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## LIFE THROUGH THE EYES OF AN UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT IN THE UNITED STATES

Yesenia Torres

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LIFE THROUGH THE EYES OF AN UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT  
IN THE UNITED STATES

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

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by  
Yesenia Torres

May 2021

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## ABSTRACT

This research project focused on how undocumented immigrants experience their lives in the United States, taking into account the multiple barriers that prevent them from integrating into the community. This research project surveyed social work students who work or engage with undocumented immigrants. A positivism paradigm research design was used to obtain quantitative data of participant's knowledge of immigrants' past and present experiences while living in the United States. The study's goal was to bring mental health awareness to the well-being and emotional experiences during the resettlement and acculturation of undocumented immigrants. This study helps inform social workers about the challenges undocumented immigrants experience in the United States. The results of this study showed that undocumented immigrants live in fear of deportation, losing their home, their families, and their earnings. According to results, deportation was a top concern for undocumented immigrants. Language barriers resulted in their top barrier, and limited job opportunities were the second most significant barrier for undocumented immigrants. Results also concluded that the principal reason for coming to the United States for undocumented immigrants was better employment opportunities and family reunification. This study's future implications promote further research to help bring awareness to the need for mental health social work within the immigration sector. With such great diversity

in culture within the United States, there is a need to promoting educational programs and other interventions for assisting undocumented immigrants.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## CHAPTER ONE

### ASSESSMENT

#### Introduction

Chapter one introduces the research question regarding how immigrants reside and view their lives in the United States. How these undocumented immigrants experience their lives and how they shape and impact their daily living and overall well-being will also be discussed. A discussion why the positivist paradigm approach was utilized and why it is the most appropriate paradigm for this research project will also be presented. Following that is a literature review on the lives and experiences of undocumented immigrants living in the United States. After providing the literature review, the theoretical orientation for the study is discussed. Lastly, this chapter covers the contribution to social work practice at the micro and macro levels of the organization.

#### Research Statement/Focus/Question

The research focus of this study was on how undocumented immigrants view and experience their lives in the United States. This study included what information is already present for this research topic and what barriers these undocumented immigrants face that cause negative impacts on their over well-being. Many of these factors prevent them from living their lives to their full potential and the constant struggle with limited resources to help them live a

more stable life. On a micro level, undocumented immigrants may have come to the United States to live better lives, and yet they do not have more opportunities to live in the United States. Immigrants are often struggling with limited jobs and resources, oppression, fear, discrimination. They are generally living their lives attempting to avoid attention while finding some tranquility in their daily living. Many of these undocumented immigrants have had many negative experiences living in the United States, which has increased the likelihood of these individuals having mental health concerns causing a long-lasting impact on their lives. Many undocumented immigrants live in the United States with feelings of rejection and being unwanted, causing them distress and overall mental instability.

Living in the United States can provide families with better opportunities and better lives when compared to some foreign countries that experience violence, drugs, and corruption. Many undocumented immigrants are living in the United States who may never see all the opportunities promised. They might have negative experiences living in the United States due to their undocumented legal status. Many undocumented immigrants are living in constant fear due to their legal status. This continuous state of apprehension can lead to mental health difficulties and other concerns that may develop rapidly or over time. Many undocumented immigrants choose to live in the shadows to keep safe from being deported or questioned on their legal status. In these cases, many illegal immigrants refuse to reach out for help when needed. These needs, such as assistance with food, employment, legal support, preventative and emergency

medical visits, mental health treatment, and other resources, are put aside due to immigrant's fear of not having legal residency or permanent legal status in the United States. Therefore, these undocumented individuals are suffering from oppression, social injustices, and discrimination. Along with these compounded factors, limited resources, and limited opportunities, many are not living their lives to their full potential.

### Paradigm and Rationale for Chosen Paradigm

This research study was conducted utilizing the positivist paradigm (Morris, 2014) as it was determined to be the most appropriate for this type of study. Through the positivism paradigm, there was an allowance for gathering quantitative data utilizing a developed data gathering instrument, which resulted in a self-administered process. Using the positivism paradigm, a researcher could translate human behavior from words into numerical data. As a result, probable statements were made from the correlations and common themes from the data findings. Therefore, with the self-administered process, data collection was conducted on a micro level and allowed the researcher to obtain the desired data, get results, and identified common themes for the research question.

### Literature Review

In the following section, the prevalence of illegal immigration and why many undocumented immigrants migrate to the United States will be discussed.

