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## SEPARATION DUE TO DEPORTATION: PSYCHOLOGICAL, EMOTIONAL, AND ECONOMIC AFFECT ON CHILDREN OF DEPORTED PARENTS

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SEPARATION DUE TO DEPORTATION: PSYCHOLOGICAL,  
EMOTIONAL, AND ECONOMIC AFFECT ON  
CHILDREN OF DEPORTED PARENTS

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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  
Gaiane Nazarian

June 2014

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## ABSTRACT

This study looked at the affects of separation due to deportation of a parent(s) on children with US citizenship status who were left behind in the care of one remaining parent, or family members, or were placed in the foster care system. It addressed psychological, emotional, and economic hardships suffered by children in face of being separated from their families and becoming vulnerable to emotionally triggered dysfunctional behavior, abuse, neglect, and poverty. Qualitative methods were used for this research as it aimed to examine the content and depth of the experience. The interview used open-ended questions to elicit response from adult children about their experiences when the separation took place by looking back and assessing how those events changed their lives soon after they transpired and also into later years of their lives. The snowball method was used to recruit participants from Armenian and Hispanic populations. The researcher found evidence in support of significant influences of separation as a negative experience that elicited numerous psychological and economic downfalls detrimental for the future development and self-realization of children and families involved.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	iii
LIST OF TABLES .....	vi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
Problem Statement .....	1
Personal Stories.....	3
Purpose of the Study .....	6
Significance of the Project for Social Work .....	7
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	
Introduction .....	10
Psychological Effects of Separation.....	10
Emotional Affects: Loss and Grief.....	13
Economic Hardship.....	15
Increased Risks of Neglect and Abuse .....	17
Theoretical Approach.....	19
Summary .....	22
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS	
Introduction .....	23
Study Design .....	23
Sampling.....	26
Data Collection and Instruments.....	27
Procedures .....	28
Protection of Human Subjects .....	28
Data Analysis.....	29

Summary .....	29
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS	
Introduction .....	31
Presentation of the Findings .....	31
Life Prior to Incarceration/Deportation .....	32
Incarceration/Deportation Process .....	33
Life after incarceration/deportation.....	34
Variables behind Staying in the United States .....	35
Impact of Separation .....	37
Continued Effects.....	39
Summary .....	41
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION	
Introduction .....	43
Discussion .....	43
Limitations .....	55
Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research .....	56
Conclusions .....	58
APPENDIX A: UNSTRUCTURED QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW .....	60
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT .....	64
APPENDIX C: DEBRIEFING STATEMENT .....	66
APPENDIX D: RESULTS TABLE .....	68
APPENDIX E: DEMOGRAPHICS .....	74
REFERENCES.....	76

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.	Demographics .....	32
Table 2.	Life Prior to Incarceration/Deportation.....	33
Table 3.	Incarceration/Deportation Process .....	34
Table 4.	Life after Incarceration/Deportation .....	35
Table 5.	Variables behind Staying in the United States .....	37
Table 6.	Impact of Separation .....	38
Table 7.	Continued Effects .....	40



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter gives information about the history of the problem of illegal immigrants and family separation as well as statistical information regarding the number of immigrants residing in the United States. It describes the agencies involved with the arrest, incarceration, and deportation, procedures, and time frames for the deportation process. The personal stories of two individuals' affected by this problem are included to give the reader testimony of their experiences of having a parent arrested, incarcerated, and deported. It stresses the importance of this issue by emphasizing society's obligation to stand up for social justice and give voice to a vulnerable population – children whose parents were deported. The chapter ends with the research question that this work will strive to investigate and answer.

#### Problem Statement

Thousands of children are faced with the problem of being separated from their parents as a result of deportation. For years, their voices have not been heard and their suffering has not been given the attention it deserves. Today, there is a glimpse of hope on horizon that this very serious issue could possibly find some kind of a resolution as the current United States president has direct and precise position regarding this topic. At this time, it is

appropriate to bring up this problem to aid studies and research towards making the voices of this population heard.

Immigrants from all over the world are drawn to the United States of America, with the hope of a better life and secure future. Many individuals and families are risking a lot, even their lives, to get to this country. Because it is difficult to keep an accurate record of illegal immigrants, only estimated numbers are known. A projected 11.2 million undocumented immigrants live in United States (Passel & Cohn, 2011). According to a report from Homeland Security, hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants are removed from the country each year (United States, 2009; Sanchez, 2011). The removal process varies and it can take place in a matter of weeks to years. Half of the detained immigrants leave voluntarily within weeks of being detained and the other half remain in the custody of Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and are incarcerated in Homeland Security facilities. They remain there for months to years. Those who attempt to stay and fight to delay their deportation and to change circumstances for themselves and their families are often individuals who have families and children in this country.

Most undocumented immigrants situated in this country have families and often these families have U.S. born children (Gonzalez, 2012). During the first six months of 2011, 46,000 undocumented immigrants who are parents to U.S. born children were deported and an additional 21,860 were not, yet left the country when given the order to do so (Gonzales, 2012). Increased

numbers of deportations of undocumented immigrants resulted in more than 5,100 children ending up in the foster care system; this number is anticipated to triple in the next five years (Sanchez, 2011; Applied Research Center, 2011).

### Personal Stories

Two personal stories are presented here to share the experiences of parents who were separated from their children due to their illegal status, and to shed light on the difficulties that families face when undocumented immigrants are separated from their U.S. born children.

Amelia, carried her blind and paralyzed baby boy, Cesar, across the Mexican border in 1995 seeking better medical care for him. She settled in the US and had three more children while she was here. Amelia was arrested in 2008; her children at the time were three months, 7-years-old, nine-years-old, and fourteen-years-old. The children were placed in the foster care system. For two years she fought to be reunited with her children and was unsuccessful; she was deported in 2010. Her parental rights were terminated because of failed progress for reunification as Amelia was not able to comply with requirements of the court because she was locked away for months, did not have legal counsel, and did not receive notifications from the child welfare agency. Her children remain in foster care and will be put up for adoption (O'Neill, 2012).

Encarnacion was an illegal resident in the United States. She had an infant son, Carlos. Encarnacion was arrested and jailed by federal immigration authorities during a raid of the poultry plant where she worked. She spent two years in federal detention waiting for deportation. When she was arrested, her child was placed with relatives who gave the baby to a childless couple. Her parental rights were terminated on the grounds that she had abandoned the baby and the couple adopted her son. The initial letter from the court did not reach Encarnacion and the formal adoption petition she received was unexpected and shocking. She wrote back with the help of a prison guard and an English speaking visitor, stating that she did not agree to the adoption of her son; she wanted him to remain in foster care until her fate was decided. She asked for visitations with her child and never received a response from the court about a custody hearing. She is still fighting to get her son back (Valbrun, 2012).

Stories like Amelia's and Encornacion's are not uncommon. Broken families and broken lives are left behind when parents are sent back to their countries of origin and forced to leave their children. Not all children end up in foster care. Some children remain in the country under the care of one of the parents and face inevitable struggles with poverty and emotional distress. Some children are left with family members because parents hope to one day reunite with them. These parents, yet again, cross the treacherous border, jeopardizing their lives in the process, in an attempt to get back to their

children. Other parents will leave their children with relatives even if they do not have any hopes of coming back simply because they want their children to have a better future. Most U.S. born children in immigrant families have never been to the countries of their parents' origin, and the U.S. is the only home they have ever known. Taking them to another country often means hardship and the loss of many opportunities and possibilities.

Parents make a difficult choice to leave their children behind believing that it is in their best interest. Yet some U.S. born children end up leaving the U.S. with their parents and attempt to adjust to a new life in a new country. In a new unfamiliar place they have to learn a new language, new culture, and often are unable to cope with and accept their new circumstances. The separation of families has a tragic effect on everyone involved, especially children. They are stripped away from their homes and their parents who love them; their lives are turned upside down leaving them in emotional, mental, psychological, and economic distress, which in turn increases their vulnerability to abuse and neglect (Murray and Farrington, 2005; Arditti et al., 2003).

