system is comprised of complex layers of relationships, and divided into subsystems such as the marital subsystem, one parent and one child subsystem, and sibling subsystems. Suprasystems might include extended family members, racial or ethnic subculture, as well as community and geographic boundaries. For immigrant families, their suprasystems may include extended family members who may or may not live within the same home. Among families that have been separated due to immigration enforcement, their suprasystems may play a role in providing support during this shift in family roles.

Moreover, through identifying the components of a family, family systems theorists draw boundaries between the family system and their environment (Cox & Paley, 1997). Specifically, a systematic view of families is implicitly contextual, considering the sociocultural, historical, political, and economic matrices in which families are located (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). In this manner, the family is an interconnected system that socially constructs its reality through establishing boundaries between its own internal relationships and the external world. This approach points to the multiple levels of influence within and outside the family such as schools, places of employment, social service systems, and law enforcement (particularly for undocumented immigrant families) (Chang-Muy & Congress, 2004).

Similarly, family systems are also able to undergo adaptive self-organization, which refers to the capacity to reorganize in response to changes from external forces (Cox & Paley, 1997). The process of change in the structure of the family system or circumstances is termed morphogenesis, which suggests potential challenges to family patterns during certain normative

or non-normative transitions. These challenges may include the loss or separation of a parent due to immigration, which inadvertently impacts both the individual and the system as family members learn to reorganize around new caregiving responsibilities and shift relationships within the social networks of additional family members and friends (Kerr, 1981). The process of family change involves a challenge to existing patterns, the exploration of alternatives, and the emergence of new patterns that are ideally more appropriate to the changed circumstances and are often more complex (Minuchin, 1985).

Family systems theory provides one way to understand the effects of immigration related separations on families and children. Cox and Paley (1997) argue that when a family systems' balance is interrupted during separation or loss, members face a challenge in continuous growth. As a result, some families may take longer than others to return to their functioning mode subsequently eliciting continuous growth and individual self-differentiation. There is potential for family and individual systems to be negatively affected by the change regardless of the length of time associated with recovery from unexpected interruptions (Kerr, 1981). This process is particularly emphasized in family separation cases where children may experience trauma due to the unexpected loss of a parent. These experiences may make the system susceptible to psychological, emotional, and economic barriers.

Family systems theory is relevant to this study because it highlights the ways in which reciprocal relationships both within the family system and beyond the system, such as immigration law enforcement, impacts the family. Dynamics between families and their environment are reciprocal and constantly changing; and a resilient family adapts to changes within its environment. Family systems also impact their environment; as in the case of immigrant families who organize and support one another during deportation raids (Chang-Muy

& Congress, 2009). Family systems theory suggests that family disruption can destabilize the family unit and negatively impact each of its members. Hence, events like deportation are a potential source of family dysfunction and personal distress, which are likely to have implications for the well-being and psychosocial adjustment of children.

Theory of Ambiguous Loss

The theory of ambiguous loss (Boss, 1999) is also relevant to this study of immigration related family separations. Pauline Boss' (1999; 2007) concept of ambiguous loss refers to situations in which loss is unclear, incomplete or partial. This thesis is based on stress theory (Cox & McCay, 1976), and Boss described two types of ambiguous losses; one in which people are physically absent, but psychologically present (such as families with a soldier missing in action, the noncustodial parent in divorce, the migrating relative); and the second, in which family members are physically present, but psychologically absent (such as the family living with an Alzheimer's victim, or a parent or spouse who is emotionally unavailable because of stress or depression). Migration and deportation would fall into the category of what Boss (1999) calls a "crossover," in that it has elements of both types of ambiguous loss. In this rubric, while beloved people and places are left behind, they remain keenly present in the psyche of the individual; however, at the same time, the stresses of adaptation may leave some family members emotionally unavailable to others.

In ambiguous loss theory, Boss (1999) proposed that stress is caused by change, or the threat of change, in the composition and expected roles and tasks within the family system. The stress of ambiguous loss persists, as there is no closure in the traditional sense of grieving and at times the loss itself may be disenfranchised. She defines disenfranchised loss as "recognized, validated, or supported by the social world of the mourner" (Boss, 1999, p. 29). Scholars

including Suarez-Orozco et al., (2002) and Falicov (2004) have integrated concepts from family systems theory and ambiguous loss to deepen our understanding of the risks and resiliencies accompanying family separation for Latinos.

In the case of forced family separations, since the parent is not presumed dead but rather gone for what is often expected to be a short time, “permission” to grieve may not be granted. The child who has experienced loss due to parental separation may therefore go unrecognized and lead to disenfranchised grief, where silence surrounds the loss (Doka, 1989). Under such circumstances, the expected emotions of grieving, such as sadness, guilt, anger, and hopelessness, may be prolonged because there is no safe arena in which to express these emotions. In immigrant family separations, because there is no clear-cut termination in the relationship, individuals may present with low-grade chronic symptomatology rather than intense, acute responses (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2011). Furthermore, when ambiguity and loss are experienced simultaneously, individuals may internalize stress and experience negative symptoms (e.g. depression, anxiety). Children whose parents are deported may experience confusion over whether their parent is a “criminal” or did something wrong to cause the problem. They also may receive the message that the loss should be kept a secret and receive confusing explanations about what happened, all of which compound the loss and increase the likelihood for adverse psychological effects (Boss, 1999).

Conceptual Framework for the Current Study

The present study is informed by family systems theory (Bowen, 1978) and ambiguous loss theory (Boss, 1999). Family systems theory is relevant to this research study because it may explain ways immigrant and mixed status families are both likely to impact their social and community contexts as well as actively adapt in relation to these contexts during deportation.

Similarly, in the case of children whose parents have been deported, ambiguous loss theory explains how children cope with ongoing losses. Combined, these theoretical perspectives provide a lens through which to guide this study on how families make meaning of a forced family separation and adjust to new family dynamics.

The study's initial conceptual framework, based on existing theory and displayed in Figure 1 below, illustrates the family system, which is depicted at the top of the family systems triangle.

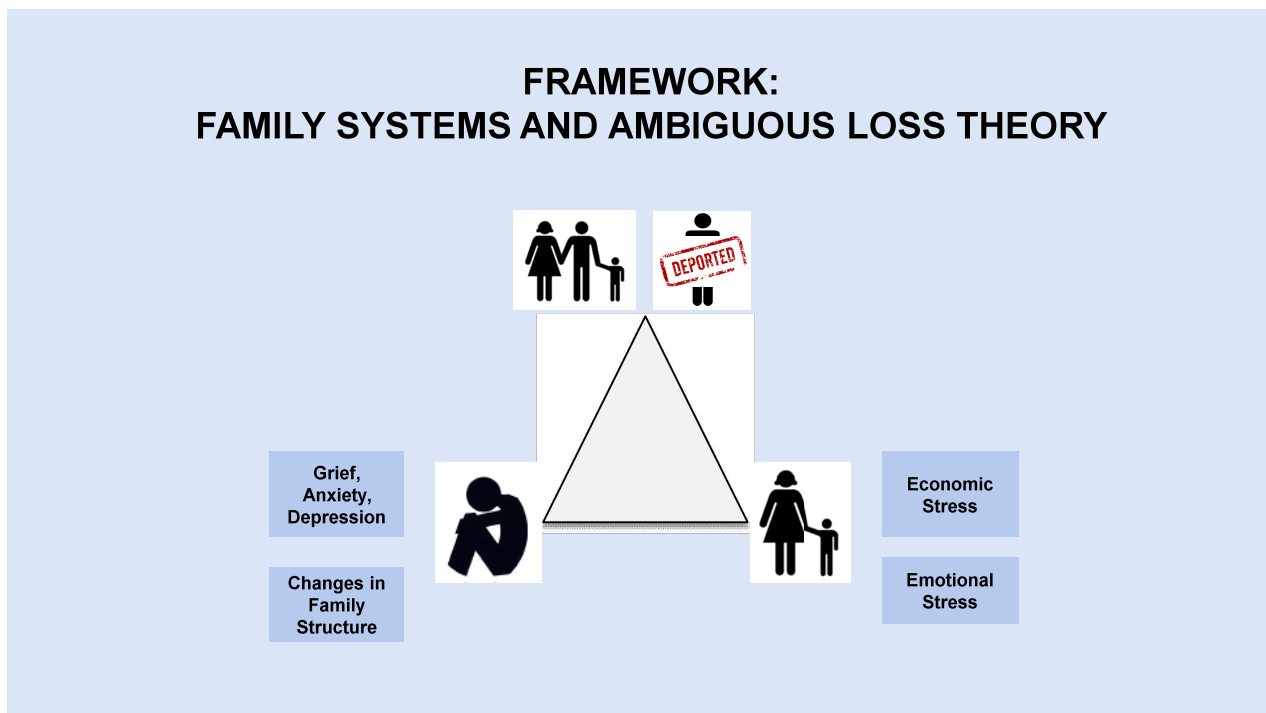


Figure 1. Conceptual Model, N=8 Families

Following the deportation of a parent, this framework suggests that the remaining parent/caregiver (as illustrated on the right side of the triangle) may experience emotional stressors from the loss of a spouse and economic challenges related to the loss of a working parent (often the breadwinner); all while also navigating fear due to her own undocumented status. According to ambiguous loss theory, this may render the remaining parent

psychologically unavailable to her child who is likely experiencing his/her own grief and loss symptoms. Subsequently, the loss will impact the family system and members of the system will be required to readjust to altered family circumstances to obtain homeostasis. On the left side of the family systems triangle, we see the child who may be experiencing trauma due to the sudden loss of a parent, fear, anxiety, and or stressors due to the changes in family structure. Ambiguous loss theory suggests that the child's losses may go unnoticed due to the stigma and fear of talking about immigration related enforcement on families. The family's ability to access support and social services may also impact their ability to reach equilibrium following the deportation event. Thus, as depicted in Figure 1, family systems and ambiguous loss theories provide an initial model for understanding how youth and their families adjust to new family circumstances following a deportation related separation.

CHAPTER 4: METHOD

According to Barton (2001), the research process consists of three main elements: epistemology, methodology, and methods of data collection. Epistemology provides the philosophical basis for how knowledge is generated; methodology is the paradigm in which the researcher conducts research and applies theory; and methods are the tools that the researcher uses to gather data. In this chapter these elements are discussed, the study site and sampling procedures are detailed, the role of the researcher is stated, and observation and interview protocols are described. The chapter is concluded by noting the analytic process and discussing the limitations of the research design.

Epistemological Frame

This study employed a social constructivism epistemology. Through this frame, the researcher seeks to understand the individual's worldviews and experiences (Creswell, 2007).

This is relevant to this study for understanding the subjective experiences of adolescents and their caregivers who have also experienced a forced family separation. According to Derry (1999), social constructivism emphasizes the importance of culture and context in understanding social phenomena and constructing knowledge based on this understanding. The goal of this research was to rely on the participants' views of their adjustment process. In the study, Latino/a youths' worldviews are shaped through interactions with their parents, caregivers, and through historical and cultural norms. In their circumstances, theirs and their parent's immigrant status bears significance on these understandings.

Methodology

This research project uses a qualitative approach. Qualitative inquiry seeks to understand the experiences and perceptions of people who are part of the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 1999). The underlying assumption is that a phenomenon can best be understood as viewed by those who experience it (Patton, 1999). Researchers investigate the phenomenon of interest by understanding how individuals define and live in this phenomenon, which is constructed by their beliefs, values, and cultures. According to Berg (1988) qualitative research allows the researcher to share others' understandings and to explore how people give structure and meaning to their lives. Although there are many types of qualitative research, phenomenology was selected as the guiding methodology for this study. Phenomenology seeks to understand the essence of a phenomenon and to provide a deep understanding of a shared experience. Phenomenology is also used to provide thick descriptions of the lived experiences of a small set of individuals in relation to a particular situation or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

One of the defining characteristics of the phenomenological approach is that the researcher forges an interpretation of the meaning of the lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Within this approach, careful techniques are used to keep descriptions as faithful as possible to the experiential raw data; this is accomplished by extreme care in moving step by step and in being mindful not to delete from, add to, change, or distort anything originally present in the initial “meaning units” of the participants own words (Padgett, 1988). Descriptive phenomenological research investigates experiences to obtain holistic descriptions, which then provide the basis for a reflective analysis to capture the essences of these experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology assumes: “There is an essence or essences to shared experience” (Patton, 1999, p.70). These essences are the core meanings shared by those who have had similar experiences. The procedures of a phenomenological study include reading the original data, which consists of crude descriptions obtained through open-ended questions and dialogue, and describing the structure of the experience based on participants’ reflections and interpretations of their stories (Creswell, 2007). The final report of a phenomenological study brings an essence of the experience of interest and recognizes a unifying meaning of the experience (Creswell, 2007).

Phenomenology serves three main purposes for research (1) discerning the meanings that individual’s make of a situation (2) developing an understanding of local situations in all their complexity; and (3) providing the opportunity to observe and understand processes as they happen (Anderson-Levitt, 2006). Therefore, a phenomenological application to this study focused on how young people and their caregivers make meaning of their experience adjusting to new family circumstances following a forced family separation. Phenomenology as a methodology also tends to have smaller and more homogenous samples of individuals who share a core experience, which guided my sampling process.

Research Site and Context

Data were collected at the International Academy, an autonomous, but public K-12 pilot school located in a community that serves neighborhood students from Pico Union and Koreatown in central Los Angeles. In 2009, International Academy opened its doors serving 340 students from kindergarten through fifth grade. A year later, they added grades 6-12 serving 840 students. In the fall of 2011, the school grew to capacity serving a total of 978 grades K-12 students.

As a newer school located in a densely populated urban community, the institution is being modeled as a *community school* to best meet the needs of its student population. During the 2013-2014 academic year, the student population was predominantly Latino (80%) and Asian (14%). According to Murillo (2015), one-third of all International Academy high school students identified as undocumented. Moreover, 87% of students were classified as low income and 55% as Limited English Proficient (LEP). A diverse group of teachers and administrators comprise the faculty. Just under half of the teachers (45%) identify as Latina/o, 31% identify as Asian, 22% identify as White, and 2% as Black (Quartz, 2013).