This section will also go over the struggles undocumented immigrants face with assimilation and their constant living in fear due to the current feelings and actions against undocumented individuals. Lastly, this literature review will discuss immigrant's limited opportunities living here in the United States and what approach will be taken when interacting with these individuals.

### Prevalence

Illegal immigration has increased over the years in the United States, leading to increased current United States presidency approaches to decrease recent unlawful immigration. According to Baker (2018), in 2015, there were reportedly an estimated 12.0 million undocumented individuals living in the United States, a higher number than ever recorded in United States history. This same study noted that in 2014, an estimated 11.5 million undocumented immigrants lived in the United States, with the population growing by 70,000 per year from 2010 to 2015. Baker (2018) stated that of these undocumented immigrants residing in the United States in 2015, six percent lived in the U.S. for the last five years, and eighty percent of these individuals lived in the United States for over ten years. Many illegal immigrants residing in the United States in 2015 were from Mexico, making up about fifty-five percent of the undocumented population. The latest information from the most current census in 2015 delineated that sixty percent of the undocumented immigrants were between the ages 25-44, and fifty-three percent were male individuals.

## Daily Living in Fear

Although there has been a long history of undocumented immigrants migrating to the United States for decades for a better future, many current-day immigrants live in fear of deportation and losing their home, families, and earnings (Nienhusser & Oshio, 2018). In 2016, U.S. President Donald Trump prioritized restricting any more undocumented immigrants from entering the United States and deporting all undocumented immigrants residing in the United States (Nienhusser & Oshio, 2018). Due to the changes the President was enacting, the deportations rate increased. These expulsion rates from the United States surged from 5,014 deportations to 13,744 deportations of non-criminal undocumented immigrants residing in the United States (Nienhusser & Oshio, 2018). In 2017, the Trump Administration announced that they were ending the DACA program, whose recipients are undocumented individuals who have applied and met all criteria for this Dream Act Opportunity, allowing them to hold temporary legal residency and the right to work (Nienhusser & Oshio, 2018). This action toward the Dream Act brought great fear to many DACA recipients and their families. They could potentially lose their status in the United States, be prohibited from working legally in the United States, and increase their chances of being deported.

The separation and loss of the families due to deportation have many undocumented individuals living in severe and constant fear on their way to work, pick up their children from school, or even go to their routine doctor

appointments. The fear that numerous undocumented immigrants live in prevents many from reporting crimes to law enforcement officials and has increased the probability of these individuals isolating themselves, hindering them from integrating into society (Nienhusser & Oshio, 2018).

### Limited Opportunities for Undocumented Immigrants

Due to their undocumented status, individuals living in the United States have experienced multiple challenges in their daily lives ranging from ethnicity-based discrimination and language barriers to occupational stress and economic instability (Nienhusser & Oshio, 2018). Due to the current changes in law and approaches to handling illegal immigration, many undocumented individuals have limited their access to social services and other resources, often frightened their status could initiate their deportation. Undocumented immigrants have limited access to healthcare and employment opportunities which is detrimental to their families.

Upon discovering the presented information, it can be concluded that undocumented immigrants migrated to the United States for a better life but still struggle with many barriers. Not only is migrating a struggle, but upon arriving in the United States, may have a hard time assimilating to the new cultural norms. Language barriers and other discriminating factors play a role in the hardship they face. Undocumented immigrants have been migrating to the United States for generations. To this day, they live their lives in constant fear that they will be separated from their families or sent back to a country they know little of

(Nienhusser & Oshio, 2018). The limited opportunities undocumented immigrants experience make it difficult for them to live their lives to their full potential without constant distress.

### Theoretical Orientation

The acculturation theory was utilized when conducting this research study. Acculturation is defined as "the process of cultural change that occurs when individuals from different cultural backgrounds come into prolonged, continuous, firsthand contact with each other (Celenk & Vijver, 2011). Therefore, due to the overall assessment of undocumented immigrants, countless people struggle with acculturation and adjust to a newly introduced culture here in the United States. In conclusion, firsthand contact with a new environment causes a change in attitudes, beliefs, identities, and values, leading to two major theoretical perspectives in the acculturation theory (Celenk & Vijver, 2011). The two perspectives in the acculturation theory are dimensionality and domain specificity, in which an individual can adapt to a new culture of settlement or maintain their culture (Celenk & Vijver, 2011). These authors believe undocumented immigrants can be appropriately assessed to obtain the desired data by utilizing this theory.