The subject of deportation and children left behind is a problem that involves several agencies. The first agency involved is the Department of Homeland Security, which includes U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration

Services (BCIS). The functions of the Department of Homeland Security through these agencies are permanent residency, naturalization, asylum, investigations, deportation, and intelligence (Bray, 2014). The judicial system is another important component that involves the deportation of illegal immigrants and deciding the fate of their families and children (Bray, 2014). The next important agency is Child Protective Services (CPS) which helps to place children in foster homes. The agency is responsible for taking the actions necessary to achieve family reunification and, in case of parental rights termination, to make plans for adoptions and permanent family placements for children.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore and understand the experiences of children who suffered separation due to the deportation of their parents. Amalie's children (refer to the personal story on page 3) did not choose to end up in the foster care system. No one asked them what they would like to have happen in their lives; they were not given a choice or a voice. These children were taken from a mother who loved them, put into the child welfare system, and never saw their mother again (O'Neill, 2012). The siblings will most likely be separated and put up for adoption since their mother lost her parental rights while detained by immigration enforcement agencies. How will the lives of these children turn out? Will be able to recover from the traumatic experiences they endured well enough to move on with their developmental stages? Will

they be able to gain self-differentiation without any significant psychological, emotional, or economic hardships? This study will aim to answer such questions by interviewing adults who had similar experiences when they were children and can now testify how this affected their lives.

### Significance of the Project for Social Work

It is important to understand this problem because these children are negatively impacted and unjustly end up in foster care and adoption placements. Social work profession's primary value is to fight for social justice. That is what needs to be done for children and families who suffer in silence as all attempts to stand up for their rights are stopped by rigid policies. Just because individuals affected by this issue have undocumented parents, does not make them any less American or any less worthy of having a normal family life and the dignity of being able to grow up with their parents by their side. It is an issue that affects many people and not giving it the attention and voice it deserves is a violation of the social work values.

The deported parents are individuals who live and work in our neighborhoods and communities. They are a part of our society whether we want to accept it or not. They work hard but pay a heavy price because of their illegal status by taking low paying jobs that many Americans are reluctant to take. The children who are being separated from their families have rights as U.S. citizens and as human beings. They should have a voice in what happens to them because their lives have a value and meaning. This struggle

is not without cost to our society as it affects the economy, politics, social services, and social welfare in this country.

There are no clear and effective policies in place to address this and related issues. The current system is not working and fails to make the best interest of children and families a priority. New policies are needed and the current political atmosphere shows, for the first time in a long time, some promise for reform. As proof of the current policies' ineffectiveness, there are many testimonies of individuals and families, research findings, and reports from governmental agencies that emphasize the need for change in handling deportation when children are involved.

The findings in this study will help to bring an understanding of these complicated problems and will bring insight into how the large numbers of innocent children are affected. A better grasp of the issues will allow for an examination of relevant agencies and will permit a discussion for possible resolutions. Children's well being is a primary goal for social work agencies. A closer look at how agencies handle these cases from the children's perspective and how children have dealt with trauma, grief and other barriers will give voice to those children who are victims of these unfortunate circumstances. This study will look at how children are affected and answer the following questions: how do children of deported undocumented immigrants experience psychological, emotional, and economic distress? Do



separation and unexpected change in family systems put them at a higher risk for neglect and abuse?

This chapter summary introduced the topic and gave information about the number of the immigrant population and children who are being affected by the deportation of their parents. The problem was presented and described in order to bring about a greater understanding of this social problem and its impact on children and families, and society at large. Personal stories of two women and the faith of their children were shared to provide a first-hand perspective of the difficulties faced by undocumented parents. Key agencies were identified and discussed to give a general overview of the deportation process. The purpose and importance of the study was stated and elaborated on. The chapter ended with the thesis questions.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

This chapter will present a review of the literature and will discuss: how children of deported parents are affected psychologically, emotionally, and economically. This chapter will also present information about increased risks and the vulnerability of children to abuse and neglect when faced with an unexpected change in their lives. The last section of this chapter will discuss the theoretical approach that will be used for this research.

#### Psychological Effects of Separation

Society has a responsibility towards their children. This responsibility is undersood and accepted by the public. Therefore, agencies are created solely to protect children from abuse and maltreatment. With that said, large numbers of children in this country are ripped away from their parents and placed under the protection of the state when they never were in danger but they have loving families and parents who are willing to provide for them and protect them. Raids organized by Homeland Security to apprehend undocumented immigrants resulted in children being left behind without anyone to care for them (Capps, Castaneda, Chaudry, & Santos, 2007). Often when raids occur, detainees are not given a chance to arrange for their children's care and well being. Many arrests result in immediate deportation

without an opportunity to contact lawyers or families. One report states that many families experienced emotional trauma, psychological duress, and mental health problems showing symptoms of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suicidal thoughts (Capps, Castaneda, Chaudry, and Santos, 2007). However, most failed to seek help because of the fear of more arrests. The report states that when raiding worksites, Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) should always assume that the workers they are arresting have children and they should have a plan in place to address those children's needs.

Cleveland, Rousseau, and Kronick, (2012) state in their brief addressed to the House of Commons Standing Committee, that separating children from their parents and putting them in protective services while parents remain incarcerated is even more damaging than detention itself, and that it results in children experiencing depression, PTSD, suicidal ideation, behavioral difficulties and developmental delays soon after the initial experience and in later years in their lives.

Children of undocumented immigrant families have a great disadvantage whether they face a family member being removed from the country or not (Gonzales, Fabrett, and Knight, 2009). The disadvantages can manifest in different ways. The fear that the family can be pulled apart and separated at any moment creates tremendous stress and changes the way

children view their lives. It affects how children define themselves and how they interact with their environment (Gonzales, Fabrett, and Knight, 2009).

Dreby (2012) conducted qualitative research that included 91 parents and 110 children from 80 households. She interviewed individuals with children who had been deported had family members who had been deported. The author reported that the fear of losing their children was the primary and common element in all interviewed parents and that the threat of deportation itself influenced most of the children deeply and changed their sense of identity. Most children reported long-term emotional trauma due to the deportation of a parent as well as constant anxiety due to the threat of deportation. Children have learned to be cautious and suspicious of police since they associate police with deportation and separation.

Similar findings were reported by another study (Suarez-Orozco, Tododrova, and Louie, 2004), which included 385 early adolescent immigrant children from five different countries who experienced separation from a parent or caregiver for various reasons and circumstances. The report indicates that children who were separated from their parent were more likely to report depressive symptoms than children who had not been separated. Disruptions in attachment, feelings of abandonment, and estrangement were evident. Family relationships changed and became complicated even when reunification took place. Children and parents reported depressive responses

and children frequently become difficult and begin acting out (Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2004).

### Emotional Affects: Loss and Grief

According to Jarrati (2011), the best way to help children face a significant loss is to tell them about the separation as soon as it becomes definite because children are sensitive to parental preoccupation and tension. Unfortunately, children living in families with undocumented parents are aware of the tension and stress constantly. This is a familiar experience for them even before the deportation since they live in continuous fear that it will happen one day.

The author also states that saying good-bye is very important when it comes to loss and facing what is to come. It allows children to express their emotions face to face with the people involved in what is happening (Jarrati, 20011). In this regard, as well, many children of deported immigrants are at a disadvantage as they often do not get that opportunity. Saying good-bye could mean realization and acceptance of the loss and may give permission to the child to move on to the stages of grief and perhaps lead to closure in years to come.

Blank and Wener-Lin (2011) state that in the absence of a parent, children's development becomes overshadowed with guilt-laden magical thinking, fantasies of reunion, and the continued devastation and regret about the life that could have been. The authors state that this experience

significantly impairs their developmental trajectory. The authors refer to loss as the passing of a parent, but the concept could hold true when children lose their parents through deportation. When one parent is deported and the other parent is left in the U.S. with the children, the remaining parent struggles with many economic hardships and emotional issues of their own. In an attempt to mend the broken flow of the family life, the remaining parent is often overwhelmed. Children find themselves left alone to deal with the loss and grief of losing a parent. According to Blank and Wener-Lin (2009), children revisit the notion of loss during different stages of their life, reevaluating what was lost, making grief a lifelong process. These children must relive the trauma they have suffered over and over again in different stages of their development.

Loss triggers mostly negative physical, emotional, and behavioral responses in children who are separated from their parents because they do not give themselves permission to grieve (Suares-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2004). The negative impact of loss might be acceptable if the loss experienced was permanent in nature. Deportation-based separation holds a promise of reunification and therefore the grieving process is not initiated to allow for coping and closure. Bland and Wener-Lin (2011) suggests that grief never ends for children who experience the death of a parent; it only changes its form during various developmental phases by creating a symbolic, legacy-based relationship with the parent who is no longer in their lives.

However, children of deported parents maintain a lingering hope for reunification. The anticipation of one day being reunited with their parents hinders their successful advancement through developmental stages since they do not allow for the grief process to begin.