The culture of Latino and Korean groups is apparent through widely visible Spanish and Korean billboards, languages spoken, restaurants, and signs around the neighborhood. In Los Angeles County, 1 in 10 residents are undocumented (Wood, 2013). Sixty three percent of those undocumented residents in Los Angeles are Mexican, 22% are from Central America and 8% are from the Philippines, China, or Korea (Wood, 2013). In Koreatown, 32% of the adult population is undocumented (Wood, 2013), which contributed to this location being an ideal setting for examining the experiences of adolescents and their undocumented families.

Recruitment and Sample

To address the study's research questions, a sample of Latino/a youth who experienced the deportation of a parent were purposively recruited from International Academy. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 8 students, ages 14-18 years, and their caregivers. Recruitment efforts began with the adolescents and then the caregivers. Flyers were posted around the school campus and in the counseling center. Classroom recruitment presentations were also conducted and referrals were obtained from teachers, administrators, and counselors who worked directly with immigrant students. These staff served as *key informants* who were aware of students who had experienced a forced family separation due to deportation. Once a potential respondent was identified, a face-to-face screening interview was conducted. Participants were eligible for inclusion if the following criteria were met: 1) Latino descent; 2) between the ages of 14-18 years; 3) have experienced a forced family separation due to detention and/or deportation; and 4) have a caregiver willing to also participate in the study. Once youth participants were determined eligible, each respective caregiver was contacted and an in-person meeting was scheduled to obtain informed parental consent. As a recruitment incentive, all participants received a \$20 gift card.

Focal Data Set

Details regarding youth participants' age, gender, country of origin, age at which the family separation occurred, length of separation, parent deported, and current living situations are summarized in Table 1 found in Appendix A. Among the youth participants, five were male and three were female. All youth participants were born in the U.S., and had family members who were both documented and undocumented in the U.S. The length of the forced parental separation varied among the 8 youth. The average length of separation between a youth and their

caregiver at the time of the interview was two years. Participants were bilingual; fluent in English and Spanish.

Presented in Table 2, found in Appendix B, the parents/caregivers in this study also shared a wide range of experiences. Six were biological mothers (who were not deported) and two caregivers were aunts of the youth participants (who gained temporary custody of their nephews upon the deportation of both the youth's parents). All parent/caregiver participants were foreign-born (four Mexican, three El Salvadorian, and one Honduran). The parent/caregivers had been consistently living in the U.S. since their families migrated to Los Angeles during the 1990's-early 2000's. Caregivers' educational level and occupational status varied. Four mother/caregiver participants had completed 10 or more years of formal education, while the rest had received eight years or less. Of the 8 mother/caregivers, 6 worked outside of the home. The age range of mother/caregiver participants was between 41-53 years. Three mothers worked as independent domestic contractors, 4 worked in the food service industry, and 1 worked in a dry-cleaning business. The eight families who participated in the study presented a wide-range of separation and adjustment pattern circumstances.

One of the principal barriers to recruitment was the inability to reach mothers/caregivers to provide consent for their child(ren) to participate in the study. Some parents/caregivers worked during the daytime and/or evenings and stated that they simply did not have time to participate because of their limited availability, with several participants disclosing they worked two jobs (both during the day and in the evening). Another barrier to recruitment was the sensitive nature of the study topic, which prevented some youth and/or parents/caregivers from consenting to participation. Two families were referred to participate in this study by key informants at the school, however, were unwilling to participate because of fear related to their

undocumented status. As a result, sensitivity to this issue was demonstrated by using culturally informed practices during recruitment to mitigate these concerns. For example, the researcher is both bilingual and bicultural and served as a volunteer at the recruitment site for a semester prior to recruitment, which provided some credibility with prospective participants. In this manner, the researcher was able to build rapport and trust with many immigrant families previously met through volunteer service, which supported obtaining consent for participants to be in the research study. Participants and their parents were informed that being in the research study was completely voluntary and that they had a right to refuse participation. The researcher also thoroughly responded to any questions or concerns surrounding the impact of the study on their families.

In addition to adolescent participants and their parents, a third group of study participants comprised of school staff and school-based service providers was included. This purposive sample (n=11) consisted of two school administrators, one school-based social worker, one social work intern, one counselor, four teachers, and two school staff from the specialized parent center located on campus. These participants were selected to gain an understanding of how school staff and service providers respond to the needs of these youth and their families. These key informants had depth of experience and knowledge about how youth cope academically, socially, and emotionally following a forced separation. I recruited participants using email, flyers, and personal contact. Additional information regarding each staff and service providers' role is provided in Table 3, Appendix C.

Data Collection

Youth. From January-April 2016, one in-depth individual interview was conducted with each youth participant (n=8). All interviews were face-to-face, semi-structured, and lasted

approximately an hour to an hour and a half. Interviews were digitally recorded with the participants' permission and took place in a private space at the International Academy. All interviews were conducted in English based upon participants' preferences. The youth interview guide contained a range of open-ended and probing questions regarding youth's psychosocial well-being, family well-being and social service needs. For example, in order to gain an idea of how youth coped, the researcher asked, "*Can you tell me about the process of how your parent(s) was separated from your family and what that was like for you?*" To gain insight on how youth and family members adjusted to these new family circumstances, the researcher inquired, "*Please tell me a little about your relationship with your current caregiver (mother, grandmother, aunt, uncle, etc.).*" To gain information on how social service systems responded to the needs of these youth, the researcher asked, "*Following the separation from your parent(s), what type of support has been most helpful to you?*" The interview guide was flexibly structured to permit interview adaptation for each respondent's unique story (Shenton, 2004). An example of the interview protocol is included in Appendix D.

Caregivers. From January-May 2016, one in-depth individual interview was conducted with the youth participant's parent/caregivers (n=8). All interviews were face-to-face, semi-structured, and lasted approximately an hour and a half to two hours. Interviews took place in a private space at the International Academy. Based on participants' preferences, interviews were conducted in Spanish and digitally recorded with their consent. Interview questions were open-ended to introduce the research topics and to allow participants to share their experiences of coping with family separation. Prompts and probing strategies were employed to encourage participants to explore more in-depth ideas and topics about interview question topics. For example, these probes included: "*Please tell me more about that,*" or, "*What examples come to*

mind?” The interview guide questions focused on topics regarding to youth and family psychosocial wellbeing, family dynamics post-deportation, and social service needs. For example, the researcher asked, *“Can you share how your child has coped/adjusted/dealt with the separation he/she experienced from his/her parent?”* In order to learn more about how the family system has adjusted, the researcher asked, *“What have been some of the challenges and/or successes of how you and your family have coped following the separation of your spouse?”* In order to learn more about how social service systems have responded to the needs of these families, the researcher asked, *“What type of assistance has helped you and your family feel supported during this time: support from school, friends, family, church, or a local agency?”* The guide was also flexibly structured to allow interview adaptation based on each respondent’s unique story. An example of the interview guide is provided in Appendix E.

Service providers. One in-depth semi-structured interview was conducted with social service providers, staff, teachers, and administrators (n=11) during February-May 2016, at International Academy. The length of time of employment at the recruitment site ranged from 1-5 years. Interview questions focused on four general categories: 1) How youth coped in the school context following the deportation of a parent(s); 2) which school and community level resources were available to these youth and their families; 3) perceptions of youth and/or families’ psychosocial well-being and belonging in school post family separation; and 4) academic, socioemotional and social support needs of students. Interviews were conducted after standard school hours in a private space on campus and lasted approximately 45 minutes to one-hour. Interview questions were designed to elicit feedback from school personnel of their perspectives on how youth and their families cope with parental loss and what types of service provisions are utilized. An example of the interview protocol is provided in Appendix F.

Protection of Human Subjects

First-generation Latino youth and their mixed-status families are an extremely vulnerable population due to the nature of their family's legal status (Nguyen, Hernandez, Saetermoe, & Suarez-Orozco, 2013). As such, multiple precautions were taken to protect participants' identities and confidentiality. Participants were given a description of the study in both English and Spanish to demonstrate cultural sensitivity and awareness concerning the participants' and their families' understanding for the research study. Both youth and their parent/caregivers were informed of the benefits and risks of participating in the study and were assured that their identity would be protected through confidentiality measures. To protect the confidentiality of participants, the legal names of individuals were not used in notes and were instead substituted by pseudonyms and codes. The name of the school that served as the recruitment and interview site was also changed to avoid linking students and associated personnel from the school with this study. All participants were also assured that any data collected during the study would be destroyed 2 years after completion of the study.

The literature suggests youth and adults can often be fearful of talking about the experience of separation, even in the context of an established relationship with a sensitive interview (Suarez-Orozco, et al., 2011). Likewise, youth and parents interviewed in this study tended to respond briefly, often spoke of having forgotten about the details of the separation, and frequently became tearful or emotional. In anticipation of interview content evoking painful feelings, the researcher approached each interview session with sensitivity and caution. As a trained social worker, the researcher was prepared to identify signs of discomfort or distress from participants. To convey a safe and comfortable interview setting, all interviews were conducted in the participants' community. As a part of the informed consent process, all participants were

informed of their right to refuse to answer any question and reminded that participation in the study was entirely voluntary. In obtaining informed consent from minor's parent/caregivers, all participants received an oral explanation of the study and a written information sheet in Spanish and English. To further protect the identity and confidentiality of student participants, only the researcher had access to any identifiable data. Furthermore, the data was coded and stored in an encrypted, password-protected computer. During the process of obtaining informed consent, all aspects of voluntary participation and confidentiality procedures were explained.

Analysis Procedures

Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method was employed as a data analysis guide. According to Creswell (2007), phenomenological data analysis consists of a series of steps. First, audio recorded interviews were transcribed and translated from Spanish into English. Due to differing language interpretations between English and Spanish, translated interviews were not verbatim in an effort to retain the authenticity of emotion shared by the youth and their parent's/caregiver's. All interview data were analyzed at the close of data collection. Transcripts and field notes were entered into Dedoose, a qualitative software program that enables the efficient storing, retrieving, analyzing, and sharing of data. Original transcriptions were divided into statements and converted into clusters of meanings that described concepts relevant to the phenomenon of forced family separation. Clusters were further grouped to create a general description of the essence of the phenomenon.

In qualitative data analysis, coding provides a means of purposefully managing, locating, identifying, sifting, sorting, and querying data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Saldaña, 2013). In this manner, data were manually open-coded, which is described as “assigning [a] shorthand designation to various aspects of [one's] data so that [the researcher] can easily retrieve specific

pieces of the data” (Merriam, 2014, p. 173). Codes were produced as similar words used across participant interviews. Segments of coded data were then extracted into codebook matrices, which allowed for identification of themes and comparison across the dyads of participants (i.e., youth participants, parents/caregivers, and school personnel).

Participants’ descriptions and interpretations were used to identify similar and different views within and/or among participants’ experiences of coping with a forced family separation. Meanings of experiences were thereafter formulated from these significant statements and reduced into meaningful segments. These segments were assigned names by combining codes into broader categories or themes that were common across all the participants’ narratives. Themes were reviewed and further grouped into categorical families to condense the essence of participants’ experiences of how youth coped with the deportation of a parent(s), and how families adjusted to new circumstances. The statements and themes derived from data analysis were used to develop a structural description of the context and setting that influenced the participants’ experiences surrounding the phenomenon. An additional interpretative strategy used in this study included a dyadic perspective to cross-compare the transcripts to highlight similarities and differences between youth and their parents/caregivers.

From the structural and textural descriptions, a composite description was written that presented the “essence” of the phenomenon, which is expressed as the essential, invariant structure. Primarily, this passage focused on the commonalities of the families that experienced a deportation related separation (Creswell, 2007). This descriptive passage is generally 1-2 paragraphs and intends to provide consumers of knowledge or others interested in the phenomenon under study with increased awareness potentially expressed as, *“I understand better what it is like for someone to experience a forced family separation”* (Polkinghorne,

1989). From these statements three core themes emerged:

1. Difficulties Coping with Parental Loss,
2. Modifying Family Structures, and
3. Rolling up Our Sleeves and Filling in the Gaps.

Table 4, Appendix G, displays a visual representation of the core concepts that contributed to these themes.

Analytical themes were connected to the theoretical framework that included family systems theory and ambiguous loss theory to explain aspects of human behavior and experiences in an effort to “make sense” and give context to this study’s findings. Openness was also maintained for flexibility in applying new theories or expanding existing ones based on the themes that emerged during analysis.

Methodological rigor was attained through the application of verification, validation, and validity (Meadows & Morse, 2001). Verification is the first step in achieving validity; this standard was fulfilled through literature searches, adhering to the practices of phenomenological design, utilizing an appropriate qualitative research sample size, and interviewing participants until achieving data saturation (Creswell, 2007). To support accurate data analysis, member checking was used by returning to research participants to solicit feedback surrounding the accuracy of thematic interpretations. Member-checking occurred less than a week after interviews were conducted.