## Contribution of the Study to Social Work Practice

This research study will contribute to micro and macro social work practice. The study focuses on direct face-to-face interviews with several undocumented individuals living in the United States. These survey questions contain valid information and will be used to bring light to undocumented immigrants' issues. This study can lead to awareness about undocumented immigrants' difficulties and experiences with completing the distributed surveys. This study will bring light and knowledge to social workers on how undocumented immigrants experience life here in the United States, enabling social workers to educate on available resources and intervene at the early stage of need. This study's purpose is to bring awareness to the diversity and culture within this population. It is hoped that this will promote educational programs and other interventions to assist these individuals with their integration into society. On a macro level, this study will determine how the environmental system surrounding an entire population needs to change and how to assist with the overall well-being of these undocumented immigrants regarding employment, housing, and healthcare. Lastly, this study will initiate advocacy dealing with the limited opportunities for these undocumented immigrants on a macro level.

## Summary

This chapter addressed the focus of this research study on how undocumented immigrants experience life in the United States. This chapter

discussed how the research study was conducted by utilizing the positivism approach and collecting quantitative data from the self-administered questionnaire. Also provided was a literature review to disperse information on the prevalence and current needs of illegal immigrants. This chapter discussed some of the experiences undocumented immigrants have had living in the United States and the limited opportunities they face due to their status. From the beginning of this research study, no specific approach was utilized but instead implemented a theory based on the data collected from this study. Lastly discussed were the contributions of this study to social work on a micro and macro level.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ENGAGEMENT

#### Introduction

This chapter discusses the engagement process for this research study, the participants' selection, and details of the research study. This chapter covers engagement strategies for gatekeepers and the research target, and the self-preparation for the research study. Furthermore, this chapter discusses the diversity, ethical, and political issues of this research study. To conclude, chapter two discusses the role of technology in the engagement process in this research study.

#### Study Site

The targeted study site was a School of Social Work at a Southern California University. This School serves the region's social work education needs with accredited programs for both a (CSWE) Master of Social Work (MSW) and a Bachelor of Arts in Social Work (BASW) degree. The School of Social Work provides accessible, dynamic, and rigorous academic programs to prepare students with generalist and advanced generalist values, knowledge, and practice skills to effectively enhance the well-being of the diverse populations and communities of our region, state, and world.

Students enrolled in this School of Social Work come from diverse backgrounds and ages, varying their social work experience. This school enrolls hundreds of students each year and offers part-time and full-time educational programs. Many of these enrolled students have a student role and have a full-time job outside their educational path. Many students within the Social Work program come into the program with various experiences and engagement with communities. Many students of the School of Social Work are potentially already working in social settings in which they engage with multiple populations, such as undocumented immigrants.

#### Engagement Strategies for Gatekeepers at Site

To conduct this research study, I needed permission from the Social Work director. An initial email was written with a detailed description of the study's purpose and possible contribution and sent to the director to persuade the school's gatekeeper. The engagement focus was to prove that this study will bring awareness to the needs of this population and clarify the overall benefits of the research study to society. The benefits to society will be bringing attention to the struggles and views of the undocumented individuals living in the United States to bridge gaps in services.

Once the gatekeeper's attention had been obtained, I provided the concierge a link to the questionnaire that would be distributed. In this email, I explained that the developed surveys were voluntary and completed without

personal identifiers to protect students' identity and undocumented immigrants. The surveys only asked for demographic information such as gender, age, length of time living in the United States, ethnicity, and background. I developed and sent an email to participants to engage them and receive their participation. The email submission of this information was in preparation for approval from the director. I then requested a letter of acceptance which was granted to complete this study.

### Self-Preparation

This research study focused on undocumented individuals' experiences while living in the United States and was addressed through a set of survey questions I developed. As stated by Morris (2014), it is required for researchers to prepare for such a study by being knowledgeable about the topic and having a set of questions designed. It was also important that a group of questions was developed utilizing specific informative factors for the appropriate research study execution. Morris (2014) reports that it is vital after creating the survey questions to develop a brief statement of that study, who the assignment is for, and who the researcher is conducting the survey. It is crucial to reassure participants that the study is not too lengthy and that the appropriate individuals are being surveyed (Morris, 2014). At the beginning of the study, a statement was included that questioned if participants knew or engaged with an undocumented immigrant and if so, please proceed to survey questions.