For the purposes of gaining a better understanding of this topic, it is necessary to continue the search for empirical studies on this issue. Extensive research is needed to address possible suggestions on how the immigration and deportation system can be changed to minimize the traumatic effect of the separation experience and allow detained parents access to services like immigration lawyers, visitation with their children, interpreters, phones, reliable correspondence between social service agencies, child protective services, and health care.

#### Economic Hardship

Dreby (2012) states that forced separation results in changes in the family structure by creating single parent households, economical hardship, and changes between the relationship of men with their wives and children. When one of the parents, especially the breadwinner, is no longer present, the other parent has to take responsibility for earning a living. Many children are forced to take on the role of the caregiver for younger siblings, while the remaining parent in the home is taking on a new role that will provide for the family's basic needs. In immigrant families, where one or both parents are undocumented, the choices of employment are usually limited and

compensation is not often based on State and Federal minimum wage earning guidelines. Even with two parents present, working together to maintain the family's needs is not enough to bring their socioeconomic state above the poverty line. Many undocumented parents are leery of applying for federal aid for which their children qualify due to the fear of being discovered, apprehended and deported (Landale, Thomas, & Hook, 2011). This fear and apprehension becomes amplified and more distinguished once one of the family members is actually deported.

By removing one of the parents from the family unit, the poverty that members of the family face is devastating. Chaudry (2011) studied the significance of economic hardship in families where a parent has been incarcerated or deported; the result was that income had decreased or completely vanished. The study reported that most families experienced a range of economic consequences, including food scarcity, difficulty paying bills, and/or unstable housing arrangements. Most of these families struggled to put food on the table for themselves and for their children (Chaudry, 2011).

The arrest of an undocumented immigrant parent has severe consequences for the economic well being of children and families because the family generally loses a breadwinner (Chaudry, 2011). The researcher goes on to state that almost all of the families in the research sample lost a working parent because they were detained, deported, or released but not allowed to work. Often single parents were released with an electronic



monitoring device (EMD), which meant that their every move was monitored and they could not risk looking for employment. Those who were brave enough to look for employment despite being told that they were often rejected because potential employers were not willing to work with someone who had been arrested or had an EMD device on them. These families are left with no alternatives to support their family but to apply for and rely on public assistance. Since public assistance is not sufficient to cover housing, food, and other expenses, they find themselves moving from one place to another or moving in with family members and friends in crowded living conditions.

#### Increased Risks of Neglect and Abuse

As evidenced in the previous three parts of this chapter, children and their families are experiencing psychological, emotional, and economic distress when experiencing a shift in their family dynamics by losing one or both of their parents to deportation. These stressors and barriers faced by the families can increase the risk of children being neglected and abused due to the added tension in their households. Neglect can manifest itself in the presence of important factors such as families' characteristics, behaviors, and social-environmental contexts (Hearn, 2010). When all these elements are compiled together, the neglect and abuse has a higher likelihood of occurring.

Families that lose their primary income providers face inevitable and severe poverty. This is a factor that can cause an increase in risk for child neglect (Johnson-Reid, Drake, and Zhou, 2013). In households where one

remaining parent is not able or allowed to work and only has access to limited resources, such as federal aid, which only allows for the bare minimum and is not sufficient for maintaining a child's basic needs or appropriate living arrangements, child neglect and abuse becomes an increased possibility. Hearn (2010) states that the role of poverty is potentially one of the most important contextual factors of neglect.

Steinberg, Catalano and Dooley (1981) state that undesirable economic change leads to increased child maltreatment, especially when preceded by a period of job loss. The authors continue by indicating that neglect and abuse are higher in areas with higher rates of low socioeconomic status and high unemployment. Whether neglect is viewed as parents' inability to secure and provide for child's physical needs or age-related impairment due to environmental factors, both paths lead to poverty. Lower employment and higher perceived material hardship are more predictive of child neglect (Slack, Holl, McDaniel, Yoo, and Bloger, 2004).

Scarcity and financial deficits change parenting styles and make parents susceptible to reacting negatively to life stressors. The main connection between economic hardship and parenting behavior is psychological distress which is triggered by negative life events and the absence and disruption of marital bonds affecting children's social and emotional functioning through their impact on the parents' behavior toward the child (McLoyd, 1990). As stress and pressure rise, parents are more prone to

experience psychological distress and depression, which in turn makes them prone to reactive behaviors towards their children. Depression can interfere with parenting practices and can affect parents' caregiving, material support, and nurturance (England & Sim, 2009).

The confusion, loss, and grief put the remaining parent in a psychologically and emotionally vulnerable state. Even the most loving and caring parents will find themselves overwhelmed with everything they are facing and that reflects in their attitudes towards their children. The family is quickly changed from a dual parent family with rules and routines, to a single parent family with that parent struggling to survive and put food on the table. Children who are affected by all that is happening will experience changes in their personality and behavior, as well (Burlew et al., 2013). Children react differently to the changes they are facing. Some children experience fear and intimidation, and others become defiant and engage in behaviors that attract negative consequences. In any case, changing dynamics are not easy to adjust to for the remaining parent. A national survey of 6,000 households found single parents to be more likely to use abusive forms of violence toward their children than parents in dual caretaker households (Gelles, 2010).

### Theoretical Approach

Systems theory is a transdisciplinary approach that considers a system as a whole and as a set of interdependent parts (Lesser and Pope, 2011). In systems theory, each system has its own identity and when that identity is lost

the system faces possible extinction (Heylighen & Joslin, 1992). System theory also focuses on the relationship between the elements rather than the elements themselves (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2013). Ackoff (1981) identifies a system as a set of two or more interrelated elements with the following properties: (1) each element has an effect on the functioning of the whole; (2) each one is affected by at least one other element in the system; (3) there are possible subgroups of elements that also have the first two properties.

Systems theory provides an understanding of how the losses and separations may affect families and children, as well as the way parental behaviors and values shape children's views. The social system's interconnectedness is demonstrated during the loss and grieving process. In relation to the system as a whole, each sub-system has its own part in forming the reactions and developmental processes. According to Laszlo and Krippner (1998), a system is a dividable whole and functions as a unit with emergent properties of properties: (1) the breakdown of the systems components when lost; and (2) the component itself will lose its emergent properties when a component is removed.

Environmental resources may assist in encouraging positive and stable relationships amongst people for successful functioning and growth. The effective connection between the systems and subsystems are determined by the factors found to be healthy for individuals and families. Hewpworth,

Rooney, Rooney, and Stom-Gottfried (2013) identify the most common systems as: subsystem within the individual; interpersonal system; organizational system; and the physical environmental system. The functional interconnectedness within these systems is a decisive element in achieving personal and family equilibrium. Disconnection within systems and subsystems may result in a dysfunction within the family unit and the challenges a person has.

When a family system's balance is interrupted, members face a challenge to their continuous growth. Thus, they might stagnate in attempts to adjust to the change. Some families may take longer than others to return to its functioning mode which will elicit continuous growth and individual self-differentiation. The family and individual system will be negatively affected by the change - regardless of the time line and the length it will take for the family to recover from unexpected interruptions. This is strongly emphasized if the change is experienced as a trauma, loss, and grief. These experiences may make the system susceptible to psychological, emotional, and economic barriers. In addition, systems theory supports the notion of uncertainty in the family system. That is created by the sudden removal of a family member. Breaking up of the family unit could be a strong reason for falling into a dysfunctional path, and result in stagnation in personal growth and fulfillment among family members.

## Summary

This chapter was comprised of five sections. In part one, literature was presented on how separation from parents affects children psychologically. The second section, focused on the emotional distress children experience when separated from their parent and the consequences of that emotional distress. The third section discussed how families and children face economic hardship after the removal of one of the parents from the family unit. The fourth section addressed how psychological, emotional, and economic downfalls make children vulnerable to abuse and neglect. Each of these sections highlighted the negative impact and outcomes experienced by children and families. The chapter was concluded with a presentation of systems theory, which will guide this research.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

In this chapter, the study design will be described in detail, including the processes, implications and limitations of the research method. It will explain how the sample was gathered and the technique that was utilized for that purpose. This chapter will discuss the instrument and tools used for the data collection. It will also cover data analysis and procedures for the study. The chapter will present concerns of human subject safety and will refer to the use of informed consent and debriefing statement as a part of the study development and completion.

#### Study Design

The purpose of this study was to describe, explain, and evaluate the affects of the separation on children of deported parents. The study aimed to show how these experiences affect children psychologically, emotionally, and economically. The study explored the possible connection of these effects with increased risks of neglect and abuse.