The researcher also practiced awareness surrounding potential biases (i.e., positionality) and utilized the strategy of bracketing (Moustakas, 1994) to minimize any preconceived ideas about the participants to guide data collection and analysis. Field notes, reflexive journals, and memos were also used as audit trails. Furthermore, to enhance validity, multiple sources of data

collection were used, which included youth, parents/caregivers, and service providers. Qualitative data analysis software, Dedoose, was also used to assist with data management given the large quantity of data (Kelle & Laurie, 1995) and to ensure a systematic approach to the coding of each interview (Lee & Fielding, 1996). The use of Dedoose to code and retrieve the data also served as an audit trail to provide documentation of the data analysis process. In addition, qualitative analysis experts were consulted to periodically review and support the analysis during all stages of the study. Upon the completion of coding the data, multiple tables were created to help facilitate data interpretation and gain visual overview of the data across cases, and across groups of participants (i.e., youth, caregivers, and social service providers). Participants' voices guided the data analysis narrative with multiple in vivo quotes from participants' interviews being used to supplement the narrative when reporting the results. Vignettes were also utilized to create descriptive and rich stories (Creswell, 2007). The next chapter presents the findings of this phenomenological study.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

This study sought to examine how Latino youth and their immigrant families experience and cope with forced family separations. It focused on how they adjusted to new family circumstances and how social service providers played a role in assisting them in meeting their needs. The analysis revealed four main findings:

1. Following the deportation of a parent, youth experienced psychosocial stress including anxiety, depression, fear and ambiguous loss;
2. Families had to adjust to new family circumstances due to economic loss and increased family tension;

3. Families who experienced the deportation of a parent retreated from social life, drastically shrinking their social networks; and
4. Families relied heavily upon informal support networks and faith-based agencies rather than government social services due to a fear of further family separation.

Youth Adjustment Process

As shown in Table 4, one of the major themes that emerged from this study surrounding how youth coped with the deportation of a parent(s) was “difficulties coping with parental loss,” which included significant emotional turmoil. The analysis of the data suggests that the factors that caused this turmoil were: 1) experiencing trauma; 2) fearing additional family separation; 3) behavioral changes; and 4) academic disruptions and challenges. Prior to the experience of forced separation, youth described having close-knit families who enjoyed spending time together. For example, they took local trips together on the weekends, ate dinner together, and some went to church on Sundays. Mothers and youth shared that joint activities always played a central aspect in their lives. All eight families shared a common experience of migration and acculturation and reported that extended family has helped them financially and emotionally through the difficulties of migration and deportation.

Experiencing Trauma

At some point during the high school experience, all participants experienced family disruption due to the deportation of one or both parents. As the young people described, these deportations tended to take place in the home, parents’ place of employment, or during a traffic stop. In one family, ICE agents arrested the parents while out shopping in a strip mall purchasing diapers for the family’s youngest child. Although none of the youth directly witnessed the arrest of a parent firsthand, they were greatly traumatized by these events and were forced to relocate

with their mother to live with extended family members. For the purpose of this study, the non-deported biological parent of six of the youth participants will be referred to as “mother;” two youth participants, Kevin and Marco, experienced the deportation of both biological parents and their aunts, who are their relative guardians, will be referred to as “caregiver.”

Marco, a bright 14-year-old high school freshman, reported that a year prior, his parents were stopped and detained on a car trip back to the U.S. after a short trip to Tijuana to visit their ailing parents. That weekend, Marco remained in Los Angeles with his aunt and uncle so that he could participate in a soccer tournament. In reflecting upon his experience with learning that his parents were arrested and detained at the border, Marco recalled how terrified the experience was for him and his family. He commented:

It still shakes me up every time I tell this story. A year ago, I received an unexpected phone call from my mom and could barely understand what she was saying because she was crying so much. She told me that she and my father were picked up by border patrol and couldn't come back [to the U.S.] because of their undocumented status. I was trembling and crying too, and then like a week later, the shock set in that they were not coming back. I had to move in with my aunt and uncle in Los Angeles. It was so hard. I had to change schools and leave my entire life behind. I was scared and sad, and couldn't tell any of my friends what had happened. I still have flashbacks to that day; to that phone call, and I still have a hard time sleeping.

The lasting effects of Marco's experience have been manifested in the form of fear, intense nervousness, and depression.

While some parents were subject to an expedited deportation process, others were detained in a detention facility for up to four months. For the families whose loved-one (often the

biological father) remained in detention prior to deportation, the family experienced a great deal of anxiety resulting from the uncertainty of the outcome of their loved-one's case. This anxiety was further compounded by the restricted ability to visit family members in detention centers, particularly when the remaining caregiver was also undocumented and thereby at risk of being apprehended.

For each of the youths, the arrest, detention, and deportation of one or more parent was a traumatic event. They all experienced depression, isolation, and for a few, a series of nightmares and changes in their sleeping and eating patterns. Paulina, is a 14-year-old high school sophomore whose father was stopped and arrested for a DUI and later deported in 2013. She was 12 years old at the time of deportation and recalls:

I couldn't sleep or eat for weeks after my father got taken away from us. I was so upset and confused. Like, why is this happening, my dad is not a criminal. He was a soccer coach to my sister, and worked at the grocery store. I never got to say goodbye and it haunts me in my sleep sometimes.

Other trauma symptoms that young people experienced included somatic issues including: stomach aches, migraines, and panic attacks. For example, Kevin, a quiet 16-year-old high school sophomore, experienced the loss of both parents who were deported when he was 14 years-old because they lacked legal documents to work in in the U.S. He shared his recollection:

Both of my parents got sent back to El Salvador. I could have gone with them but they told me I couldn't because of all the gangs and violence back home. So, I went to live with my *tia* in Los Angeles. After it all happened, I remember having these intense reactions, like it felt like I was going to die. It felt like my whole world just crashed. I panicked without my parents. Like, everything that made me feel safe in the world –

my family and home was now gone. I had headaches all the time and lost so much weight. I looked like I was barely there.

For Kevin, and each of these young people, forced family separation resulted in significant trauma, loss, and grief.

Fearing Additional Family Separation

One of the core fears that many of the youths experienced following a forced separation was that their remaining caregiver (often the mother) could also be deported. These participants worried and that they would be subsequently left alone in the U.S. Stephanie, a 17-year-old high school senior whose father was deported two years ago, described her inability to concentrate in school after the detention and deportation events. She stated, “I’m always worried about what is going on with my mom. She might be at work or at the store and you don’t know what is going to happen.” Similarly, Oscar, an 18-year-old who experienced the deportation of his father two years prior, added: “It’s like when you’re calling your mom and she is not answering the phone. I get a feeling inside, like something is wrong, and my mind starts racing, what if my mom was arrested?”

Youth participants also described feeling worried about their own well-being. They feared that they could end up in the foster care system and/or homeless if their mothers (who were also undocumented) were deported. In addition to fearing their own safety, youth also wondered if they would be able to accomplish their career goals of becoming a doctor, a veterinarian, a chef, a nurse, or an Army cadet. For example, Ismael, a 17-year-old male who played on the high school basketball team and experienced the forced separation of his father one-year prior shared:

My dad was barely deported a year ago, and my mom is also undocumented. I always

worry, could I be deported too? It's so confusing. Like who gets to stay here anyway?

What would happen to me if my mom was deported? I don't have family nearby."

Ismael was acutely aware of how preoccupied he was with the fear of losing his mother and/or of being deported himself. Despite his status as a U.S. citizen, he felt afraid that he could also be separated from his mother because of her undocumented status and was fearful for his own well-being. Similarly, Maritza, a 15-year-old high school sophomore whose father was detained and then deported to El Salvador, shared:

My father left Central America twenty-five years ago to escape the Civil War, only to get forced back there. The thought of having to go live in a country that you barely even know is scary. My mom and I are barely making it without my dad. I can't even imagine if my mom got deported too; I would be completely lost.

Youth linked their safety to that of their mother's well-being, illustrating how fearful they were of further family separation.

Youth reported feeling intimidated by authority figures power and ability to separate families. They feared authority figures including the police, sheriffs, and for some, even firefighters. Youth participants were also confused about the role of police officers and did not understand the difference between immigration officials (ICE) and the police. Resulting from these experiences, their perceptions of authority figures changed quite dramatically. Raul is a sixteen-year-old young man whose parents were both detained and arrested for speeding when he was 13 years old. He described this shift in his perception of law enforcement, "from someone that can help you to someone who is a threat to the family." He added:

One time when I was younger we were at the park when I heard sirens. I didn't know what was going on and just said, 'Run, Mommy run!' We crawled under a picnic table

and I remember saying, ‘Quick, get down, hide!’ I realized it was actually just a police car driving by, but it was scary and so messed up because we should feel safe and protected by the police but instead we have to hide.

This quote illustrates how these young people came to believe that authority figures are *muy malo*, or “very bad.” Raul’s fear of the police also speaks to the trauma that undocumented youths and families experience in their current communities.

Behavioral Changes

Like their children, the mothers concurred that they had observed a range of behavioral and emotional changes in their children following the detention and deportation of their fathers. For instance, they described their children as having experienced a loss of appetite and weight loss following deportation. Others became more aggressive or increasingly displayed “acting out” behaviors. Some mothers stated that their children became extremely emotional for several weeks, and even months, after the detention and deportation proceedings of their fathers. They recalled that symptoms of sadness and anger intensified to the point that they believed their children may have been depressed. In addition, mothers reported difficulties managing their children’s emotions and behavior; especially those who had previously relied upon their husbands for doling out discipline. Oscar’s mother, Mariella, explained her frustrations in dealing with her son’s behavioral changes:

Now that Oscar’s father is gone, he acts like he can do whatever he wants. He talks back to me. It is a constant struggle trying to get him to respect my rules, I miss the additional support that Oscar’s father gave to me and to our family.

Many of the mothers’ stories also reflected a sense of fear, sadness, anxiety, and hyper vigilance in keeping with what was reflected in the youths’ interviews. Fabiola, 48 mother of

Maritza, 15, reported that her daughter asks daily, “¿A que hora va a llegar a la casa mami?” [What time are you going to be home?]. Fabiola added that her daughter, calls me non-stop throughout the day when I am at work to make sure I’m safe. She said, “My daughter is fearful that when she goes to school, or when I go to work, I’ll somehow not return – just like her father who was deported while away at work.”

In some instances, the behavior changes were so severe that mothers’ felt at a loss for how to cope with her children’s angry outbursts. For example, Maria 41, the mother of Raul, 16, and Blanca, 7, described her children’s reaction to their father’s deportation three years ago:

My children became so upset after their father was taken away. My son, Raul would say, Mama where is *papa*? He’d yell, and cry and he’d even hit his sister. I’ve had such a hard time dealing with his behavior. Raul still doesn’t understand that there is a law that doesn't permit us - undocumented immigrants to be here. My kids were confused because they thought that only a person who steals or does a crime, goes to jail. My kids argue and fight, and cry so much. They take out their hurt and frustration onto each other. It’s unbearable.

Maria’s experience highlights the struggles that families face in trying to understand and make sense of their new realities at home following a forced family separation. Young people described experiences of confusion, sadness, trauma, and fear of further loss, while mothers also noticed emotional and behavioral changes in their children.

Academic Disruptions and Challenges

Returning to school following deportation of one or more parents was extremely difficult for each of the young people as they were unable to concentrate on their studies. Youth described experiencing a great deal of fear about leaving the house and worried that immigration

enforcement could take place at their school-site. Subsequently, all youth participants experienced academic challenges. Teachers, school staff, and administrators shared that following a forced separation, children of deported parents have great difficulty holding their attention and staying on track in the classroom with academic their goals. Ms. Ramos, a history teacher at International Academy who had Kevin as a student shared, “I noticed Kevin’s mind was not there. He was pretty distraught for weeks; agitated, and very concerned about the future.” Some teachers shared that they allowed for more flexibility in turning in assignments because youth were simply not present in class mentally or emotionally.

The most obvious impact on children’s schooling was the increase in absences that occurred following the detention of a parent. Youth missed days of school because parents feared ICE might detain them on the route to school. One 18-year-old senior high school honors student, Oscar, missed two weeks of school while his father was detained and ended up missing several assignments and grades. Another high school student, Maritza, 15, had strong attendance and grades prior to the separation from her father, but afterward her academic performance deteriorated. A school administrator, Ms. Martinez shared:

We know that our undocumented immigrant families have unique needs and were missing a lot of school. We do a lot of outreach and make a lot of calls home to provide reassurance that their children and families are safe at our school and will be protected.

Teachers and staff shared that most students recovered academically a few months after they experienced a family separation. A teacher, Ms. Lozano, a strong advocate for the needs of immigrant families shared that the youths’ ability to bounce back depends on so many things. She said:

Some youth are like, I got to do better; my mom and dad are counting on me. And other

times, they seem to feel defeated, like, “what does it matter if this [family separation] can happen, why should I care about school? We are focused on helping these students by tuning into their needs and by being in communication with their parents. Without this level of support, children and families will not feel safe and will not be able to concentrate on their schoolwork.

Thus, as corroborated by youth, parents, and school officials alike, immigration enforcement and forced family separation resulted in psychosocial stressors for young people that included symptoms of trauma, fear of further family separation, behavioral changes, and interruptions in children’s schooling.

Family-Level Adjustment to New Circumstances

The family system had to undergo a number of adjustments because of immigration enforced family separation. As shown in Table 4, the second major theme, “modifying family structures,” refers to experiencing familial adjustment to new family circumstances following the deportation of a parent(s). Dimensions of this theme included 1) experiencing familial tensions; 2) retreating from social life, including drastically shrinking families’ social networks due to fear of further immigration enforcement; and 3) experiencing financial difficulties and housing instability; and 4) relying upon support from extended family members.

Modifying Family Structures

Prior to the arrest and deportation of loved ones, many of the participants’ family structures were two-parent nuclear households consisting of the mother, father, and children. Following the separation of a parent(s), each of the eight families moved in with extended family members to share rent and other living expenses. For the youth, one of the most difficult changes that they experienced following the forced separation of their father was the abrupt shift in

family structure from living with two parents to living with one (their mother) and extended family members. Most youth recalled missing their fathers yet having little contact with them because of challenges in communication across borders. Youths recalled having to share tight living spaces with siblings and cousins, and spending less time with their remaining parent (their mother) who had to take on additional work to supplement the loss of their father's income. For some, the abrupt change in family structure led to postponing personal goals such as going to college, because they needed to contribute financially to the household. For example, Stephanie, a 17-year-old junior in high school, discussed her frustrations with having to relocate frequently and deal with new house dynamics:

We've moved around so many times. Now we are living with my cousins and my aunt in her tiny garage. I miss having my own room and I wish I saw my mom more. She started making and selling tamales, and is hardly ever home these days. All these changes are hard.