In preparation for this research study, to better understand the lives of undocumented individuals, a vast amount of research was conducted. Other research methods were considered to determine common themes presented and clarify contributing factors to the experiences of undocumented immigrants. The literature review and analysis helped better understand what is going on in the lives of undocumented immigrants and what the problem is going forward. It was essential to remember sensitivity when engaging with any individual who assists undocumented individuals. Trusting anyone with personal information would make undocumented individuals feel vulnerable, mainly due to overarching fears regarding security. Lastly, it was vital to develop and attach an informed consent to the beginning of the survey, which covered the purpose and a description of the survey, participation, confidentiality, duration, risks, benefits, contact, and results (see Appendix A).

### Diversity Issues

Diversity issues that could have arisen while attempting to conduct this research study would be participants feeling that they are being targeted because they engaged with undocumented immigrants. As a result of this, it could have caused some discomfort and vulnerability but explaining the purpose and contribution to society may have provided some relief. Unfortunately, this openness may have provoked the potential participants to refuse the surveys and therefore added a challenge to conduct this research study. I attached a

statement of the proposal in the email submitted to the participants to address this issue. To alleviate any fears the participants may have in sharing their information, a consent form was shared before participants initiated the survey.

Another diversity issue that may have arisen when working with this population is making sure I had conducted enough literature reviews and research to learn about the diversity. The analysis included areas such as economic class, education, religion, language, and culture (Migration Policy Institute, 2020). An increase in competency was accomplished by researching the hardships faced by these individuals who have recently migrated to the United States. It was also crucial for me to examine the immigration pathway and the acculturation process of these undocumented immigrants arriving in the United States. Another area of research for cultural sensitivity to this population was learning about their lives here in the United States and their societal and unemployment issues, and the jobs they carry to make ends meet. By doing this, I had better insight and understanding of this population's experiences and struggles.

### Ethical Issues

It is vital for social workers always to practice being mindful and aware of ethical dilemmas that may arise and practice within ethical boundaries and scope of practice. As reported by Morris (2014), appropriate institutional review boards should be consulted with such research studies. Therefore, to reassure that the

research study was practicing under ethical, social work practices of not harming clients, the research proposal was submitted to the Institutional Review Board and resulted in their approval (see Appendix B).

In all cases, social workers should always obtain voluntary and written informed consent from participants for any engagement in evaluation or research and remind participants that there is no penalty for their refusal to participate (Morris, 2014). In the initial engagement process, informed consent was reviewed by all participants and was attached to the emailed survey. Morris also states while collecting data, and researchers are to be mindful of their own biases and values, so it does not influence the data gathering. It is vital to keep in mind that allowing the researcher's biases and values to control the study can affect the research, and it will not reflect the reality of what is happening. Lastly, no identifiable information was requested from the participants or was used for this study. The study focused on age and gender rather than names, which may have helped alleviate their fears in sharing personal information.

### Political Issues

Political issues that could have arisen from attempting to conduct this study include the fear that this study could provoke assumptions that organizations could better address these issues. This issue was addressed by presenting the school and the voluntary participants with the research proposal. The research proposal focused on the benefits of the study and its contributions

to social work practice. Another political issue that could have arisen from this is the participants feeling that they are breaking confidentiality by engaging with me and how it is unethical to break confidence regarding what was spoken about in private.

### The Role of Technology

The technology utilized for this research study was focused on the engagement with participants via an online platform. Technology for this research used an email platform for communicating all the details to stakeholders and gatekeepers. This same email platform was also used to engage with students and distribute the developed survey. I also utilized a survey software known as Qualtrics. Through Qualtrics, the survey was created and distributed by a link attached to the presented email to social work students. Since this study was implemented utilizing online surveys in which gathered data in words, a database that can translate words into other forms of results, SPSS, was used to transcribe the collected information into numerical data.

### Summary

In Chapter Two, the discussion of the process of engagement with participants and gatekeepers was discussed. This chapter discussed the research site utilized for this research project. The self-preparation needed to take place for me to be reasonably equipped before beginning the research

study. The chapter then discussed the diversity, ethical and political issues that may arise during the research and how appropriately addressed. In conclusion, Chapter Two closed by explaining the role of technology for this research study in the engagement phase.

## CHAPTER THREE

### IMPLEMENTATION

#### Introduction

Chapter Three discusses how data was gathered and who the study participants were. This chapter discusses how the participants were selected and then explains how the desired data was securely collected and the data collection process. Subsequently, the chapter discusses how the data was recorded and the data analysis behind this research study. Lastly, a summary of the chapter will be provided.