For this study, qualitative methodology was used. A qualitative study is characterized by the use of textual data. Although most information gathered for the study was literal, the research analyzed certain facts like statement

totals, regularity of events, frequency of behaviors, and demographic characteristics of the sample.

A qualitative approach was chosen for this study because the research aimed to discover the unique expression of experiences from children who were separated from their parents by incarceration and deportation. With this study, there was a need for flexibility when interviewing the participants because the experiences that the participants shared were sensitive. Participants were given an appropriate amount of time to respond and recover before moving on to the next question as many of the answers elicited emotional responses. The perspective of the participants was substantial, as it offered the truth of their reality, focusing on their thoughts, memories, and feelings. Qualitative research allowed for a comfortable and nonjudgmental setting, which was important for meaningful and truthful communication.

For the purposes of the study, the phenomenological approach was utilized as it is a good fit for the goals that the research is aiming to achieve. Phenomenology is a descriptive study that looks at how individuals experience a specific phenomenon which is also one of the styles of qualitative research (Grinnell and Unrau, 2007). Trying to understand the significance, the organization and essence of the occurrence was explored by individuals' unique worlds and exclusive perspectives. This approach utilized in-depth interviews and seeks commonalities in the experiences of the participants. The information was recorded in detail for accurate analysis.



The research topic is traumatic and during interviews some of the individuals relived their experiences. A plan of action was in place to address psychological and emotional needs if and when they came up. A packet of information with referrals to trained professionals in local areas was available and in the possession of the interviewer and was given to the participants when needed.

A limitation of the study came from having non-representative data. The sample was comprised of individuals from the Armenian, Russian, and Latino populations in Los Angeles and San Bernardino counties. Many other nationalities were not included in the study simply because there was no access to those groups and communities given locale and lack of contact. Another limitation was that individuals interviewed experienced the separation when they were younger and they had to refer to their memories from years ago to tell their stories, which meant that they might have forgotten some details or they might not have an accurate recollection of the events and emotions in question.

This study attempted to discover how children of deported parents experienced psychological, emotional, and economic hardship due to the deportation of their parent(s) and whether there were increased risks of neglect and abuse because of psychological, emotional, and economic hardship faced in the aftermath of the separation.

## Sampling

The fear of being found out as undocumented and facing consequences as a result is a downside when looking for participants for this research. There is an overall suspicious undertone that comes from individuals' experiences, not allowing them to come forward. Additionally, many individuals do not want to revisit painful memories of the past as it triggers sadness, depression, and anger. Therefore, the snowball method of data collection was chosen for this research. The choice was made with the understanding that finding the population of interest was going to be challenging due to the nature of the problems these individuals are facing. The snowball effect allowed the researcher to go directly to the people that the study was looking for in the community and to get referrals from individuals that know about others who had been touched by this issue.

With the snowball technique an individual from the Armenian community known to the researcher who had the experience of separation due to deportation was approached and they were asked for referrals to other individuals. Additionally, individuals at the researcher's church, school, and place of employment were approached for referrals to individuals who had these types of experiences. As referrals came through one at the time, 7 participants were recruited. This was a sufficient number to gather the necessary and pertinent information to understand and describe the

experiences and their affects and to provide answers to the thesis questions for the study.

### Data Collection and Instruments

The data was collected by observation and administering interviews using a prepared interview schedule (Appendix A) that prompted conversation and discussion regarding participants' experiences. The collected data included demographic nominal variables such as age, gender, and ethnicity. Information was also gathered through open-ended questions that elicited descriptive and in-depth responses regarding the psychological, emotional, and economic effects experienced by the participants before and after the separation. Participants' responses also shed light on the development or increase in neglect and abuse.

There was a set of questions (see Appendix A) that the interviewer aimed to address; however, in the spirit of keeping the interview natural and allowing flexibility, prepared questions were used only as a guide and were not asked in a certain order. The researcher allowed rapport building at the beginning. Depending on the flow of the interview, some questions were deferred contingent on the participants' willingness to go deeper and into details when sharing their stories. The researcher took care not to overwhelm individuals and not put them in a position that may have caused them emotional trauma.

## Procedures

The data was collected by conducting observations and in-depth interviews. Participation was solicited by the snowball method. The data collection took place at any location that was convenient for participants including their place of residence or any public setting where they felt comfortable. The researcher collected the data personally and the time for each interview did not exceed a two-hour timeframe. If individuals had a lot to say and wanted to go longer than two hours, the researcher was flexible and accommodated the participant by extending the time further.

## Protection of Human Subjects

Special care was taken using a sensitive and non-judgmental approach when conducting interviews to avoid causing any emotional harm. When negative reactions occurred, the researcher made sure to have referrals to agencies and services where the participants could get the assistance and help they needed. The respondents were informed about the purpose of the study to gain cooperation and rapport. Verbal and written informed consent (Appendix B) was used. Two copies were presented during the initial meeting, which gave a brief description of the study and the process the participants should anticipate, information about the researcher's identity, and contact information.

The participants were informed that they could stop the interview and their participation at any time and withdraw from the study all together at any

point. The participants were informed about the benefits and risks of the interview and they were assured that at all times, the anonymity of their identity was protected. If a participant refused to sign the informed consent because they were afraid of being identified, the verbal consent was considered as sufficient and the written form was waived. To protect the anonymity of participants the names of individuals were not used in notes; instead of names pseudonyms and codes were be used.

### Data Analysis

Once the data were collected, the interviews were transcribed so commonalities could be identified in the stories using key word identification to create categories of experiences such as substance abuse, depression, fear, and CPS involvement. A specific color was assigned to each category and the keywords and phrases were then color-coded according to the appropriate category in each transcribed interview. The number of keyword and key phrase responses within each category was quantified for analysis as frequencies and percentages.

### Summary

This chapter conveyed important information pertaining to the methods guiding this study. It described the design method and sample gathering method. It covered the instruments and tools used for data collection and gave a detailed explanation on how the informed consent was be utilized to protect

participants' anonymity. The chapter gave overview of how data was analyzed and how it was coded, quantified and reported.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

This chapter will present the findings of qualitative interviews. The sample demographics will be reported and presented in a table. Common themes will be identified and quantified using univariate statistics. A table showing the findings will be presented.

#### Presentation of the Findings

The sample was comprised of seven individuals ( $n = 7$ ). Males ( $n = 4$ ) comprised 57.1% of the sample and women ( $n = 3$ ) comprised 42.9% of the sample. The majority of the sample was comprised of Latinos ( $n = 4$ , 57.1%) followed by Armenians ( $n = 3$ , 42.9%). Participants originated from several different countries of origin; Armenia ( $n = 3$ , 42.9%), Venezuela ( $n = 2$ , 28.6%), Mexico ( $n = 1$ , 14.3%), and Peru ( $n = 1$ , 14.3%). The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 29. The average age was 21.71 ( $M = 21.71$ ,  $SD = 4.15$ ) (See Table 1).

Table 1. Demographics

Variable	Frequency N	Percent %	Mean	Standard Deviation
Gender				
Males	4	57.1		
Females	3	42.9		
Ethnicity				
Latinos	4	57.1		
Armenians	3	42.9		
County of Origin				
Armenia	3	42.9		
Venezuela	2	28.6		
Mexico	1	14.3		
Peru	1	14.3		
Age			21.71	4.15

Life Prior to Incarceration/Deportation

All participants stated that the reason their parents moved to the U.S. was to pursue a better life and economic opportunities. Each participant of the sample also stated that deported parents were the primary breadwinners of which 71.4% were sole wage earners of the family. Seventy-one percent of the sample described their family life prior to the IRS involvement as happy (See Table 2).



Table 2. Life Prior to Incarceration/Deportation

Variable	Frequency N	Percent %
Why did parents move to the U.S.		
For better lives	7	100
Economic opportunities	7	100
Reunite with family	3	42.9
Incarcerated Wage Earner		
Primary breadwinner	7	100
Sole wage earner	5	71.4
Life prior INS involvement		
Happy	5	71.4
Vacations and trips	4	57.1
Loved and cared for	4	57.1

#### Incarceration/Deportation Process

Fifty-seven percent of the sample stated that the deportation/investigation process was lengthy (i.e., 8 months to 18 months). Fifty-seven percent of the sample stated that family members could not afford to hire legal representation. Forty-two percent stated that they were able to hire a lawyer. Fifty-seven percent of parents attempted to cross the border and return at least on one occasion. Forty-two percent of the sample confirmed that CFS was involved in their lives. All participants confirmed significant distress in their lives in result of IRS involvement. None of the participants got a chance to say good bye to their parents (See Table 3).