Mothers coped with new circumstances by modifying family arrangements and reaching out to family members for economic and housing support. While these mothers found that relocating to live with their extended family was an economic necessity, young people on the other hand, felt an immense sense of loss due to the deportation of a parent(s) and because their mother was less available because of work-related obligations.

After the deportation event, families had to branch out and rely upon extended family for daily support. The mothers who were left to fend for themselves coped with the shock of their sudden loss of their husband by seeking emotional and financial support from extended family members. These relatives assisted mothers with child care, housing, and economic needs. Several families shared how it was especially crucial for them to rally together and pool their resources

together for their stability and survival. Mothers relied heavily on extended family for financial and other assistance over the longer term, as they did immediately following the deportation.

Isabel, 49, the mother of Paulina, 14, shared:

I am so grateful for my family here in Los Angeles. Some of them are U.S. citizens and have helped me learn the system. My sister invited me and my children to live with her after my husband was sent back to Mexico. Having her around has kept my depression away, because now, I am not going through this alone.

Nancy, 45, the mother of Ismael, similarly shared “We moved around a lot, until finally my sister let us live in her garage. It’s small and very cold, but at least we are together and not as worried about if we can pay next month’s rent.” Mothers also reported taking on the short and long term financial burdens because of forced separation and devised how to best financially provide for their children.

Familial Tensions

Forced family separations increased family tension and in some cases intensified existing family stressors between mothers and their children. Sudden single motherhood resulted in numerous changes in the family’s daily routines, especially childcare. For example, after Gladys’s husband was deported, she entered the workforce as a seamstress for the first time in eight years and as a result her daughter Stephanie, who was 15 years old, became the primary childcare provider for her 4-year old brother during after-school hours. Stephanie described the challenges she faced filling in for her mom at home:

My mom started working when I was in the 9th grade. So I’ve been pretty much taking care of my brother and running the house since then. I had less time to devote to school and friends. In a way, I feel a little resentful because I have to miss out on fun things that

my friends get to experience, like going out after school, but at the same time, who else would do it?

Stephanie felt the strain of having to help out around the house and provide childcare while her mom went back to work.

Like their children, mothers were also very emotionally affected by the loss of their spouse, which affected their family system. They were hyper-stressed and not their best selves because of experiencing loss, grief, and the shock of not having their spouse physically present. They described their own sadness, loss of energy, bouts of crying, anxiety, and uncertainty about the future due to their own undocumented status. For example, Fabiola, 48, mother of Maritza, described the precarious days following the arrest of her spouse:

The first few weeks after my husband was detained were horrible for my children and me... I was so nervous and upset about what else was going to happen to us and that fear doesn't go away. When a person is nervous, you pass it on to your kids and they feel anxious. I don't know what to do, I am human. I know my children are upset; I am too.

Similarly, Nancy, 45, the mother of Ismael, whose husband and sister were both deported in a large workplace raid, described how her own exacerbated sadness and anger affected her interactions with both Ismael and her daughter Ana. As a newly undocumented single parent of U.S.-born children, the fear of one day being forced to decide whether to leave her children or take them away from the only country they have ever known takes its toll, to the point that Nancy described as follows, "Sometimes I want to die so that I don't have to keep suffering." Nancy noted she sometimes scolds her children for 'any little thing' without understanding why." Similarly, Lorena, 50, aunt and relative caregiver of Marco who lost both parents to deportation, expressed, "I have less to give to my own kids because I am stressed out. I have to

be both the mother and the father to my children and also to my nephew Marco who lost his parents; it is exhausting.” Mothers such as Nancy and Fabiola expressed feelings of guilt and tension for being less emotionally available to their children due to their own grief over the loss of their spouse. Relative caregivers such as Maribella, Kevin’s aunt and Lorena, Marco’s aunt experienced being overwhelmed from taking on the role of a mother to their nephews, while also responding to the needs of their own households and biological children.

These abrupt changes, combined with trauma, led to difficulties in adjusting to new circumstances. For example, Maritza, a 17-year-old high school junior who was falling behind in her academics, described the ways in which tensions with her mother escalated after her father had been detained and deported. She explained that her father had always been the person whom she turned to for help with friends, relationships, and with her homework. Maritza recalled:

My mom has always been busy with my younger siblings so we never got close. My father has always been there for me, like when I had, like, projects to turn in, or just needed some advice he helped me a lot.

Following her father’s deportation, Maritza stopped doing her homework, got sent home from school for fighting on two occasions, and no longer had a desire to participate in everyday activities such as household chores and homework. Without her father’s supportive parenting style, Maritza experienced a great deal of sadness and longing for the daily support her father had provided and she also felt uncertain about how to connect with her mother.

Retreating from Social Life: Living Under the Radar

Pervasive throughout mothers’ experiences was the fear of being arrested and deported, which significantly changed how participants lived their public lives. Family routines also changed partly because of the fear of further family separation. Fear of law enforcement made

families wary of leaving their homes. Mariella, 48, mother of Oscar, noted that she kept her children home from school at times to avoid ICE:

I used to pick them up from school, now since we have to hide from ICE, I worry that if my son goes to school, maybe they [ICE] will find us, so sometimes when we hear from our neighbors that ICE is in our neighborhood, and my son stays home from school.

Mothers also described how reports from their neighbors, gossip, and or social media caused them to fear for their safety. Nancy, Ismael's mother stated that she received notices and warnings on Facebook and from her neighbors, "Stay at home tomorrow. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is conducting raids in the (restaurant) kitchens." Nancy shared that this type of fear and worry not only cost her a decrease in her salary because she stayed home from work so often, but also made her feel socially isolated.

Some mothers who lived with this looming fear of their own deportation described an acute feeling of being imprisoned in their own homes because of increased immigration enforcement activity in the neighborhood. For example, Maria, mother of Raul, reflected upon feeling confined to her home following the arrest and detention of her husband. She explained:

We used to go to the park, to the mall, stores, and camping. Now we hardly go anywhere. We mostly stay inside the house and avoid certain areas because we are all aware of ICE. This tension that we feel causes one to get depressed. We don't want to go anywhere, and then the frustration begins to come out. Then fights begin with each other, among the kids especially because there is so much frustration because they cannot go outside and play. It's as if we are prisoners in our own home. But even like this, it is still better to be here than in Mexico. In my home town of Juarez, Mexico, there is so much violence, gangs, and drug warfare that no one feels safe. Everyone tries to leave Mexico.

Ongoing fears about ICE operations and community tensions led to widespread social isolation, which led to a sense of protection through family seclusion. In the most extreme cases, Isabel, mother of Paulina recalled that she and her daughter have at times, stayed in the basement with their lights turned down so that no one would suspect that they were home. Isabel described the need to retreat indoors:

Maybe I'm paranoid, but I don't feel like we can go out around town like we used to. I have spoken to a couple of my neighbors and they told me, "There's a checkpoint at the grocery store. They arrested fifty people last night. Don't open the door for anyone, it might be ICE!" The only place where it's safe to go is church. People I know actually stay there for days/weeks at a time.

Through the theme of "retreating from social life," it became clear that families had to live under the radar; that their worlds became smaller. Yet, despite this new reality, families continued to reach for the American Dream even after having endured thousands of miles on their journey to the U.S. in hopes of providing better opportunities to their children than what is available in their home countries.

Experiencing Financial Difficulties and Housing Insecurity

Forced separations negatively affected families' financial situations and their ability to thrive materially and economically. All mothers and caregivers experienced hardships related to the sudden loss of their spouse including: difficulty paying bills, increasing debts, housing instability, food insecurity, legal fees, the inability to send remittance money to the deported parent in their home country, and apprehension about applying for public assistance. Without the incomes of the "breadwinners," particularly when families were still struggling to payoff migration debts, remaining family members struggled to make ends meet, which put further

stress on the family unit.

Mothers felt guilty for having to work more hours to meet the needs of their families, because it resulted in spending less quality time at home with their children. They scrambled to find enough work and arrange for child care and navigated cleverly through tertiary economies. For example, reselling clothes, furniture, or appliances at roadside stands, making tamales or tortillas in garages, setting up hair salons in living rooms, and cleaning houses. Fabiola, the mother of Maritza, noted her frustrations in having to take on additional work as a nanny while struggling to care for her own children, she shared, “I have to take care of other mother’s kids, when I can’t even spend time with my own. However, it turns out, as mothers, we suffer so much, and the work never ends.” These economic crises were especially prevalent among several families who had not yet paid off the debt incurred in migration. During this time mothers encountered significant difficulty coping with the economic and psychological stress caused by the arrest of their spouse or partner. They were often less integrated into U.S. society and less familiar with the means to cope with daily life than their spouse had been. This was especially true for Mariella, mother of Oscar, who explained:

I don’t have a driver’s license and have difficulty figuring out the Metro in Los Angeles, so just getting around town is hard. My husband was in charge of the money for the house. At first, I didn’t have access to the bank account either and couldn’t leave the house. It was so horrible, I just cried all the time because I felt so alone and helpless.

Following deportation, in these extreme cases, some mothers were left isolated, afraid, and unable to make the basic decisions about daily life that their husbands had often made before they were deported. Mothers were unaccustomed to making basic financial decisions and did not have access to husbands’ bank accounts. For these women, the loss of their husbands represented

not only the loss of a partner and breadwinner, but also a loss of a clear direction for their families.

Relying Upon Support from Extended Family

An additional core theme was that mothers relied upon the support of extended family members to help with day-to-day caregiving, emotional and tangible support. Mothers tried to maintain a sense of calmness and normalcy at home to lessen the impact of deportation on their children. Paulina's mom, Isabel, described the various methods that she and her family utilized to protect her daughter from the stressors of losing a parent:

My sister and I work together to try to provide my daughter with a sense of calmness after all that happened. For example, our routine here is that I go to work, come home, if she's awake, I ask her about school. We're searching for calmness in the home.

Another way that mothers utilized the support of their family members during this transition was by shielding children from details about their father's deportation. Parents of younger adolescents explained that they felt that it was inappropriate for children to have information about "adult" happenings (such as issues related to immigration enforcement) and worried that children would be upset, concerned, confused. Mariella, mother of Oscar, shared:

My family and I will tell my son everything when the time is right, for now he just needs to be a kid and stay focused on school. It's our job to worry about how we are going to pay our rent without the second income.

Some mothers informed their children that their fathers had to stay away at work for a long period of time. Others said that their father was visiting family in their country of origin. However, for younger adolescents who could not understand the concept of parents not having "papers," sudden separation was considered personal abandonment. Mothers and their family

members relayed that they felt a sense of responsibility to limit the information that children received about why and how their parent(s) had been deported so that they would not personalize the cause of the separation. For these families, this strong family orientation, often termed *familismo*, was very present in how they handled the forced separation.

Community Social Services: Responding to the Needs of Families

In speaking with school personnel including teachers, administrators, school staff, and school-based social workers and counselors, a third major theme emerged in this study, which is described as “rolling up our sleeves to fill in the gaps.” This theme is related to how social service systems responded to the needs of families post-deportation. This core theme relates to how various individuals and organizations assisted these families during this time of crisis and readjustment. These providers ranged from school personnel including teachers, administrators, and school-based social workers to community-based organizations to faith based agencies. Providers all committed to helping these families cope with this traumatic period in their lives and chart a way forward. Dimensions of this theme included: (1) overwhelmed and under-resourced: barriers to service delivery; (2) experiencing fear in accessing support; and (3) Avoiding social services and health care; (4) experiencing newfound social support (see Table 4).

Forced separations caused major disruption in the lives of families, creating a need for social services to fill some material and emotional gaps. However, social service supports such as public assistance and medical benefits were often out of reach for many of these families because of their undocumented status. Since the school that these youths attended offers a wide array of psychosocial supports, including after-school programs, counseling and academic and behavioral interventions, the youths tended to rely upon the school as a beacon of support. Given

the school's location in a high immigrant community with a large undocumented population, school personnel were particularly aware of the challenges that students and their immigrant families face and are often prepared to help families in ways they can. Teachers, school administrators, social workers, and faith-based providers, went above and beyond to assist youth by providing crisis intervention, counseling, case management, information and referral services, and provisions for their basic needs.

Rolling Up Our Sleeves to Fill in the Gaps

At International Academy (the recruitment and interview site), most staff, faculty, and administrators are bilingual in English and Spanish and aim to create a welcoming environment for monolingual Spanish speaking students and parents. Many of the teachers were familiar with students who had experienced forced family separation and took a very hands-on approach to caring for them. Teachers like Ms. Lozano, who taught English at the school for three years and was also raised in an immigrant family, provided emotional support to several of the young people in this study who had been affected by a forced family separation. She shared:

I play many roles to these youth throughout any single day. I am their teacher, psychologist, and sometimes I am like their mother and their coach. Their emotions are constantly up and down, especially after experiencing the loss of a parent. I counsel them when they feel sad, motivate them when they feel they can't continue, and nurture them when they need that too.

Some teachers noticed that these students were coming to school less prepared, without necessary school supplies and on occasion, students confided that they had missed several meals since they moved to Los Angeles to live with their extended relatives. Ms. Claudina, a 9th grade homeroom teacher who was born in Honduras, discussed how she offers support:

I know what it's like to experience the ups and downs of being from an immigrant family. My parents were from Central America, so I can relate to their experiences.

Financially, it is hard and some of these kids have to work to help pay for rent. There are times when I can see how tired they are and yet they are still trying as best as they can to be here at school. I sometimes bring in cereal for them in the morning so at least they start the day with food in their stomachs. They know that they can count on me.

The youth in this study felt and appreciated the support they received at school to meet some of their basic material needs. Maritza, 15, who lives at her aunt's house with her mom spoke about the impact that Ms. Ramos, a 10th grade history teacher who teaches an advisory class for first-generation immigrant students, has had on her family. Ms. Ramos is a strict, but also caring teacher and was most helpful to her. Maritza recalled:

Ms. Ramos knew that my family had been through a lot. It was more than eight people living at my aunt's house, and we didn't have enough money for school supplies or food sometimes. Most of the teachers... they donated food and clothes to my family. I remember coming home from school with a lot of bags full of like food and diapers and other stuff.