#### Study Participants

For this study, the participants were individuals from a Social Work Program who work or engage with undocumented individuals in the United States. Many individuals work in the social services field where they engage or have encountered undocumented individuals and have possibly experienced sharing their personal stories and current and past struggles. The participants will contribute to learning about undocumented and Latinx individuals living in Southern California. The target ethnic group would be that of the Latinx population due to how society struggles with the current immigration policy changes, which have affected this population in particular.

## Selection of Participants

The survey study was distributed to the School of Social Work participants regardless of race or background, as long as they were adults and could report on engagement with undocumented immigrants. The research study distributed surveys to obtain information on adults who were undocumented and living in Southern California. The selection of participants was voluntary, which allowed participants to share the information they were knowledgeable in freely.

The research will be essential and used to discover knowledge and truth about a situation (Morris, 2014). The sampling strategy used was purposive sampling, where I looked for study participants who would be able to give complete data about the study focus. Utilizing this sampling strategy gave the best results because a small number of individuals were targeted rather than an attempt to interview an entire community. This approach assumes that that one sample is selected according to the stated purpose of the study (Morris, 2014). The units of analysis for this sampling strategy will include individuals within an organization.

## Data Gathering

I solicited MSW and BSW student respondents from the School of Social Work with the support of the program's director. An estimated 300 students received the solicitation to complete the survey. The solicitation included a Qualtrics survey link, which required the respondent to read and agree to the

informed consent before starting the study. The survey questions covered specific topics (see Appendix C), like the undocumented immigrant experience through the lens of social work students. It took approximately ten weeks to collect the data.

Once the group of participants was selected for the research study, it was essential to prepare them. One of the first steps in prepping for the research study and data gathering was to build rapport with the participants. Building rapport is crucial to obtain valid data and review informed consent. In an online platform, I attached their information, student status, and the purpose of the study. It was crucial to make these participants feel at ease for me to have a reliable, valid, and comprehensive data collection. It is essential that the participants be fully oriented with the research project.

Survey questions that were used in this research study were by using open- and close-ended questions. Using open-ended questions, participants verbalized their responses as necessary and answered in their terms. By utilizing close-ended questions, I allowed for a more structured data gathering. As such, responses were provided and thus limited some reactions from the participants. The positivist paradigm commonly combines open- and close-ended questions, and so this was utilized in this study to ensure consistency and accurately gathered quantitative data.

In the survey, participants' questions were focused on the experiences and views of undocumented immigrants' lives. Survey questions focused on the

background, current demographic information, what brought these individuals to the United States, and how they see their lives since their arrival. Some descriptive questions were direct and asked participants to describe the experiences of undocumented immigrants that were shared with them. Questions were asked regarding the accessibility to resources for these individuals and how easy or knowledgeable they are with what resources are available for them. Other questions asked about how comfortable this population is in asking for help if needed and knowing what steps to take for public assistance. Lastly were questions that covered undocumented immigrant's assimilation process in the United States.

#### Phases of Data Collection

There were various phases in the data collection for this research study. The first phase of the research study was the email with the attached survey distributed to students over their summer break in 2020. Self-administered online surveys were implemented due to limited time and resources for this type of study. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, online surveys were thought to be a safer way to engage with individuals and still abide by the stay home and social distancing orders.

After distributing the online survey, I monitored the response rate so that a follow-up to the email could be distributed to participants. After the results were received, I gathered data securely onto a protected internal hard drive, requiring

a password to access. By doing this step, the products and data gathered from participants remained confidential. After collecting the data, I reviewed and analyzed the data utilizing an SPSS database, translating participants' descriptive responses into numerical statistics.

### Data Recording

Survey participation was conducted through the online survey process with no personal identifiers. Also, the school's email distribution list of student's identifiable information remained confidential. SPSS was utilized to record and analyze the data that was collected from participants. By using SPSS, the report was translated into numerical data. After entering the transcripts into the database, I began coding and selected data depending on predicted themes from there, the information that fell into each category and was sorted. After the transcripts were reviewed and data were sorted, the data was analyzed to determine the most common themes and patterns.

### Data Analysis

By utilizing the positivism approach, I understood the data and its meaning through hypothesis testing and finding correlations among the data. With this approach, the laws of cause and effect were developed, stating that if the correlation was observed between the cause and effect, this correlation was derived from the cause and effect.