Table 3. Incarceration/Deportation Process

Variable	Frequency N	Percent %
Legal Representation		
Legal representation/received	4	57.1
Legal representation/not received	3	42.9
Deportation/incarceration process		
Immediate deportation	1	14.3
Incarceration/deportation 1-12 month	2	28.5
Incarceration/deportation over 12 month	1	14.9
Reunified with family	2	28.5
Removal without prior notification	7	100
Child Welfare Involvement		
Child Welfare not involved	5	71.4
Child Welfare involved	2	28.5
Involved with CFS		
No	5	71.4
Foster care	2	28.5
Able to Say Goodbye Prior to Incarceration/Deportation		
No	7	100

Life after incarceration/deportation

Fifty-seven percent of parents attempted to re-enter the country after being deported. Four of the participants stayed with other family members after incarceration/deportation. Most of the participants reported that there was no drug involvement after the incarceration, but two participants reported that there was involvement with drugs on the part of their sibling or themselves. After the incarceration/deportation, 57.1% of the participants became

caregivers for their families and 85.8% reported that life became hard and that they felt alone (See Table 4).

Table 4. Life after Incarceration/Deportation

Variable	Frequency N	Percent %
<b>Attempted reentry</b>		
Attempted/failed	4	57.1
Didn't attempt	1	14.3
Does not apply	2	28.5
<b>Living Arrangements After Deportation/Incarceration</b>		
Stayed with other family members	4	42.9
Stayed with mother	2	28.5
Did not answer	1	14.9
<b>Involvement with Drugs</b>		
Sibling involvement	1	14.9
Personal involvement	1	14.9
No Drug use	5	71.4
<b>Life Changes After Removal/Incarceration</b>		
Became caregiver for family	4	57.1
Life became hard/sad/painful	3	42.9
Left Alone/Felt Alone	3	42.9
Caregivers were upset	2	28.5

#### Variables behind Staying in the United States

Forty-two percent of the sample acknowledged that they were not given a choice as to whether they want to stay in the U.S. or to leave with their parent. All participants expressed that they had at least some familiarity with

the culture and traditions at the same time stating that they consider the U.S. to be their home. Fifty-seven percent stated that their parents made a right decision by leaving them in the U.S. versus 42.9% that felt that staying together would have been better decision. Seventy-one percent of the sample stated that their life would have been much more difficult if they left with their parent (See Table 5).

Table 5. Variables behind Staying in the United States

Variable	Frequency N	Percent %
Reasons for Staying in the U.S.		
Leaving was not an option	2	28.5
Hoped parent would return	2	28.5
Wanted to return but couldn't	2	28.5
Was a child, no one listened	2	28.5
Father was not deported	2	28.5
Parents' country of origin had no meaning	1	14.9
Not given a choice to leave	3	42.9
Familiarity with Parents' Country of Origin		
Familiar with heritage/traditions/language	7	100
Did not feel it was their country	6	85.7
Felt it was Right to Leave Children in U.S.		
Yes	4	57.1
No	1	14.9
Can't Say	1	14.9
How Difficult Would Leaving Have Been		
It would be more difficult than staying	5	71.4
It would have been better to leave	2	28.5

### Impact of Separation

All participants stated that their relationship with their parent was damaged by their separation. Eighty-five conveyed that their life would have been happier and less stressful if their parent remained in the U.S. Each participant reported some kind of a psychological effect due to their experience and negative changes in their social lives. Seventy-one percent

conveyed that their school performance was affected. Eighty-five stated that most difficult part of their experience was unexpected change and growing up without their parent (See Table 6).

Table 6. Impact of Separation

Variable	Frequency N	Percent %
How Did your Relationships Change		
Became distant with deported parent	2	28.5
Became angry with deported parent	1	14.9
Watched remaining parent fall apart	1	14.9
Remaining parent became overwhelmed/stressed	2	28.5
Ignored by remaining parent	3	42.9
How Would Life be Different Without Deportation/Incarceration		
Life would be normal	3	42.9
I would be happy	2	28.5
Unaware that unfair things happen to people	1	14.9
Life would be wonderful/not sad or lonely	1	14.9
Psychological Disturbances		
Sibling with emotional/behavioral problems	1	14.9
Anxiety Attacks	4	57.1
Depression	4	57.1
Remaining parent has depression	3	42.9
Therapy	3	42.9
Self-harm/Suicidal Ideation	2	28.5
Nightmares	1	14.9

Variable	Frequency N	Percent %
<b>Effects on School Performance</b>		
Delayed plans for college	1	14.9
Grades Dropped	3	42.9
No Change	3	42.9
<b>Behavioral Changes in Public</b>		
Did not continue with school	1	14.9
Isolated/Kept to myself	3	42.9
Got into fights	2	28.5
Got into trouble	1	14.9
Tried to make parent happy	2	28.5
<b>Most Difficult Part of Experience</b>		
Taking on Parental Role	1	14.9
Growing up without parents	2	28.5
Loss of control	1	14.9
Seeing change in remaining parent	1	14.9

### Continued Effects

Seventy-one percent of the sample stated that they were aware and had at least some idea about their parents undocumented status. All participants expressed that they are still grieving in some way, they had hopes for reunification for many years after the separation, and they suffered financial hardship. Seventy-one percent stated that their parents always worked and did not remember them being unemployed. Fifty-seven percent confirmed that their families experience shortage of food and inability to pay for utilities at least in one instance after the separation with the parent. Forty-two percent they would not be able to pay for their meals and other expenses

without the help of the extended family and friends. Each participant stated that they experienced physical, emotional abuse or neglect by after separation from the parent and that the remaining parents' and caregivers' attitudes changed in consequence of added stress and responsibility in their lives. All participants reported that they have not forgotten their experience and they are still affected by it (See Table 7).

Table 7. Continued Effects

Variable	Frequency N	Percent %
Did You Understand Risks of Undocumented Status of Parents		
Did not understand/Did not know	3	42.9
Understood, didn't worry	3	42.9
Heard some conversations	3	42.9
Felt there was something wrong with us	1	14.9
Grief		
I still grieve	3	42.9
I cried a lot/was sad/scared	3	42.9
Became the class clown/tried to normalize it	1	14.9
Parents Experience of Discrimination Before or After		
Not aware	5	71.4
Parent kept working	5	71.4
Other parent started working	2	28.5
Lack of Food, Unstable Housing, Money Shortage		
Not enough to eat/hungry	4	57.1
Not an issue/received help from family	3	42.9



Variable	Frequency N	Percent %
Victim of Abuse or Neglect		
Neglect	3	42.9
Verbal Abuse	4	57.1
Physical Abuse	2	28.5
Change in Remaining Parent/Relative Caregiver		
Became short-tempered, angry	3	42.9
Substance Abuse	2	28.5
Distant	1	14.9
Changed behavior, thoughts, and feelings	1	14.9
Frequency of Thoughts about Experience		
Every day	4	57.1
Often/On and Off	2	28.5
I don't like thinking about it	1	14.9
Effects on Life/Thoughts about Self		
Doubts about life	1	14.9
Lack of Trust	1	14.9
Feel broken	1	14.9
Stress and fear still present	2	28.5

### Summary

This chapter presented the findings of qualitative interviews. The sample demographics was reported and presented in a table. Common themes were identified and quantified using univariate statistics. The results show that there was a significant psychological, emotional, and economic hardship suffered by the participants as a result of incarceration/deportation of their parents. The study did not show discernible evidence of child protective

services' involvement in children's lives after the incarceration/deportation of their parents despite the noticeable increase in general and emotional neglect and physical abuse. Tables showing the findings were presented.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

This chapter includes a presentation of the conclusions derived from this thesis project. The limitations of this study are presented.

Recommendations for future social work practice, policy, and research are discussed.

#### Discussion

The interviews with individuals who experienced separation from their parents due to deportation or incarceration demonstrated that they were affected psychologically, emotionally, and economically. The findings did not show evidence that there was a significant child welfare involvement; despite increased instances in abuse and neglect.

Every person who was interviewed stated that their parents came to the U.S. to pursue economic opportunity and a better life. They came with the belief that this country would allow them to fulfill their dreams and have a satisfying life. The majority of the sample already had family members in this country including parents and siblings, and they came to the U.S. to reunite with their family members in addition to pursuing the “American Dream”. These findings are in agreement with the statistics reflecting the large number of undocumented immigrants living in U.S. According to Passel & Cohn

(2011), estimated 11.2 million undocumented immigrants are residing in U.S and most of them have children born in this country (Gonzalez, 2012). They are motivated by the promise of better live and economic opportunities and risk a lot for a chance to have a normal life and provide for their families.