Similarly, others recalled that they benefitted from the social-emotional support that they received from their teachers and staff at the school. For example, Paulina, 14, credited her teachers with her ability to remain strong during her father's deportation case. She shared:

I talk to all my teachers because they know me and have noticed I've been down since my father got sent away. They are there for me; I can go into their classroom before school or after and vent or just hang out. Just being able to go there whenever I want is so helpful. They care about me and have been supportive.

In addition to motivating students to persist and do the best they can, teachers and staff were attuned to the differences in their students' behavior and emotions following the deportation event. After exhibiting depressive symptoms and anxiety, about half of the youth participants were referred by teachers to counseling services at the school. Some participants relied heavily upon the emotional support they received through the counseling center at school. For example, Ismael, 17, shared:

I have been getting counseling at school for the past three months and I feel different, like so much better than I was a few months ago. I used to just want to just stay in bed all day. I cry so much less now; I think because I don't feel so alone. I learned how to breathe and take care of myself when I feel down. I'm worried though about what it will be like during the summer when school is out. I won't have any support.

Stephanie, 17, a high school senior also discussed the fear that she had over potentially losing her supportive school networks once she graduates. She shared, "This school is my second home. I'm worried that I won't have anyone to talk to or to help me once I graduate. My teachers and everyone here, they get me."

Despite the school staff's commitment to help students cope with a forced family separation, there were some noticeable differences in the way teachers and staff responded to students' needs and coping mechanisms based on gender. One school counselor, Ms. Phillips, described the differences in coping and help-seeking behaviors between boys and girls who had experienced forced family separation. She shared:

Female students create a support system for each other. It's not about jokes, or making fun of one another. It's actually about supporting themselves and one another and learning. Like, "Ok, this is how I got through it." Boys in contrast, joke and tend to make

fun of one another. They use humor, a very sarcastic humor. They don't support each other, so the behavior is a little more challenging. Even with their friends, boys are not willing to ask for help.

Marco, 13, described his reluctance to ask for help from his peers or teachers, "I just deal with it on my own. I don't really get support from no one. I keep things to myself. If you tell your friends, they will make fun of you." Ms. Phillips added, "Girls tended to be a little more resilient and were more willing to adapt to their new circumstances and more willing to ask for help and talk to people about their needs."

In addition to teachers and staff, female participants also relied upon their peer networks at school for emotional support as they coped with loss, grief, and the uncertainty of the future. For example, Stephanie, 17, shared, "I tell my friends at school everything that has happened to my family. They have seen me cry, get upset, feel so scared, and they are still there for me." In contrast, most male participants on the other hand recalled that they did not seek out the support of teachers or counselors. Ms. Washington, a school administrator explained:

We are learning that we have to be strategic in how we support these youth. In the past we've offered support groups for recent immigrants and children of immigrants, but it seems like we need to provide something different for kids who have gone through this type of parental loss. Whether its groups or individual support, it may need to be gender specific because males and female students seem to have different experiences and needs.

While all participants experienced difficulty adjusting to school and family dynamics following the deportation, in the school context, there were some discernible differences between how male participants and their female counterparts sought and utilized social supports.

Overwhelmed and Under-Resourced: Barriers to Service Delivery

At the International Academy, parental involvement plays a significant role in shaping the culture of the school. There is a dedicated parent center on campus which is led by a bilingual staff member and provides a welcoming environment for monolingual Spanish speaking parents. The parent center offers bilingual workshops on parenting, literacy, and provides a space for parents to socialize with other families. In essence, parents are highly regarded as assets on campus.

Despite such a welcoming environment, school staff noted some of the challenges that arose in meeting the unique needs of undocumented parents and youth who have experienced immigration enforcement. Ms. G. a school social worker, highlighted some of the barriers that exist in providing service delivery at the school. She explained:

Schools are not designed to deal with this type of pervasive ongoing crisis in the community. We try, but we don't have the specific trauma-based resources or training. Teachers, staff, school secretaries, even the janitor needs help in learning how to deal with the level of fear, PTSD, and anxiety that these kids and their moms are carrying around with them. It affects everything they do in school and in the community. The youth lose their focus and every little thing sets them off. The fear of deportation is real. It is always on their minds.

Teachers also described some of the limitations they experienced in serving undocumented youth and parents. Ms. Johnson, a teacher at the school shared:

Teachers need specific training to be able to help students stay focused in the classroom and we also need help in learning how to be there for parents who have immigration

issues. We don't really get that kind of support from our district. We are too focused on meeting the Core Standards.

These teachers' remarks reflected the challenges they face in the day-to-day struggle of meeting academic benchmarks, engaging students and their parents academically, while also tending to their emotional needs.

A school social worker, Ms. G. described some of the systemic barriers that she had encountered in referring families who have experienced trauma to services outside of the school system. She shared:

We literally get bombarded with undocumented immigrant families, who don't know what to do. They don't know where to go for support, don't have the financial means to pay for services and don't know how to navigate the community to seek support. We (social workers) have to help them by sometimes walking with them to the one agency nearby that serves Latinos, but we don't have the time! They are scared to seek support because of the fear of being asked about their legal status. Our district needs to provide us with more services.

Similarly, social work intern Ms. Zelaya, expressed her frustrations with feeling overwhelmed and under-resourced as a provider at the school. She explained:

Families need greater support than we can offer at the school. I can provide some case management services, and informal counseling, but they really need intensive trauma-informed care. I try to refer these parents to Spanish speaking service providers in the community, but honestly, I don't think they go. As Latinas, they experience cultural stigma around accessing mental health support and on top of that, are too scared of filling out the paperwork and being found out.

School staff described feelings of frustration and barriers in serving families who have experienced immigration enforcement. Ms. Solano, co-coordinator of the parent center on campus, which provides skill-based workshops for parents such as computer literacy and English as a Second Language classes, highlighted the importance of providing safe spaces for parents to share mutual support. She shared, “We need to forget the assumption that we know their experience. We have no idea what they have gone through, what it feels like to deal with ICE, to be dehumanized, and to suddenly lose your loved-one.” Similarly, Ms. Barreras, co-director of the parent center shared:

Parents need support groups; individual therapy and family therapy is fine, but in my opinion, they need to be around other moms and dads who have been through something similar and can say, “We’ve been through it, and it will get better.”

This quote speaks to how school social workers, counselors, teachers, and administrators wrestled with how to best serve the needs of undocumented parents who are often afraid to access services. School-based providers filled an important gap in service provision for youth, yet felt unprepared and limited in their capacity to fully serve undocumented families’ needs because they lack of resources, training, and time. As one school counselor shared, “I am here but I also have to put out all these other “fires” and emergencies on campus. I can’t concentrate on their needs because I am stretched too thin.” Ultimately, service providers felt ill-equipped to deal with the needs of their clients.

Experiencing Fear in Accessing Social Support

The youth participants were for the most part open to reaching out to their teachers, school staff, and social workers for help. However, their mothers/caregivers were far more reluctant and less likely to take advantage of parent-oriented programs offered at school, such as

short term family therapy, parenting workshops and/or English-language skills classes because some now viewed the school as “an extension of the government.” Following the deportation of their spouses, some mothers were afraid to access school resources as they believed that seeking these services could result in being reported to immigration officials or otherwise damaging their chances of remaining in the U.S. parents provided multiple explanations for why they ceased engaging with the school after the deportation of their spouse. Maria, 41, Raul’s mother explained, “I don’t have time to go to the school anymore. Now I have to work two jobs, pay for my husbands’ legal fees, and juggle child care.” Fabiola, Martiza’s mother concurred, “They [the school] don’t realize how much energy it takes to be a single mom. It’s not that easy to drop everything and go up to the school. I have extra responsibilities now that my husband is gone.”

Other parents were concerned with avoiding immigration enforcement. As a result, they stayed away from the school, which according to rumors among other undocumented neighbors, was a site for ICE enforcement. Maribella, Kevin’s aunt who took custody of him following the deportation of both his parents, shared, “What if ICE comes to the school? I’ve heard of that. They wait until 3 PM when parents pick up their kids. It’s risky. Kevin has been through enough already.” Gladys, Stephanie’s mother agreed, “I used to be part of the parent group at school, but I haven’t gone in awhile. I miss it because I used to get so much support there, but honestly I feel too scared.” For a few mothers, the school itself represented an extension of authority, which seemed too risky for mothers; and for others, rumors about ICE enforcement fueled decisions to stay away from school grounds. As a result, school staff had much more difficulty engaging parents around their own needs and ways to support their children following the deportation of a parent. Mr. Walsh, a history teacher who has taught at the International Academy for six years shared:

I've noticed a big change in the level of parental involvement among families who experience immigration issues. They used to come around more often. I'd see them at the parent-advisory meetings, now I rarely see some of them. It's hard to reach them by phone too, they don't call me back. I'm not sure if it's because they have to work more since their husband is away or if they are scared of us? It can be frustrating, but I know it's our school's responsibility to do a better job of reaching out to them.

However, not all parents felt apprehensive about accessing the school as a resource for support. Some mothers described feeling a sense of trust in the staff due to a shared cultural identity.

Raul's mother, Maria explained:

I know the social worker at the school. She is Latina and speaks Spanish. I feel I can trust her. I talk to her about my problems and she watches out for me and my son. She says I should go to therapy but honestly I feel better after just talking to her, here and there.

For Raul's mother, being able to access a bilingual social worker informally through periodic "check-ins" and case management was instrumental in her feeling supported in the school setting. Similarly, Nancy, 45, Ismael's mother spoke about the importance of being able to rely upon the school and administration for support. She shared, "The principal is there for us. She is an immigrant herself, so she probably knows what it is like for families who have to hustle all the time. I respect her and all that she does for parents."

For a few families, the school became the entry point; connecting families with services. These families trusted the school because of a shared sense of cultural identity and values with staff and the principal. For other caregivers, however, overwhelming fear and caution precluded them from relying upon the school for services because of misinformation and rumors about local ICE activity.

Avoiding Social Services & Health Care

Following the loss of a loved-one resulting from deportation, nearly all the mothers self-terminated critical government subsidized aid such as WIC, and food stamps which they qualified for via their U.S. born children. They feared that receiving government assistance might alert authorities to their presence and their undocumented status and lead to their own deportation. This anxiety led some parents to completely avoid institutions that they perceived as sites where ICE could potentially apprehend them. For example, Gladys, Stephanie's mother said, "I wouldn't go into a government building now, because I know that once I step foot inside, they will take me away." Similarly, Maria, Raul's mother avoided the hospital placing her younger son with asthma at risk. She recalled, "We tried to bring him to the medical clinic, but people told us Immigration [ICE] was there. We didn't know if it was rumors or not. I was scared to bring him there. Where could we bring him?" Instead of going to the hospital she and her family stayed at home and she administered oxygen to him at home. The foregoing examples illustrate how rumors and misperceptions of different government agencies placed families at risk for food insecurity and health problems because of a lack of access to government aid and support.

Experiencing Newfound Social Support

Community-based organizations. Given that the mothers experienced a profound fear of formal government social services, many had to find other ways to meet their family's basic support needs. Four mothers in this study sought out resources through their undocumented neighbors and friends who informed them of local non-profit Latino and immigrant-based social service agencies which offer a range of support for newcomer immigrant clients in need of immigration legal services and advocacy. For example, Mariella, Oscar's mother, described how

fortunate she felt to learn of CARECEN, a non-profit Latino social service agency that is well-known as the largest Central American immigrant rights organization in the United States. She commented:

I wish I had known about this Central American agency sooner. The staff and people there look, talk, and sound like me! I found out from my *comadre* [friend] about their legal workshops and I've been learning my rights as an immigrant woman. Together we are learning about how to start a small catering business, since I already make and sell *pupusas* to my friends. I feel powerful, I never knew I had these rights in the U.S.

Similarly, Gladys, mother of Stephanie, experienced a newfound sense of control over her life in learning about a Latino-based non-profit agency that serves immigrants and families impacted by issues of poverty, immigration issues, domestic violence, and mental health issues.

Gladys shared:

My daughter and I just started going to this group for Latina mothers and daughters who need support. My sister told me we needed to go because ever since Stephanie's father got sent away, we have been arguing about small stuff all the time at home and at school, and I noticed Stephanie seemed upset. They [the staff] are Latino, we speak in Spanish.

It's a place where feel safe, where we can go and talk; they understand us and our culture.

We don't feel judged.

Through these personal connections, mothers experienced a sense of empowerment and control over their lives. Family members and neighbors, especially those who have been in the United States for a long time, who speak English, and "know the system," became crucial sources of information about how to enroll children in school and find health clinics in Los Angeles with Spanish-speaking staff. Maribella, Kevin's relative caregiver and aunt explained how she learned

of a clinic with Spanish-speaking staff where documentation of legal status was not checked. She said, “My neighbor told me, ‘Go there; look I get this here; there they help you; they’re good people.” From their descriptions, these social networks were not only helpful in connecting parents with assistance for their basic needs, but also essential because networks supplied needed information, interpretation, and in some cases transportation to and from detention centers and/or the court office. The mothers’ ability to seek out other resources that they felt they could trust and assist them in meeting their families’ needs demonstrates a sense of resiliency and know-how.

Faith-based organizations. Los Angeles and the greater Southern California region is home to a network of inter-faith agencies and churches that provide advocacy and support to immigrant families, particularly those vulnerable to, or who have been affected by immigration enforcement since the Central American refugee crisis of the 1980’s. These churches and religious communities provide emergency relief, temporary shelter, transportation, legal services, fellowship and social services.