I conducted a bivariate analysis of the independent variable (demographics of the participants) and the dependent variable (perceived comfort in undocumented individuals). Specifically, an independent samples t-test was done to analyze the data utilizing the SPSS software. A breakdown of the demographic profile of the respondents was completed using descriptive statistics. Lastly, the study was a quantitative cross-sectional study using survey data.

### Summary

Chapter Three discussed who the study participants were in this research study and explained how the study participants were selected and the data gathered. Next, it discussed the phases of data collection and how the data was recorded. The chapter then discussed how the data was analyzed by implementing an independent samples t-test to examine and explore the correlations in the data provided.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

Chapter Four discusses the results of the analyses and provides a response to the research question of, "What is the perception undocumented individuals have on their lives in the United States?". I will also discuss in detail the data analyses and the data interpretation. Then this chapter will clarify the demographics of the participants and the undocumented immigrants by utilizing descriptive statistics. This study identifies the perceived barriers these undocumented immigrants face daily from students' perspectives in a social work program.

#### Data Analysis

Data was gathered and received from 69 participants via the Qualtrics platform. All 69 participants confirmed to be of age 18 and over and agreed to the attached consent form. The research study conducted a bivariate analysis of the independent variable of the (demographics of the participants) and the dependent variable (perceived comfort in undocumented individuals). I then analyzed the correlations between the independent and the dependent variable. Specifically, independent samples t-tests, were completed to compare the data and conclude the themes for the research questions.

## Presentation of Findings

Descriptive statistics were used to provide a demographic breakdown of the sample. Respondents in this study were 34.8% White, with 51.5% of respondents indicating "other." This study did not accurately assess respondents from Latinx backgrounds. Still, it denoted, but a large percentage likely were Latinx considering that respondents were from the School of Social Work. Individuals from ethnic backgrounds such as Black, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, making up 13.2%. Of these participants, 51.5% were from ages 25 to 34 years of age, 22.1% were aged 35 to 44, and 19.1% were 18 to 24 years of age. The remaining participants ranged from ages 45 to 54, resulting in 7.4% of the sample.

91.2% of surveyed participants were female, and 57.4% reported never have been married. The individuals who said their marital status as married was 35.3%. Of all surveyed individuals, 27.9% were students in the part-time online Pathway Program, and another 27.9% were part-time on-campus students. Of these surveyed individuals, 25.0% were master's full-time on-campus students, and 19.1% were bachelor's part-time students.

Participants reported that the individuals they encountered or engaged with undocumented come from many different countries. While 71.4% were Mexican, 10.2% were from other ethnic groups, including Central American and Asian. Another large group, 18.4%, was from El Salvador. Of these undocumented individuals, 42.6 percent of them have lived in the United States

for ten to twenty years, 29.8% were twenty or more years, and 25.5% lived here in the United States for 1 to 5 years. About 2.1% have been in the United States for five to ten years.

Deportation is a top concern for undocumented immigrants from the providers' perspective, with 68.1% of participants ranking it in the top two areas of concern. Top-three concerns included family separation, with 66% of respondents ranking it reasonably high on the list. Also, 66% of respondents ranked unstable income as a top-four concern, and 72.4% of respondents rank limited job opportunities as a top-five concern.

46.8% of respondents have identified language limitations as the number one barrier for undocumented individuals faces. The next significant barrier is employment opportunities, with 55.3% of respondents ranking it second or third. Finally, housing was identified as the third significant barrier, with 46.8% of respondents ranking it third or fourth.

As a result of this survey, it was concluded that there are two top reasons these undocumented individuals report why they came to the United States. A majority of undocumented immigrants, roughly 58%, report migrating for employment opportunities, while 14.5% went to the United States for family reunification. These statistics were a result of the descriptive statistics that were provided by the distributed via online surveys.

## Summary

Chapter Four reported the data gathered from the participants, data analyses, and discussed the findings of this study. Chapter Four also discussed the participants and undocumented immigrants' demographics utilizing no personal identifiers to reassure confidentiality and reports to the background of these undocumented immigrants. Chapter Four discussed the response to the research question and provided statistics for every question presented to the participants.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

In conclusion to this study, a review of the results will be discussed. Chapter Five will examine whether the results supported the research question and whether these findings support the literature review and studies. Chapter Five will discuss recommendations for social work practice, policy, and research and include a conclusion statement.

#### Termination and Follow Up

Termination and follow-up are a vital part of any research study with any client engagement, direct or non-direct. Upon the arrival of termination, I did not have any more communication with the participants. The participants would remain anonymous, and when distributing the survey, they were informed that no personal identifiers would be used and no further contact would be made. Students and the School of Social Work were notified about where to locate these findings.