The majority of the sample described their family lives prior to the deportation/incarceration of their parent as happy. They had cherished memories of family vacations and trips and felt loved and cared for by their parents. After the incarceration/deportation the remaining parent or caregiver became short-tempered and angry or distant. Several of the participants reported that they were neglected or verbally abused and a couple of participants stated that they were victims of physical abuse. After losing their parent, several of the participants reported suffering from depression, nightmares, and feeling isolated.

The deportation/incarceration process was presented with multiple variations. Four participants stated that their extended family was able to hire legal representation for the incarcerated parent. However, they felt that it was in vain as it did not produce results that they were anticipating. In the cases where families did have legal representation, the legal assistance was largely ineffective and did nothing to reduce the length of stay or the deportation. Three participants stated that their family did not hire a lawyer because they could not afford that kind of help.

The length of the deportation process has been described as very different for each participant. Two participants were fortunate to reunify with their parents after 6 months of separation. Two participants stated that their parents were incarcerated for 8 months before the deportation and one person stated that her mother was deported after 18 months of incarceration. One of the parents was deported immediately. Regardless of the differences in length of incarceration, all parents were removed without prior notification to the family and were not given chance to say good-bye to their children or spouses. Many of the participants hoped for reunification with their deported parent, but one participant stated that they were scared and thought they would never see him again.

The majority of the participants stated that their parents attempted to return because they wanted to come back to be with their family. Only one parent did not attempt to reenter because she could not afford to pay for the cost of re-entering the country. One of the participants stated that her mother resides in Tijuana where she does not have any family or friends; she decided to stay there because it is as close as she can be to her children.

As stated in the article "Shattered Families", CPS involvement is common when there are no appropriate relatives to care for the children (Applied Research Center, 2011). However, only two out of seven participants reported CFS involvement in their lives after the deportation of their parent. Both instances were for short periods of time until extended family members

gained legal guardianship. Extended families stepped in and provided homes for most of the participants and that is a factor in the low number of instances when a child welfare agency was involved.

Two participants had a history of drug use after their parents' deportation. One participant stated that drugs were the only way she could escape her reality and bear the pain of loneliness and sadness. Another participant talked about the remaining parent using drugs to deal with the loss of their spouse.

All participants experienced significant distress and negative changes in their lives after the deportation/incarceration. Four participants stated that they became caregivers for their siblings or their guardians. They had to grow up fast and take responsibilities that were too much for their age. One participant stated that he never had a childhood, "I skipped my childhood". Another participant stated that her life became hard, sad, and painful. Participants felt alone and often were left alone to take care of their own needs. Their caregivers were overwhelmed and that reflected on the quality of the interaction and relationship.

A couple of participants stated that their relationship with the deported parent slowly became distant, "We became like strangers", "After awhile we didn't have much to talk about". One of the participants felt angry with the deported parent believing that her mother made a wrong decision by leaving her in the U.S. The participant felt ignored and abandoned when her mother

insisted that staying in the U.S was the best for her and did not listen to her no matter how much she pleaded wanting to join her mother. One of the participants stated, "The most difficult part was to see my mother fall apart". With this particular participant, the remaining parent became very depressed and overdosed on illegal drugs.

Although most participants admitted having at least some understanding of the culture and knowledge of the language of their parents' country of origin, they stated that they considered the U.S. their home and their country and could not see their life in another country as a reasonable alternative. Two participants stated that leaving the U.S. was not an option. Two other participants stated that they would prefer to be with their deported parent even though they understood that the quality of the life would not be the same as in the U.S. Four of the participants conveyed that their opinions on the matter were not inquired about and that they were not taken seriously because of their age. Most of the participants had hopes that their deported/incarcerated parent would be reunited with them.

Most participants believed that their parents struggled with the choice to leave them behind. They also expressed their belief that by leaving them in the U.S. their parents made the right decision. Participants struggled with abandonment and separation issues when they were children, but as adults they are able to understand and appreciate their parents' decision and consider it as a sacrifice on their part. Five out of seven participants were in

agreement that they would experience much greater hardship if they had left with their deported parent. Only one of the participants had strong feelings and communicated that the decision was wrong. She stated, "Children should be with their parents, no matter what".

When asked how they pictured their lives without the experience of parental deportation/incarceration, participants stated that their lives would be normal, happy, and wonderful. One of the participants stated, "We were living the American Dream". Another participant stated that his experience was eye opening and taught him the reality of life. He stated, "This experience taught me that unjust and unfair things happen to innocent people all the time. I am not as optimistic about life as I use to be".

The findings of this study are in agreement with the results acquired by Capps, Castaneda, Chaudry, and Santos (2007) that families facing incarceration/deportation experience emotional trauma, which leads to manifestation of psychological disorders. Predominant theme in regards to psychological disturbances was depression and anxiety. A majority of the participants reported feeling depressed which followed the separation from their parent and remained until adulthood. Equally significant was expression of anxiety and panic attacks. The participants reported experiencing frequent anxiety and panic attack episodes varying for some as weekly and others as monthly incidents. The remaining parents and siblings have been affected by psychological turmoil, as well. They, too, experienced depression, anxiety, and



behavioral changes. One of the participants expressed that he lived in fear and often had nightmares showing signs of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). His nightmares did not go away completely; they tend to come back especially when something stressful happens in his life. Two of the participants reported having self-harming thoughts and engaging in self-harming behavior like cutting and daring acts that could end in injuries or death. One of the participants admitted to continuing to cut themselves at times. Only half of the participants interviewed had therapy and addressed their feelings associated with separation from their parents. Everyone who has been in therapy felt that it was helpful and taught them coping skills.

School performance and future plans for a college education were affected for four participants. Their grades dropped and their behavior changed manifesting in some as isolation and with others as anger and aggression. One of the participants had to give up college to take care of their siblings. The remaining three did not feel that their experiences affected their school performance. Two out of three stated that their school performance was bad before the separation and that did not change with incarceration/deportation. One of the three stated that his school performance excelled before and after the separation.

Suarez Orozco et al. (2004) & Burlew et al. (2013) talk about changes in children's behavior when shift takes place in family dynamics. The study found supporting evidence showing significant changes in children's behavior

and outlook. Three participants shared that they became isolated and kept to themselves as result of their experiences. Three of the participants recognized that their behavior changed and became aggressive. They often got into fights and got reprimanded at school and at home because of their behavior. Two of the participants stated that they saw changes in their remaining parent/caregiver and they did everything in their power to please that parent and make them happy.

When asked what the most difficult part of their experience was, two of the participants stated that growing up without their parents was most difficult. Four of the participants were left without a parent after their primary parent figure was deported. The mother of one of those four participants left him when he was very young and he has no contact with her. The father of the other participant died long before the deportation and the mother was the only living parent at the time she was removed. The mother of two participants died from drug overdose after their father was deported. The deportation left these children without parental love and nurture. Other difficulties identified by participants were growing up fast and taking on many responsibilities that were too much for their age. One of the participants stated that feeling that he did not have control over his life was most difficult. He described how hard it was for him to see how everything and everyone was changing and there was nothing he could do about it. He felt desperate and helpless during those changes.

Most participants shared that even though many years have passed, they still are struggling with accepting their circumstances and they still don't have adequate skills to cope with what happened to them and their families. Psychotherapy has been useful for some of them. However, it did not completely heal and barely gave them some skills to survive. One of the participants shared that drugs have been her only outlet to deal with the pain and sadness she feels all the day. She has become very suspicious and does not trust anyone and anything. She is reluctant to participate in therapy and open up about her experiences.

Most participants had a prior understanding of their parent's undocumented status due to direct conversation with their parents or indirect discussions they heard in their household. However they did not give much importance to that and did not truly recognize what kind of danger being undocumented presented. Only one of the participants stated that having undocumented parents made him feel insecure and that there was something wrong with his family. Gonzales, Fabrett, and Knight (2009) and Dreby (2012) state that the knowledge of being part of a family with undocumented parents creates fear and disadvantage for children regardless whether actual deportation takes place or not. This study did not find enough evidence to support that. Participants did not have alarming concerns or distress prior to the incarceration/deportation of their parents and did not realize the serious implications behind the undocumented status of their parents.