Like the Latino and immigrant focused non-profit organizations, at least half of all mothers in this study also sought assistance from churches and faith based organizations, which provided additional sources of guidance, support, and counsel regarding how to navigate systems and avoid deportation. In the mothers’ view, churches and faith-based agencies played the most important roles in providing short-term humanitarian relief and longer-term social, emotional, and spiritual support. Catholic, Unitarian, and Methodist churches were the first places that these families turned to for emergency assistance outside of their own extended family networks. Organizations like Catholic Charities, and the Immigrant Welcome Centers, located in Los

Angeles, Huntington Beach, and North Hills were conduits for food, clothing drives and cash-based fundraising efforts, and spiritual support.

While several mothers relied on a combination of non-profit organizational support and faith-based organizations, a few turned to their church as their sole source of support because of their faith. For them, the church was not only a place to receive valuable goods and services, it was also a place of refuge – both physical and spiritual. Oscar’s mother, Mariella recalled:

Just like in my country, here, the church is the only place I can count on for support.

There is a food pantry, support groups for mothers [in Spanish] and legal workshops. The church also provides beds for people who are in hiding from ICE. In fact, I’ve thought to myself, if it ever gets bad and we need to go, we could stay at the church for a while.

They will give you a bed to sleep on and will help pay your bills.

For mothers like Mariella, and Fabiola who grew up in El Salvador, and had experienced accessing the Catholic Church as a place of refuge during their Civil War during the 1980’s, it became a familiar and safe option to rely upon for various needs.

Similarly, Isabel, Paulina’s mother, discussed the critical role that the Catholic Church has played in connecting her to social support during the adjustment process following the deportation of her spouse. She shared:

I go to church at Dolores Mission in Boyle Heights. It’s a place where I go for a sense of peace from all the discrimination and fear that I hold as an undocumented mother.

When I am at church, I feel the strength of my community, my faith; this is what keeps me strong in the face of so much violence against my community. We learn about our rights, how to stay safe and not get deported, and we also to be aware of one another’s struggle, to protect one another, and to remain hopeful about the future.

The key role that faith-based agencies and churches played in supporting families reflects the important function of religious institutions in Latino communities— especially among immigrant populations. Mothers gravitated toward the church for both communal life and as a spiritual venue. Especially in these times of hardship, they first turned inward to their families, then toward trusted religious institutions and leaders, community-based agencies, and lastly toward the government. Most of these families acquired both spiritual and emotional support through their participation in faith based organizations and churches in Los Angeles. In this manner, churches naturally emerged as safe havens where families could seek refuge and retain respect for their culture and values. At the same time, some families experienced barriers accessing support from churches. Not all families identified as religious or spiritual and therefore did not access the support of the church or faith based agencies.

As a result of positive service use with Latino based agencies and faith based centers, some mothers described a growing sense of self-empowerment in their ability to access support. By using their personal contacts, and the knowledge embedded in their larger social networks, these mothers became extremely resourceful and were able to find ways to navigate the system. As Nancy, mother of Ismael, explained, “We look out for each other. These resources are here by means of our Latino community, our networks.” Because immigrant communities tend to trust and find comfort in religious communities that embrace their culture, churches and other religious organizations played important roles as safe havens, central distribution points, and avenues for outreach.

Conclusion

This study sought to examine how adolescents and their undocumented families cope with forced family separation following the deportation of a parent. Through the use of a

qualitative phenomenological approach, the findings reveal that young people experienced psychosocial stressors such as anxiety, depression, fear of further family separation, and behavioral changes as because of family disruption. In many cases, school was a supportive environment for youth, one that helped them cope and access support; particularly for female adolescents. Deportation triggered a series of seismic ruptures to the family beginning with wresting the parent(s) from the family system. In turn, this triggered a series of different adjustments beginning with the adjustment to the traumatic loss one or both family members. This loss led to a series of economic, social and psychological consequences.

Families adjusted to new circumstances post-deportation by modifying familial structures due to forced single-parenthood and economic loss. These families experienced familial tensions and often retreated from social life which included drastically shrinking social networks due to fear of further immigration enforcement. Families experienced financial difficulties and housing instability and were forced to rely heavily upon the support from extended family members in child-rearing. The challenges that families faced adjusting to new family circumstances reveals that parental deportation destabilized relationships between parents and their children, exacerbated financial hardships, and forced some families into hiding. Many families experienced challenges accessing social support while others relied upon informal support from neighbors, community based agencies, churches, and faith-based networks, which assisted families with critical needs and in rebuilding their lives and improving their well-being post deportation.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

This phenomenological study sought to understand how adolescents and their caregivers experience and cope with the changes and challenges related to the deportation of an

undocumented parent(s). Previous studies have demonstrated that forced family separations negatively influence the psychosocial well-being of young children (Capps et. al, 2007; Chaudry et. al, 2010; Dreby, 2012; Gulbas et. al., 2015). This study builds on previous research by probing deeper into how families adjust to new circumstances and how schools and social service providers respond to the needs of these youth and their families. Taken together, ambiguous loss (Boss, 1999) and family systems theories (Bowen, 1978), help us understand how forced family separations contribute to a process of re-adjustment in roles and family structures. Overall, the findings from this study revealed that upon the arrest, detainment, and subsequent deportation of a parent, adolescents experienced a host of challenges stemming from their loss, including fear, anxiety, depression, academic difficulties, economic instability, and adjustment to sudden changes in family circumstances. Families coped with and confronted these challenges to create a new homeostasis. Youth reached out to their school and peers for support, while mothers/caregivers reached out to extended family, accessing aid through informal support networks, extended family, and faith-based centers, all while limiting their public interactions to prevent further disruption by immigration officials. The experience overall was characterized by fear, loss, and the “unknown.”

The modified conceptual framework (Figure 2) illustrates my unique findings concerning how adolescents and families cope and adapt following the deportation of a parent. As displayed in Chapter 3, (Figure 1), the first model highlighted how family systems and ambiguous loss theories provide initial perspectives for understanding how young people and their families adjust to new family circumstances. Family systems theory is relevant because it explains the way mixed-status families are likely to adapt. Ambiguous loss theory explains how children cope with an uncertain loss. Combined, these theoretical perspectives provide a lens to understand

how families make meaning of a family separation and adjust to the resulting changes in family circumstances. In this modified model, (Figure 2, see below), at the top of the family systems triangle, we can see that the forced removal of one or both parents has destabilized the family unit, impacting each of its members. The left side of the triangle depicts the stressors that youth faced following the deportation, such as: trauma, anxiety, depression and loss. The figure below adds the type of support that youth received from various networks such as school staff and their peers. On the right side of the family systems triangle, we see that mothers and caregivers experienced symptoms of loss and great stress as they became solely responsible for the economic, emotional, and logistic components of supporting their children and/or relatives. Families then turned to informal supports for assistance, which consisted of extended family, Latino non-profit organizations, and faith-based centers. In addition, mothers/caregivers relied upon their supra systems, or extended family, which according to Bowen (1978), may play a large part in how families self-stabilize. For each of these eight families, they relied upon their extended family members to share in housing, day-to-day expenses, caregiving duties, and for overall emotional support. At the bottom center of the triangle, we also see that while families were able to obtain a new level of homeostasis through their own resilience and by seeking informal support through their networks, they were very much still in the process of adjusting to new familial roles and coping with a pervasive fear of further family separation.

Modified Conceptual Framework

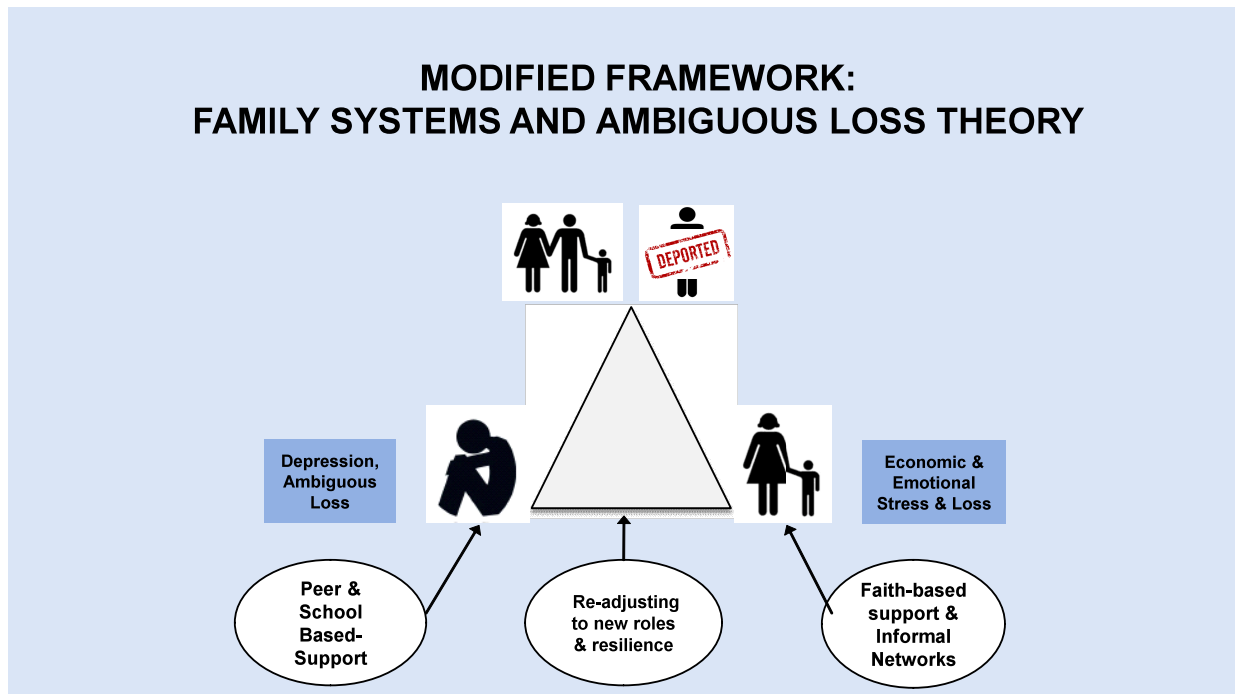


Figure 2.

Adolescents' Coping Process

The first research question examined how Latino adolescents living in mixed-status families cope with a forced family separation due to the deportation of a parent. Reinforcing prior literature, one of the core themes found concerning question one was the experience of emotional distress (Capps et al., 2007; Chaudry et al., 2010; Dreby, 2016; Ayon & Bou Ghosn Naddy, 2012; Lykes Brabeck, & Hunter, 2013). Among these participants, these symptoms included: anxiety, sadness, a loss of appetite, and insomnia. These participants also uniquely harbored a variety of fears about their family stability, the potential deportation of another parent or caregiver, and in regards to interactions with law enforcement or authority figures. These fears and psychosocial stressors negatively influenced their adjustment patterns at home and in

school. Deportations involved a double or triple trauma for these young people; while they did not directly witness the forcible removal of the parent, they suddenly lost their caregiver and abruptly lost their familiar home environment. These findings are consistent with the extant literature on immigration-related family separations, which have found that youth experience psychosocial stressors and behavioral changes due to immigration-related family separations (Allen et al., 2013; Capps et al., 2007; Chaudry et al., 2010; Dreby, 2014; Gulbas, Zayas, Yoon, et al, 2015; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2011). In addition to the above stressors, and unique to this study, these youth were also fearful about whether they too were at risk of being deported, despite their status as U.S. citizens. They experienced confusion about the role of law enforcement officers and received misinformation due to rampant fear in the community.

Ambiguous loss theory (Boss, 1999; 2005), helps to understand how forced family separation can produce the types of symptoms that these youth described following the deportation of one or more parents. “Ambiguous loss” refers to the type of loss experienced by the remaining friends or family members of someone who is no longer with them but their absence is neither permanent nor definitive. The youth participants described feelings of loss from being unable to live together with their deported parent(s), uncertainty about when and/or if they would be reunited, and anxiety and stress from not knowing how their parent(s) were fairing in their home country. These empirical findings parallel the clinical conclusions of Falicov (2004), Sholheim, Zaid, & Ballard (2016), Rubio-Hernandez & Ayon (2015), and Suarez-Orozco et al. (2002) who also found that the uncertainty and sudden shock of a forced family separation often results in trauma symptoms and anxiety. For these youth, their loss was compounded by the fact that their parent was physically unavailable yet psychologically present in their minds.

This ambiguity seemed to lead to prolonged grief and confusion as some expressed that they did not have “permission” or the space to grieve due to the taboo nature of immigration enforcement.

Research question 2 examined how families adjusted to new circumstances following the deportation of a parent. Family systems theory helps to conceptualize how families adapted to these changes. According to this theory, individuals cannot be understood in isolation from one another, but rather as a part of their family, as the family is an emotional unit (Bowen, 1978). In other words, the loss of a parent(s) destabilized the family unit, impacting each of its members. Such losses led to new family dynamics and economic circumstances to which each of the family members had to adjust. For each of these families, the loss of one or both parents disrupted family members’ sense of stability. Mothers experienced a profound sense of grief over the loss of their spouses and faced a tremendous amount of emotional stress in figuring out how to reunify and support the family financially during their spouses’ absence. Like extant research, the loss of the father or breadwinner, often resulted in economic hardship and related problems such as food insecurity and housing instability (Capps et al., 2007; Chaudry et al., 2010; Dreby, 2016). The mothers left behind were under constant emotional stress which resulted in significant changes in family dynamics and all while they had to cope with their own grief due to the loss of their spouse, which rendered them emotionally unavailable for their children at times.

According to my findings, mothers and caregivers relied heavily on extended family and the church for moral, emotional, and economic, support. This is consistent with previous research which found that Latino/as rely upon their family, friends, neighbors, and community organizations for various types of support (Ayon & Bou Ghosn Naddy, 2012; Levitt, 2007). These suddenly single mothers/ caregivers scrambled to replace their husband’s role in the family to become the sole providers for their children. Because of the economic strain caused by

the absence of one or both parents, remaining members of the family unit relocated to live with relatives, while mothers/caregivers took on additional employment and turned to their older children for assistance at home. Youth's roles at home also shifted as they became a critical source of support to the household. Males took on part-time employment, while female participants took on more domestic roles such as cooking, cleaning, language brokering, and providing child-care for their younger siblings.