#### Communication of Findings and Dissemination Plan

This research will be submitted as part of the research study to the California State University of San Bernardino. Research findings will be provided

to the participants via their school's preferred platform, including the library. After the information is submitted to the educational entity, nonprofit organizations that engage with undocumented immigrants will be contacted for this study to be offered and shared with their staff, clients, and community. These organizations can choose to share this information via their newsletters or bulletin boards, which will assist staff members working with undocumented individuals, bringing awareness to these vulnerable individuals' hardships and experiences. Lastly, this study will be published at the California State University of San Bernardino's Scholar Works website and be disseminated at the CSUSB's School of Social Works research symposium around June 2021 in the form of an electronic poster.

## Discussion

This study supported the literature regarding undocumented immigrants' experiences, fears, barriers, and background on their arrival to the United States. This study was able to help the question "What is the undocumented perception individuals have on their lives in the United States?". The literature review provided reports that "In the current day many are living in fear of deportation, losing their home, their families and their earnings." According to the study results, deportation was listed as a top-two concern for undocumented immigrants, as seen from the perspective of 68.1% of social work students. According to Nienhusser and Oshio (2018), there was a high rate of deportation,

which could have been a contributor to deportation being the biggest of undocumented individuals.

As a result of the findings, it was concluded that undocumented individuals living in the United States believe that their most significant barrier is language. This data supports what the literature review previously presented. Many undocumented individuals may come to the United States for a better life and better employment opportunities. However, findings report that living here in the United States and limited job opportunities are the second biggest barrier that prevents them from reaching their full potential in daily life. The data and findings also reported the same concern and goals for individuals who come to the United States for better employment opportunities and family reunification. Many families have been victims of family separation or are joining families already living in the United States.

#### Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy, and Research

Recommendations for social work practice are to create an environment where these undocumented individuals do not feel the need to hide in the shadows but instead feel empowered and safe. Security is one of the essential human needs; therefore, to contribute to their safety, there must be policies set in place in which undocumented individuals will not be deported without cause. Social workers can partake in social work policy advocacy to initiate change, either by developing policies or changing policies already in place. Social

workers can assist in identifying gaps in the system that limit opportunities and security for these undocumented individuals.

Another recommendation is to initiate change and create a healthy environment for these individuals by bringing awareness and education to the community and society on the fears and barriers of undocumented individuals. Our approach as social workers is one of the most impactful for working with these vulnerable populations, so increasing cultural competence and understanding with this population is recommended. Not only is competency critical amongst social workers, but also in the community. With community support and evidence-based practices, social workers can help develop more programs so that these undocumented individuals feel safe enough to access and are at no to low cost. These services can provide adult learning programs and English as second language classes, which may be facilitated by social workers or various providers in the social services field.

### Summary

By exploring the broader implications of the results for social work practice, it is essential to focus on the current political climate and current societal changes. These can all affect the experiences these individuals are facing. Oppression and discrimination have played a significant role in society, and during these last several years, there has been an increase in fear, instability, and family separation among undocumented individuals. Per this

study, results can help bring awareness to the ongoing issues that prevent them from achieving their full potential. Social workers should feel knowledgeable and empowered in their field and, as such, work with greater compassion when engaging with undocumented individuals.

APPENDIX A  
INFORMED CONSENT

## INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to examine the views and experiences of adult undocumented immigrants living in Southern California. The study is being conducted by Yesenia Torres, a graduate student, under the supervision of Dr. Armando Barragán, Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at CSUSB.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of the study is to examine the views and experiences of undocumented immigrants living in Southern California.

**DESCRIPTION:** Participants will be asked to complete a survey on the views and experiences of undocumented immigrants living in Southern California, demographics will be collected but no personal identifiers.

**PARTICIPATION:** Your participation in the study is totally voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Your responses will remain confidential and data will be reported in group form only.

**DURATION:** It will take 10-15 minutes to complete this survey.

**RISKS:** Although not anticipated, there may be some discomfort in answering some of the questions. You are not required to answer and can skip the question or end your participation.

**BENEFITS:** There will not be any direct benefits to the participants but conducting this study will potentially assist society overall how to better assist undocumented individuals.

**CONTACT:** If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Barragán at (909) 537-3501.

**RESULTS:** Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks database (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/>) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 2021.