As described by Capps, Castaneda, Chaudry, & Santos (2007), often raids conducted by immigration agencies are depriving families from having appropriate communication and chance to say good bye to their family members. None of the participants were given a chance to say good bye to their incarcerated/deported parents. All participants expressed their belief that saying good bye could have made a difference in the way they dealt with the separation and grief that followed. As stated by Jarrati (2011) the proper way of informing children and preparing them emotionally and psychologically from the beginning is detrimental for their future physical, developmental, and emotional health; it allows putting things in perspective and moving on. Most participants felt that they never had a closure. Their grief was expressed by sadness, crying, being scared, and for some acting out. Most of the participants stated that their grief process did not end; they still continue to grief in one way or another.

Most of the participants expressed that they had lingering hope that one day they will be reunified with their parents. Couple of participants stated that they day dreamed about reuniting with their parent, especially when life became difficult. It seems that these participants used their imagination to escape the painful reality and used that as a coping mechanism. This allowed them temporary escape and gave them hope. One of the participants stated, "It kept me going". This is consistent with Blank & WenerLin's (2011) findings, which proposes that children often develop fantasy thinking and play the

scene of reunification in their minds as means of coping with stressful situation. On the other hand this kind of thinking created a hindrance in progressive grieving. According to Suares Orozco, Todorova, & Louie (2004), lingering hope for reunification prevents children from accepting the reality and giving themselves permission to grief.

When asked how often they thought about their experience and how it affected their current life most participants stated that they think about their experience daily or often. One participant stated that she does not like thinking about it because it puts her in bad mood and makes her depressed. The participants stated that they still feel stress and fear, which is derived from their early experiences. They also stated that they feel broken, lack of trust, have doubts about life, and difficulty making important decisions.

Prior to deportation/incarceration at least one parent of each family was employed. The majority of the deported/incarcerated parents were the sole wage earners for the family. By removing the primary breadwinner from the family, the remaining children and their caregivers suffered numerous economic hardships. Some of the families lost their homes, had to apply for public assistance, and had to rely on extended family or friends for support. A majority of the participants recalled instances when they did not have enough to eat and their family did not have means to pay for utilities leaving them without water or electricity. Others that did not experience financial and economic hardship stated that they had support of extended family, friends,

and church community. As indicated by Dreby (2012) and Chaudry (2011), the removal of main wage earner from family unit leaves no other outcome but an economic hardship for remaining family members.

All participants reported a diminished quality of relationship with the remaining parent after deportation/incarceration. A majority felt neglected and ignored by the remaining parent or caregiver. As indicated by Murray & Farrington (2005) a disturbance in family equilibrium results in emotional, psychological, and economic distress increasing the chances for abuse and neglect. Two participants described their parent as being overwhelmed with stress that developed with a need to adjust and take on new responsibilities of employment and providing for the family's financial needs. Johnson Reid, Drake, & Zhou (2013); Slack, Holl, McDaniel, Yoo, & Bloger (2004); & McLoyd (1990) state that poverty increases chances for child neglect. In several cases, the oldest child became the primary caretaker of the family because the remaining parent was working or the caregivers were older.

Most participants reported increase in verbal and physical abuse and neglect. Change of attitude, thoughts, feelings, and behavior by remaining parent and caregiver has been observed by most participants. Remaining parents/caregivers became short tempered, easily angered, and distant. Two participants reported that their parent/caregiver abused illegal substances and self-medicated for distress and depression. Four of them stated that remaining parent/caregiver became increasingly verbally abusive. Three participants

reported being neglected by their remaining parent/caregiver. Two participants reported physical abuse. Despite the evident neglect and abuse experienced by these children, the CFS was involved in the lives of only two participants and only for very short period of time. The CFS involvement constituted in placing children in foster care and shortly placing them with their relatives after their mother overdosed on illegal drugs.

The motivation behind their participation was identified by most as a hope that telling their story will make a difference. They felt that talking about their experience will be good and would have a healing effect. Others stated that they participated because they wanted to be helpful and did not want to refuse when they were asked to participate.

#### Limitations

Due to the delicate nature of being an undocumented immigrant in the U.S., it was difficult to find willing participants for this study and, therefore, the sample size was a limiting factor. Larger number of participant would allow gathering of more evidence and common themes. Even though this is a qualitative study and interviews addressed wide range of questions and concerns, the small sample presents difficulty for accurate measurement of the representative qualities of the study. Because of the small size sample it would be unrealistic to apply the findings to larger population.

Time was another limitation in that the time limits to find a sample and obtain the data were constricted due to the research project requirements and

academic year. Coordination of face-to-face meetings was challenging due to work, school, and other obligations and had to be organized based on participants' schedule and availability.

Participants' unwillingness to disclose sensitive information or discuss emotional topics may also have been a limiting factor in gaining full disclosure from participants. The coding of the data itself could have been a limiting factor as broad answers may have been more narrowly categorized than participants may have intended or anticipated.

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

Social workers both within Child Protective Services (CPS) agencies and outside of CPS agencies need to have a concrete understanding of the impact of parental incarceration and deportation when working with minors who have lost parents because of their immigration status. The impact of losing a primary breadwinner on the emotional and financial stability of a family is overwhelming and referrals to vital services should be a regular part of social work practice when working with this population. Vital services like individual and group therapy sessions, psycho-education, parenting classes, loss and grief counseling can make a significant difference in ways children and remaining parent/caregiver copes with their situation.

Just as children experience trauma when being removed from their homes for abuse or neglect, children who are separated from their parents due



to incarceration or deportation also experience trauma as well as the many negative effects of trauma such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD. Social workers providing mental health services and child welfare services should be particularly sensitive to the impact of trauma on these children and should provide services using a trauma-informed perspective to help them overcome the psychological and emotional difficulties brought about by the removal of a parent from their lives.

More research on the effects of parental incarceration and deportation needs to be conducted. Social workers need to research how incarcerated, undocumented parents can have better access to the resources and services provided by CPS in order to complete their reunification services. As this population grows into adulthood, continued research on the long-term effects of parental deportation and incarceration should be investigated and changes to social policy should be explored. This will allow better understanding of how numerous lives are impacted by current immigration policies from childhood to adulthood and give us insight to make educated decisions that can result in social justice.

Most importantly, the system itself needs to change. Offering reunification services to parents who are unable to access those services and then denying or terminating parental rights to parents whose only crime is an undocumented status violates the principle behind ensuring that reasonable efforts are made on the part of CPS to help parents reunify with their children.

Citizens of the U.S. who are incarcerated are either able to access services while they are incarcerated or reunification services are delayed until the parent is released from jail, and undocumented parents of U.S. born children deserve the same chance to reunify with their children. By removing undocumented immigrants from the lives of their children, governmental agencies harm the well-being of minor citizens of this country. Social workers need to advocate on behalf of these children and work to re-write policy and legislation so that the children of undocumented workers have the same opportunities to pursue happiness and the American Dream as every other citizen of the U.S.

### Conclusions

This study looked at how children of deported undocumented immigrants experience psychological, emotional, and economic distress. It also explored whether separation and unexpected change in family system put children at a higher risk for neglect and abuse. The findings show devastating effects on individuals who had to endure separation from their parent psychologically, emotionally, and economically. The negative, life altering effects are long lasting and followed these individuals to their adulthood. The study illustrated existence of inadequately designed systems that fail to recognize the severity of the problem and unable to address the needs of this population. Even though, the study did not find significant CPS involvement, it did show overwhelming evidence of increased cases of neglect and abuse.

The participants in this study suffered tremendous pain and experience a loss of simple human right to grow up with caring parents in a loving home. They shared their experience with hope that their voices would be heard and that they will make a difference for others in the similar situation.

This chapter discussed in detail the results of the conducted interviews. The limitations of the study were explored. Recommendations for social workers to educate themselves about this population were discussed as well as the importance of working with these children from a trauma-informed perspective. Recommendations for future research on this topic and the long-term effects on children were made. Last, a call toward systemic change was made so that U.S. citizen minors of undocumented parents can grow up to lead happy and healthy lives.

APPENDIX A  
UNSTRUCTURED QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW

## **Unstructured Qualitative Interview**

Qualitative interviews are going to be unstructured to allow participants share their stories to the degree and depth that they will feel comfortable with. Follow up questions may be used to gain information about participants' experiences. The questions may include but are not limited to:

1. Can you share your story of separation from your parent(s) due to deportation/incarceration? What do you remember about that experience?
2. Do you know when, how, and why your parent(s) immigrated to the United States?
3. What was your family life like before deportation/incarceration of your parent(s)?
4. What can you tell me about the deportation/incarceration process that your parent(s) went through? How long it took for actual removal to take place? Was your parent(s) able to use legal help? Were family members given a chance to say good-bye?
5. Did your parent(s) attempted to return after deportation?
6. After the removal of your parent(s) where were you residing? Was child welfare agency involved in your life after the removal of your parent(s)? If yes, what was their role in your life? Were there attempts of reunification with your parent(s) by child welfare agency?
7. How did your life change after the removal of your parent(s)?
8. Can you share with me the reasons why you stayed in this country and why you didn't follow your parent(s) to the country of their origin?
9. How familiar are you with the culture, language, and traditions of the country of your parent(s) origin?
10. Looking back, do you think that your parent(s) made a right decision by leaving you in United States? How difficult that decision was for your parent(s) in your opinion?
11. How different do you think your life would be if you left with your parent(s)?
12. Can you tell me why you agreed to participate in this study? What was the motivating factor for you?