Similar to Dreby's (2016) findings, youth and their mothers adapted to new circumstances by taking on new roles, which assisted families in re-establishing a sense of equilibrium. Economic insecurity and hardship called for families to alter their daily routines and find means for survival while protecting against fear of immigration enforcement. For these families, this process of adjustment resulted in increasing tension among youth and parents. Not discussed widely in the literature, is my finding that adolescents in these circumstances resented and felt burdened by what they perceived as their parents' over-reliance on them, which encroached upon their freedom. This finding highlights how the deportation of a parent can cause youth to relinquish part of their childhood. Although remaining mothers/caregivers were in need of this assistance, from their older children, they were aware that subjecting their children to additional obligations could blur the lines between parent and child.

Due to fears of additional family deportations, worry, secrecy, and keeping a low-profile became the norm in these families. The fear of deportation, mixed with gendered norms about women's safety, may account for why mothers and their children were forced to "live under the radar." Mothers and children became vigilant at all times, always on the lookout for situations that could expose their family to harm. Consequently, mothers drastically limited the family's social outings, were less engaged in children's school activities, and in some cases, prohibited

their children from participating in extracurricular activities. As in other studies, worry and secrecy became part of the survival strategies for families' daily life (Zayas, 2015). This led to increased tension in the household and as a result, families experienced greater social isolation and family conflict.

The third research question examined how social service providers responded to the needs of families who experienced a forced family separation. Social service providers included teachers, staff, administrators, mental health counselors, social service agencies, and faith-based organizations. Findings were consistent with previous research that has emphasized the school as a significant resource for youth who have experienced the deportation of a parent (Capps et al., 2007; Chaudry et al., 2010). Teachers, staff, and administrators supported youths' socio-emotional needs, provided donations to families, and despite a lack of trauma-focused services on campus, linked some youth to outside social services.

Previous studies have found that children who had experienced a forced family separation often felt like outcasts from the broader school and social networks (Dryden-Peterson, 2015). By contrast, the youth in my study perceived the school as a safe haven and felt supported by the stability that the school offered. This is likely due in part to the schools' location in a densely populated immigrant community where school administrators were keenly aware of deportation risks and were committed to protecting youth and families. Further, through programming that reflects the cultural, ethnic, and language needs of the student population, youth may have felt safe reaching out to teachers during this stressful time. The school itself made an effort to provide a safe and welcoming space for these families.

For mothers/caregivers, however, the threat of deportation resulted in less school engagement. Consistent with previous literature, some of these caregivers did not look to the

school for support to begin with since they perceived the school to be an extension of the government (Dryden-Peterson, 2015). The general reluctance of Latino families to seek psychosocial support, combined with access issues due to documentation status, meant that families' mental health needs following forced separations were seldom addressed from the school site array of services. Previous studies have found that Latinos are often reluctant to seek mental health support due to the stigma associated with mental health issues (Aguilar-Gaxiola, Loera, & Mendez, 2012). In this scenario, the stigma was even greater since families were not only in need of mental health support, but were also in need of basic provisions.

Fear and anxiety led some parents to completely avoid government institutions that they perceived as sites where ICE could potentially apprehend them. Nearly all mothers in the study terminated their critical government subsidized aid such as WIC, and food stamps. These findings are similar to prior research (Capps and Fortuny, 2006; Henderson et al., 2008; and Holcomb et al. 2003), and has long term implications for their children's health and well-being (Yoshikawa, Orozco & Gonzales, 2016). Much like the findings that Yoshikawa (2011) reported, barriers to accessing public benefits led to delayed care, economic hardship, and stress for families. Consequently, mothers'/caregivers' social support networks were vital resources in providing information and assisting families gain stability (Ayon, 2013; Xu & Brabeck, 2012). These support networks tended to be other Latino immigrants (neighbors, family, friends), who shared similar migration-related experiences. Personal networks were not only helpful in linking mothers to Latino-based organizations, but were also important because they provided crucial information and moral support which enabled families to learn where and how to access assistance. My findings are consistent with previous research showing that immigrant families rely upon the strengths of their social networks to cope with economic difficulties and gain

access that are previously unavailable to them due to their undocumented status; this demonstrates significant resilience considering the challenges they face (Ayon, 2013; Ayon & Bou Ghosn Naddy, 2012; Xu & Brabeck, 2012).

Another major source of support for the mothers/caregivers in this study, was churches and faith-based organizations, which played a significant role in contributing to their and their children's well-being after the deportation of the spouse or parent. Religious institutions provided far more than spiritual support. These institutions offered psychological support, trust, and acceptance along with concrete needs such as short-term humanitarian relief, legal advocacy, social support, and in some cases, shelter. In particular, the Catholic and Methodist churches, leveraged their relationships with local immigrant-based advocacy organizations to provide families dealing with hardships stemming from immigration enforcement with basic provisions such as food, clothing (via clothing drives), and cash aid (via fundraising). Because their faith is so deeply intertwined with their spiritual and emotional well-being, most of the mothers/caregivers in this study preferred reaching out to the church for mental and emotional support, turning to priests, pastors, and fellow parishioners for hope and healing. Hence, the church became a valuable source of social capital and a safe haven for families seeking refuge in a space where their culture and values are recognized and respected. This finding, along with results of previous studies (Capps et al, 2007; Chaudry et al., 2010; Falicov, 2004; Foley & Hoge, 2007; Levitt, 2007) demonstrate the close relationship between faith, culture and well-being, and can inform best practices in successfully engaging Latino immigrants in need of social services.

Summary of Discussion

While previous studies have focused on how Latino youth experience the deportation of a

parent, this study contributes to the literature by examining not only how youth experience and cope with family separation due to deportation, but also how such an adverse event impacts the family unit, including youth and their parents. Returning to the revised conceptual model, (Figure 2), this study contributes to the literature by providing a more nuanced understanding of immigration-related family separations. In addition to the theoretical framework of ambiguous loss and family systems theory, this study demonstrated how youth and their families coped and confronted new challenges in order to create a new homeostasis. Youth reached out to their school and peers for support, while mothers/caregivers generally coped by reaching out to extended family, accessing aid through informal support networks, and faith-based centers. On a promising note, findings from this study show that even under extreme loss, fear, trauma, and economic stress, families displayed tremendous resilience in the face of forced family separations and bounced back from the loss and disruption that accompany this event.

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

This study has several strengths. Mixed-status families are an extremely vulnerable population to access due to the nature of their family's legal status (Nguyen, Hernandez, Saetermoe, Suarez-Orozco, 2013). As such, questions about legal status and immigration enforcement are difficult to ask, and, consequently, research with undocumented families is greatly limited. Access to such data has only become available through large community-based studies. Hence, this study is one of the first qualitative projects that captures the lived-experiences of families confronting and coping with the challenges associated with a forced family separation. In addition, this study also integrates how various service providers including educators and school staff, social workers, and community based-practitioners, both formal and

informal, respond to these families' needs.

Multiple steps were taken to ensure rigor and trustworthiness of the study findings. Data were collected from multiple sources to triangulate research findings. For example, both youth and their remaining parent/caregiver as well as several school and social service providers who were well-positioned to describe how youth and their families coped with forced family separation due to deportation were interviewed. Field notes were taken during each visit to the school. Observations and informal conversations with students and school personnel also provided additional context into how the school responded to the needs of these families. Furthermore, theoretical triangulation was used by employing two theoretical perspectives (family systems theory and (ambiguous loss theory) to inform the analysis and the interpretation of the findings.

Limitations

Limitations in the study design. Due to the retrospective nature of this study, youth and parents had to draw upon their recollections of how they coped with a forced family separation. Participants may have forgotten some details or might not have had an accurate recollection of the events and emotions in question. However, these forced separations all occurred within a relatively short period of time (1-3 years) of the interviews, and were still undergoing their adjustment process. As such, the author drew upon various sources (youth, parents, school and service providers) to verify data.

Limitations in the interview process. In-depth interviews are an effective way to collect qualitative information. However, some participants may have disguised their true feelings about their experience coping with a parental loss, while other participants may have tried overly hard to cooperate by offering the author responses that they perceived to be helpful, resulting in social desirability bias. For example, youth may have overly emphasized the positive

support that they received from a parent/caregiver following the loss of their parent, while on the other hand, youth may have deliberately omitted challenging aspects of their coping process; particularly related towards intergenerational relationships. The use of triangulated data assisted with this limitation, yet despite the threat, still rigor exists.

Limitations in the sampling technique. A purposive sample can have some inherent biases. Youth participants were recruited by school faculty, teachers, and social workers from one densely- immigrant populated, urban high school in Los Angeles, California. It is possible that these youth were comparatively more comfortable discussing personal experiences than those who were not recruited by these key informants. Second, given the high concentration of undocumented immigrants in Los Angeles, it is likely that educators, staff, and mental health professionals at this high school were more cognizant of deportation-related family stressors and were more closely attuned to the needs of youth who have experienced a forced family separation. This may limit transferability of the findings to other regions or schools as the experience of undocumented youth across different contexts may vary greatly. This study did not seek to examine issues of prevalence, but nevertheless the transferability of findings may be limited by the one recruitment site.

The sample in this study consisted of Mexican and Central American families in Los Angeles. While these communities make up the largest Latino subgroups in Los Angeles, they do not represent the experience of all Latino subgroups or families from other nationalities who are subject to forced family separations. However, as noted by MALDEF (2015), the bulk of deportations in the U.S. are among Mexican and Central Americans. Future research with a larger and more diverse immigrant population may uncover a greater breadth of experiences related to how youth and families cope following a forced family separation. The socio-political

context may have also played a role in in aspects of sampling.

During the time in which this study was conducted, the Latino community experienced heightened fears driven by fear of exposure and potential deportation. It is possible that the climate influenced the characteristics of the sample in that those willing to participate in the study felt that their risk was somehow less than others who did not. In addition, this study only included youth who had mothers/caregivers who were willing to participate in the study. It is possible that others who were experiencing greater struggles due to a deportation related family separation, were not as forthcoming.

Limitations in the researcher's stance. This study is limited by the use of one primary data analyst, which opens up the possibility of researcher bias. Research has found that this methodological concern can be partially mitigated by making the analytic process explicit through a detailed audit trail (Thome, 1998). In an effort to ensure that others can confirm finding, the researcher provided an audit trail (Padgett, 1998) by documenting each step taken in data collection and analysis. The components of my audit trail included the raw data-field notes, interview transcripts, along with journal and memos noting decisions made during data collection, coding, and analysis. While the audit trail is not intended for exact replication, it may enhance reproducibility, in which another researcher may be able to use the audit trail to reproduce and verify the findings (Schwandt & Halpern, 1988). In addition, the researcher participated in a peer-debriefing group with colleagues and met regularly with her dissertation advisors to receive feedback, brainstorm new ideas, critique research findings, and debrief about fieldwork and data analysis experiences. The researcher also engaged in member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which involved returning back to my participants at the school to verify interview details and validate the accuracy of participants' experiences (Creswell, 2007).

Implications for Social Work Policy and Practice

Implications for Policy

In light of the current political climate on immigration, undocumented immigrants and their families are more vulnerable than ever before. Recent federal enforcement of immigration laws has led to an increase in deportations; many of which are expedited. As demonstrated in this study's findings, even in states such as California --which has fairly liberal policies towards immigration, mixed-status families continue to live in a constant terror of losing a parent, sibling, grand-parent, or aunt/uncle due to ICE enforcement. In addition, these families underutilized much-needed social services which has implications for child and family well-being. For the U.S citizen children in this study, they too experienced fear, confusion, and misinformation that they could also potentially be deported. This indicates that the policy environment matters. At the mezzo level, much work needs to be done by social service agencies and practitioners to ensure that families are informed of their rights, connected to appropriate services, and knowledgeable of critical social service benefits (i.e. Medical, Food Stamps, etc.) for which their U.S. citizen children are eligible. Local community-based agencies ought to provide forums to educate parents via, "Know Your Rights" workshops which may assist in reducing parents' fear of accessing social service support in local or county government buildings. This might ensure that individuals seeking to participate in activities at any these locations, are free to do so without fear of apprehension.

Mezzo-Level Social Work Practice Settings

This study's findings contribute to several implications for social work practice as they highlight the experiences of Latino youth and their families related to parental deportation.

Schools and other social service providers' can play an important role in assisting these families both cope and adjust to new family circumstances.

School Settings

In communities with high immigrant populations, schools often become the entry points for undocumented families: connecting youth and/or families to a broad array of academic, health, and mental health-related services. Hence, schools are important sites for support in immigrant communities and can assist youth and families feel safe and protected. First, school districts/administrators should publicly denounce any local enforcement raids and/or ICE activity and should affirm that the school is a welcoming place of learning, support, and is a resource for all students and families, regardless of immigration status. Distancing the school from enforcement actions that separate families may reassure parents' anxieties about detection of undocumented status and subsequent threat of deportation. Second, school-based social workers should increase their awareness of how family separation impacts youth and their families and should receive training that will enable them to provide services tailored to these families' needs. Such training must be culturally-based, trauma-informed, and contextually situated (i.e. accounting for political climate). School social workers can also engage in awareness-raising efforts by offering training sessions with administrators, faculty, and school staff on the impact of immigration policies on Latino youth and families. Third, the role of bilingual school social workers is critical, as they can deliver culturally-attuned Spanish speaking mental health services, provide trauma-informed support groups for adolescents and/or parents, advocacy in the form of "Know Your Rights Workshops," and can link immigrant families to Latino and immigrant-oriented community-based resources and/or local faith-based centers to serve any additional needs that the school may not be able to provide.