I understand that I must be 18 years of age or older to participate in your study, have read and understand the consent document and agree to participate in your study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Place an X mark here

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

APPENDIX B  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



September 23, 2020

**CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

Administrative/Exempt Review Determination

Status: Determined Exempt

IRB-FY2020-286

Yesenia Torres Armand Barragan Jr.  
CSBS - Social Work  
California State University, San Bernardino  
5500 University Parkway  
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Yesenia Torres Armand Barragan Jr.:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "Living In the United States as an Undocumented Immigrant MSW Student Study" has been reviewed and determined exempt by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of CSU, San Bernardino. An exempt determination means your study had met the federal requirements for exempt status under 45 CFR 46.104. The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk and benefits of the study to ensure the protection of human participants. Important Note: This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional campus approvals which may be required including access to CSUSB campus facilities and affiliate campuses due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Visit the Office of Academic Research website for more information at <https://www.csusb.edu/academic-research>.

You are required to notify the IRB of the following as mandated by the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) federal regulations 45 CFR 46 and CSUSB IRB policy. The forms (modification, renewal, unanticipated/adverse event, study closure) are located in the Cayuse IRB System with instructions provided on the IRB Applications, Forms, and Submission webpage. Failure to notify the IRB of the following requirements may result in disciplinary action. The Cayuse IRB system will notify you when your protocol is due for renewal. Ensure you file your protocol renewal and continuing review form through the Cayuse IRB system to keep your protocol current and active unless you have completed your study.

- Ensure your CITI Human Subjects Training is kept up-to-date and current throughout the study.
- Submit a protocol modification (change) if any changes (no matter how minor) are proposed in your study for review and approval by the IRB before being implemented in your study.
- Notify the IRB within 5 days of any unanticipated or adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research.
- Submit a study closure through the Cayuse IRB submission system once your study has ended.

If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, the Research Compliance Officer. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at [mgillesp@csusb.edu](mailto:mgillesp@csusb.edu). Please include your application approval number IRB-FY2020-286 in all correspondence. Any complaints you receive from participants and/or others related to your research may be directed to Mr. Gillespie.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Nicole Dabbs

Nicole Dabbs, Ph.D., IRB Chair  
CSUSB Institutional Review Board

NDMG

APPENDIX C  
SURVEY QUESTIONS

## Survey Questions

1. What is your ethnicity?

White

Black or African American

American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Other

2. What is your age?

18-24

25-34

35-44

45-54

55-64

3. What is your gender?

Male

Female

4. What is your marital status?

Married

Widowed

Divorced

Separated

Never married

5. What is your current enrollment status?

Bachelors Student/Part-time

Bachelors Student/Full time

Masters Full time/On-campus

Masters Part-time/Pathway

Masters Part-time/On Campus

(Do you know someone or work with that is an undocumented immigrant?

If so, please answer the following questions (6-15) to the best of your ability and your perceived understanding.)

6. What nationality is your undocumented client or acquaintance identify with?

Spanish

Central American

Asian

Salvadorean

Other

7. What is the average time of residency in the United States for the undocumented individual or individuals you interact with?

1-5 years

5-10 years

10-20 years

20 or more

8. What are the biggest worries these undocumented individuals face living

here in the United States?

Seeking medical help

Driving without a legal documentation

Using public transit

Unstable Income

Limited Job Opportunities

Family Separation

Deportation

Discrimination

Other

9. Undocumented individuals are very knowledgeable in the resources that

are available to them?

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

10. How comfortable are undocumented individuals seeking assistance?

Extremely comfortable

Slightly comfortable

Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable

Slightly uncomfortable

Extremely uncomfortable

11. How would you describe their process of adapting or adjusting to the culture of the United States?

Extremely easy

Slightly easy

Neither easy nor difficult

Slightly difficult

Extremely difficult

12. What are the most significant barriers undocumented individuals face?

Language barriers

Employment opportunities

Housing

Access to local services

Transportation issues

Cultural differences

Raising children

Prejudice

Isolation

Economic barriers

Reporting crime

Other

13. How would you rate their overall satisfaction living here in the United States?

Very Satisfied

Satisfied

Neither

Dissatisfied

Very Dissatisfied

14. How would you rate their experiences living here in the United States?

Extremely good

Slightly good

Neither good nor bad

Slightly bad

Extremely bad

15. What are the reasons your undocumented individuals report why they came to the United States?

Family Reunification

Employment Opportunities

Humanitarian protection

Corruption

Other

Developed by Yesenia Torres, 2020

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