Community-Based Social Service Settings

In this time of uncertainty regarding immigration policy and enforcement in the U.S., at the federal, state, and local level, social service agencies must make a considerable effort in engaging and informing immigrant families and individuals that their buildings and offices are safe for them to enter and interact. As we saw in this study, many undocumented immigrants are reluctant to enter these sites and access services for fear of apprehension. Social workers should participate in public campaigns designed to allay community members' fears about accessing social services. As Xu & Brabeck (2012) note, programs might also capitalize on the key role that the local Spanish media (i.e. television, newspaper, websites) plays in disseminating information, for example about the value of accessing mental health support. Additionally, formal agencies should engage in interdisciplinary collaboration, interagency partnership, and community one-stop service delivery to address service use barriers among undocumented families.

Given the importance of Latino families' social networks, practitioners should recognize the strengths of this asset and incorporate family or other key members into treatment planning. However, as Ayon & Bou Ghosn (2013) note, a gap in Latino immigrant families' social network is their lack of access to formal sources of advocacy. As this study demonstrates, while participants experienced an abundance of emotional and moral support through their family, neighbors, and friends, they lacked access to individuals who could formally guide them when faced with a deportation, being stopped by law enforcement, or while seeking access to medical care for their child. Service providers in community-based agencies have an opportunity to fill this gap in families' social networks and should actively draw upon the strengths of *promotoras* to remove the stigma of accessing services. *Promotoras* are members of the Latino community,

such as neighbors, mothers, fathers, elders, and youth who have formerly utilized services in these agencies, are trained, and serve as volunteers in Latino-based agencies. They are attuned to the stigma and reluctance that Latinos and immigrants experience when seeking formal services and are often stationed in laundromats, churches, supermarkets, parking lots, apartments, streets, bus stops, and schools. Armed with first-hand experience and relationships in the community, *promotoras* provide education on where to turn for accurate information, trusted resources, ethical legal counsel, health and mental health services. They can also inform immigrant parents about immigration enforcement's current policies and practices and how best to respond in circumstances where a spouse or a relative is detained.

Faith-based agencies and churches have played a significant role in providing humanitarian, legal aid, spiritual, and mental health support to undocumented families affected by immigration enforcement. As demonstrated in this study and throughout the literature (Ayon, 2012; Capps et. al., 2007; Chaudry et al., 2010; Delgado, 2012), faith-based agencies have a long- standing history of trust among the Latino community. Therefore, both legal and humanitarian assistance should be coordinated by and offered through trusted community institutions such as those in faith-based and immigrant serving organizations. In addition, churches and faith-based agencies should continue to take a stand against restrictive immigration policies that separate families. They ought to enhance outreach to promote their institutions as safe spaces for individuals to receive guidance, support, and counsel regarding how to navigate systems. In addition, churches should work with national coalitions to promote the “new sanctuary movement,” a nation-wide faith-based organizing movement that provides shelter and legal advocacy for individuals at risk of deportation.

Micro-Level Social Work Practice Settings

By understanding the psychosocial needs of these youth and their families, social service providers can better help these families meet their needs and regain their stability. In order to assist children in coping with feelings of loss, practitioners must be aware of the phenomenon of forced family separation in their assessments and treatment processes because it creates a challenge to family relations. As Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie (2002) note, caregivers play an instrumental role in helping minimize the losses for adolescents. Practitioners can help families maintain the psychological presence of the separated parent to promote connection and cohesion. For example, frequent phone contact between the deported parent and child may be an effective method. Some emerging technologies such as Skype, or online video conferencing enable family members separated by time and space to be virtually present for extended periods of time, thereby allowing faraway relatives to “participate” in household events. Emerging technologies create opportunities for togetherness between relatives. For example, “a separated mother and/or father can monitor their children’s homework progress via frequent phone contact, a distant mother and daughter can shop online together” (Bacigalupe & Parker, 2015). Technology use may attenuate the sense of distance experienced by many transnational families so that youth may feel more closely tied with their separated family member than ever before. In addition to utilizing innovative technologies to promote closeness, for youth who experience symptoms of trauma, loss and/or fear of further family separation, it would be helpful for the practitioner to normalize and contextualize the distress these youth may be experiencing. This strategy might assist family members in enlarging their perspective to see their difficulties as understandable considering the adversities they face (Walsh, 2006).

Social work practitioners can also assist families with organizing new patterns of

interaction when a family member is physically absent (Walsh, 2006). Clinicians can help the family jointly develop a clear picture of the family's identity and each person's roles within the family. This may be particularly important for clinicians working with families, where the separation of a parent likely to result in significant shifts in the household; concrete role responsibilities in these family systems are likely to have significant shifts (Solheim, Zaid, & Ballard, 2016). Social workers should help normalize clients' experience in so far as is possible, and/or role-play a conversation with their clients in which they help facilitate the shift of roles. In addition to these practice-based recommendations, evidence-based intervention studies should also be developed with the aim of understanding the effects of forced family separations in order to develop strategies to assist families manage the separation and potential reunification process.

Directions for Future Research

While previous studies have focused on how Latino children experience the deportation of a parent, this study contributes to the literature by examining not only how youth experience and cope with the forced family separation, but also how such an adverse event impacts the family unit. Overall, this study found that youth experienced symptoms of trauma following the deportation of one or both parents. Youth obtained support from their school and peers, while caregivers coped by seeking support from extended family, accessing aid through informal support networks, and faith-based agencies, all while "living under the radar," to prevent further disruption by immigration officials. This study also found evidence that even under extreme loss, fear, trauma, and economic stress, -- mixed-status families display tremendous resilience in the face of forced family separations and adjusted to new family circumstances. However, numerous questions on this topic remain, such as: How do parents and youth who do not utilize social service and faith-based organizations cope with a deportation-related family separation? How

does family separation and loss of parental income affect children's well-being and health and social service needs in the long term? How many children have had a parent detained or deported in the U.S., and what are their characteristics in terms of age, US citizenship, and parental origins? How do children with detained and deported parents fare in the child welfare system? A multi-site study where all individuals involved in the deportation process, such as youth, a remaining parent or surrogate caregiver, a deported parent, ICE agents, Border Patrol and social workers is needed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how anti-immigrant legislation impacts children and families over time.

Future studies ought to examine how children fare who have been placed in the child welfare system due to parental deportation so that we may better support youth and families caught between these systems. Further research should employ mixed-methods to gain an understanding of the prevalence of deportation-related family separations. Interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, triangulated research is essential to continue to understand the lived experiences of this understudied population. In order to improve the services that social workers provide to vulnerable populations like undocumented immigrants and their families in the field, scholarship should advance greater knowledge to enrich the understanding of this phenomenon.

Appendix A

Table 1.
Descriptive Statistics of Youth & Caregivers Interviewed Post Family Separation (n=16)

Pseudonym/ Age	Age at Separation	Length of Separation	Parent(s) Deported	Current Living Arrangement
Kevin, 16	14yrs old	2 years	Mother & Father	Aunt/Uncle
Ismael, 17	16 yrs. old	13 months	Father	Mother/ Grandmother
Oscar, 18	16 yrs. old	2 years	Father	Mother & Aunts
Raul, 16	13 yrs. old	3 years	Father	Mother Aunt
Stephanie, 17	15 yrs. old	23 months	Father	Mother
Marco, 14	12 yrs. old	2 years	Mother & Father	Aunt/Uncle
Paulina, 14	12 yrs. old	2 years	Father	Mother & Aunt
Maritza, 15	12 yrs. old	3 years	Father	Mother & Aunts

Appendix B

Table 2.
Descriptive Statistics of Mothers/ Caregivers Interviewed Post Family Separation (n=8)

Remaining Caregiver Pseudonym/Age	Caregiver to Child	Country of Origin	Years Spent in the U.S.	Services Received
Maribella, 53	Kevin's Aunt	Mexico	26 years	Mental Health (Latino Non-Profit Agency)
Nancy, 45	Ismael's Mother	Mexico	24 years	School-Based Support & (Latino Non-Profit Agency)
Mariella, 48	Oscar's Mother	El Salvador	22 years	Faith-Based Agencies & Case Management (Latino Non-Profit Agency)
Maria, 41	Raul's Mother	Honduras	18 years	School-Based Information & Referrals
Gladys, 44	Stephanie's Mother	Mexico	15 years	Faith-Based Spiritual Counseling
Lorena, 50	Marco's Aunt	Mexico	20 years	Methodist Church & Faith-Based Agencies
Isabel, 49	Paulina's Mother	El Salvador	20 years	Basic Needs and Spiritual Counseling; Catholic Church
Fabiola, 48	Maritza's Mother	El Salvador	23 years	Spiritual Counseling; Faith-Based Agencies

Appendix C

Table 3.
Descriptive Statistics for School-Based Service Providers

Pseudonym of Service Provider	Professional Role
Ms. Martinez	Administrator
Ms. Washington	Administrator
Ms. G.	Social Worker
Ms. Zelaya	Social Work Intern
Ms. Phillips	Counselor
Ms. Ramos	Teacher
Ms. Claudina	Teacher
Ms. Lozano	Teacher
Mr. Walsh	Teacher
Ms. Solano	Co-Coordinator-Parent Center
Ms. Barreras	Co-Coordinator –Parent Center

Appendix D

Table 4.
Themes and Core Concepts

Theme	Core Concepts
Difficulties Coping with Parental Loss	<p>Experiencing Trauma</p> <p>Fearing Additional Family Separation</p> <p>Behavioral Changes</p> <p>Academic Disruptions and Challenges</p>
Modifying Family Structures	<p>Familial Tensions</p> <p>Retreating from Social Life</p> <p>Experiencing Financial Difficulties</p> <p>Relying upon Support from Extended Family</p>
Rolling up our Sleeves to fill in the Gaps	<p>Overwhelmed and Under-Resourced</p> <p>Experiencing Fear in Accessing Social Support</p> <p>Avoiding Social Services and Health Care</p> <p>Experiencing Newfound Social Support</p>

Appendix E: Youth Interview Protocol

Introduction

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself. What are some things that you are really interested in?

Family Relations

1. Everyone has a story of migration to the United States; please tell me about you and/or your family's journey. (Probe for sequence of migration; who came first, who came next? Caretaking arrangements? (Quality of caretaking arrangement?))
2. Can you tell me about the process of how you were separated from a [role of family member] how did it occur and who did you have to separate from- (one parent, or both? Siblings?)
3. Describe your relationship with your current caregiver (mother, grandmother, aunt, uncle, foster parent, etc.).
4. [If participant moved to a new household] what was your relationship like with your parents after you rejoined them? How has your relationship changed with your parents and or caregivers since that initial transition?
5. Do you ever talk with your [ROLE] about the time you were apart?
6. How would you describe your level of connection/closeness with your parent(s) these days?
7. What helped you get through the time you were apart? (Probe for friends, family support, school support, personal resources, etc.)

Social Service Involvement

1. What social support resources (counseling department on campus, neighborhood centers) are you aware of on campus or off campus?
2. After [xyz characterization of separation] did you ever talk to counselor or to anyone about the separation? (Probe church, coach, etc.).
3. Does your family receive any social support from agencies on campus or in the local community? If so, which agencies do they go to for support? How helpful do you think that has been?
4. What type of support has been most helpful to you?

Views of the Future

1. Tell me about your plans for the next 2-3 years. Where do you see yourself?
2. What do you hope to be doing? How do you imagine that you will get there?

We have come to the end of our interview. Thank you for your time. Is there anything you would like to add or think I should have asked about? Do you have any questions of me?

Appendix F: Parent/Caregiver Interview Protocol

Introduction

1. Cuéntame sobre su familia, con quien vive? Tell me a little bit about your family.
2. ¿Dónde viven Uds. y con quién viven? (Where do you live and with whom do you live?)
3. ¿Cuánto tiempo en total estaban/están separados? (How long has your child been separated from his/her other parent?)
4. ¿Me puede decir como su hijo se ha ajustado a la separación de los miembros de su familia? (Can you share how your child has adjusted to the separation he/she experienced from his/her parent?)
5. ¿Cómo fue la separación del mama/papa por su hijo y su familia?
6. ¿Cómo fue la despedida de su hijo con estas personas? ¿Han podido mantenerse en contacto con esta(s) personas? (Did your child have an opportunity to say goodbye- to his/her parent(s), if so how was it? Has your child been able to maintain contact with the parent(s) who she/he was separated from?)

Family Well-Being

7. ¿Habla Ud. y su hijo acerca de la separación? (Do you speak about the process of separation with the child, if so, what is shared?)
8. ¿Cómo le lleva Ud. con su hijo después de la separación? Como su hijo lleva con los demás en la familia? (How do you and your child get along post-family separation?)

Social Service Support

10. ¿Desde la separación, hay algo que usted o su familia ha necesitado por ejemplo, algún tipo de actividades por su hijo, consejería, apoyo económicamente? (After the separation, are there any supportive services that you or your family have needed such as counseling, financial support?)
11. ¿Lo que ha ayudado a su familia la mayor parte durante este tiempo; La escuela, apoyo de la familia/amigos, la iglesia, algún agencia de servicios? (What support has helped you most during this time; support from school, friends, family, church, or a particular social service agency?)
12. ¿Participa Ud. o su familia en algún tipo de servicios de apoyo; por ejemplo ayuda de la comida, la renta, consejería, servicios de salud mental de algún agencia o, de la escuela? (Do you or your family participate in, or receive any kind of social or economic support?)
13. ¿Lo que ayudaría a su familia la mayor parte durante este tiempo? (What type of social service support would be most helpful to you and your family during this time?)

Appendix G: Service Provider Interview Protocol

Introduction & Social Service Provision

1. Can you describe the type of services that you provide to Latino/a youth who have experienced an immigration related family separation?
2. Can you describe any challenges that you experience serving Latino/a youth and immigrant families who have experienced a forced family separation?
3. What do you see as limitations to the current services that you provide Latino/a youth and immigrant families that have experienced a forced family separation?
4. How do you and your school/agency/program address the needs of Latino/a youth and/or immigrant families who have experienced trauma due to a family separation?
5. What services do you feel would be beneficial to offer Latino/a youth and immigrant families who have experienced a forced family separation?

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