13. How did your relationship with your parent(s) and other family members changed after deportation/incarceration?
14. How do you think your life would be different if your parent(s) weren't removed from this country?
15. Have you or any of your family members experienced psychological disturbance like anxiety, PTSD, suicidal ideation, or depression during and after the experience of the deportation?
16. Was your school performance affected by your experience?
17. Did your behavior change in school, in public, and/or at home?
18. What was most difficult part of this experience and how were you able to cope with it?
19. Before deportation/incarceration of your parents, were you aware of the fact that they were undocumented?
20. Did having undocumented parent(s) affect how you interact with others in your environment (neighborhood, school, and other social settings)?
21. Did you have an opportunity to say good-bye to your parent(s) before deportation took place?
22. Did you grieve after separation from your parent(s). How were you able to come to acceptance?
23. Did you have a hope for reunification? What did that hope meant for you?
24. Did your family suffered financially due to the removal of a parent(s)? Can you describe how you/your family was affected economically?
25. Did you or any family member experienced food scarcity, difficulty paying bills, and/or unstable housing arrangements after the deportation/incarceration of a parent(s)?
26. Did your parent(s) experienced discrimination when looking for employment?
27. Were you ever a victim of neglect or abuse during and after the deportation/incarceration of your parent(s)?
28. How did attitudes of the remaining parent or relative caregiver change after the deportation/incarceration of a parent?

29. Were you placed under care of the state due to parental removal? If yes, can you share your experience regarding that occurrence?
30. How often you think about your experiences? Does it still affect you life? If yes, in what way?

APPENDIX B  
INFORMED CONSENT



## **INFORMED CONSENT**

This study in which you are being asked to participate is to address how children of deported parents are affected psychologically, emotionally, and economically. Gaiane Nazarian is conducting the study under the supervision of Dr. Corry Dennis, Assistant Professor at California State University, San Bernardino. Your voluntary participation will help to gain understanding what it is been like after being separated from a parent(s) due to deportation. The interview will take from an hour to two hours depending on the depth of discussion. There are no risks of physical injury from participation in this study. You may become more aware of your feelings and beliefs by revisiting your past experiences. In case you need counseling services, we can provide referrals to local agencies for assistance. The interview manuscripts will be kept in a password-protected computer file. Your name will not be recorded on any of the paperwork and your anonymity will be protected. Your participation is voluntary and you can choose to stop and withdraw from the interview at any time. If you have questions regarding this study please contact research supervisor Dr. Corry Dennis, an Assistant Professor at CSUSB at (909)537-3501 or at email address: [cdennis@csusb.edu](mailto:cdennis@csusb.edu). Thank you for your participation. Study has been approved by the School of Social Work Subcommittee of the CSUSB/RB. I have read the information above and agree to participate in your study.

APPENDIX C  
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

**A study addressing how children are affected in result of  
separation from their parents due to deportation  
Debriefing Statement**

Thank you for your participation in this research on how children of deported parents are affected psychologically, emotionally, and economically conducted by Gaiane Nazarian, a student of MSW program at CSUSB. An in-depth interview was completed for the purpose of this study with open ended questions and discussions aimed to gather information about personal experiences and insight to gain understanding of what it is like in the aftermath of separation from a parent or both parents. The results of the interview will be assessed and commonalities will be identified for analysis and discussion. Your participation was important in helping to have better understanding for the study. Your individual data will not be available to you as all the information will be used collectively for the final results. Your name and identity will remain anonymous. A copy of the study will be available in John M Pfau Library at CSUSB. If you have questions, you may, also, contact research supervisor Dr. Corry Dennis, an Assistant Professor at CSUSB at (909)537-3501 or at email address: [cdennis@csusb.edu](mailto:cdennis@csusb.edu).

APPENDIX D  
RESULTS TABLE

Themes	Frequency n	Percent %
<b>Why did parents move to the U.S.</b>		
For better lives	7	100
Economic opportunities	7	100
Reunite with family	3	42.9
<b>Incarcerated Wage Earner</b>		
Primary breadwinner	7	100
Sole wage earner	5	71.4
<b>Life prior INS involvement</b>		
Happy	5	71.4
Vacations and trips	4	57.1
Loved and cared for	4	57.1
<b>Deportation/incarceration process</b>		
Legal representation/received	4	57.1
Legal representation/not received	3	42.9
Immediate deportation	1	14.3
Incarceration/deportation 1-12 month	2	28.5
Incarceration/deportation over 12 month	1	14.9
Reunified with family	2	28.5
Removal without prior notification	7	100
<b>Attempted reentry</b>		
Attempted/failed	4	57.1
Didn't attempt	1	14.3
Does not apply	2	28.5
<b>Living Arrangements After Deportation/Incarceration</b>		
Stayed with other family members	4	42.9
Stayed with mother	2	28.5
Did not answer	1	14.9
<b>Child Welfare Involvement</b>		
Child Welfare not involved	5	71.4
Child Welfare involved	2	28.5
<b>Involvement with Drugs</b>		
Sibling involvement	1	14.9
Personal involvement	1	14.9
No Drug use	5	71.4
<b>Life Changes After Removal/Incarceration</b>		
Became caregiver for family	4	57.1
Life became hard/sad/painful	3	42.9
Left Alone/Felt Alone	3	42.9
Caregivers were upset	2	28.5

Themes	Frequency n	Percent %
<b>Reasons for Staying in the US</b>		
Leaving was not an option	2	28.5
Hoped parent would return	2	28.5
Wanted to return but couldn't	2	28.5
Was a child, no one listened	2	28.5
Father was not deported	2	28.5
Parents' country of origin had no meaning	1	14.9
<b>Familiarity with Parents' Country of Origin</b>		
Familiar with heritage/traditions/language	7	100
Did not feel it was their country	6	85.7
<b>Felt it was Right to Leave Children in U.S.</b>		
Yes	4	57.1
No	1	14.9
Can't Say	1	14.9
<b>Difficult Decision for Parents to Make</b>		
Yes	4	57.1
No	1	14.9
<b>How Difficult Would Leaving Have Been</b>		
It would be more difficult than staying	5	71.4
It would have been better to leave	2	28.5
<b>How Did your Relationships Change</b>		
Became distant with deported parent	2	28.5
Became angry with deported parent	1	14.9
Watched remaining parent fall apart	1	14.9
Remaining parent became overwhelmed/stressed	2	28.5
Ignored by remaining parent	3	42.9
<b>How Would Life be Different Without Deportation/Incarceration</b>		
Life would be normal	3	42.9
I would be happy	2	28.5
Unaware that unfair things happen to people	1	14.9
Life would be wonderful/not sad or lonely	1	14.9

Themes	Frequency n	Percent %
<b>Psychological Disturbances</b>		
Sibling with emotional/behavioral problems	1	14.9
Anxiety Attacks	4	57.1
Depression	4	57.1
Remaining parent has depression	3	42.9
Therapy	3	42.9
Self-harm/Suicidal Ideation	2	28.5
Nightmares	1	14.9
<b>Effects on School Performance</b>		
Delayed plans for college	1	14.9
Grades Dropped	3	42.9
No Change	3	42.9
<b>Behavioral Changes in Public</b>		
Did not continue with school	1	14.9
Isolated/Kept to myself	3	42.9
Got into fights	2	28.5
Got into trouble	1	14.9
Tried to make parent happy	2	28.5
<b>Most Difficult Part of Experience</b>		
Taking on Parental Role	1	14.9
Growing up without parents	2	28.5
Loss of control	1	14.9
Seeing change in remaining parent	1	14.9
<b>How Did you Cope</b>		
Haven't learned how to cope	3	42.9
Drugs	1	14.9
<b>Did You Understand Risks of Undocumented Status of Parents</b>		
Did not understand/Did not know	3	42.9
Understood, didn't worry	3	42.9
Heard some conversations	3	42.9
Felt there was something wrong with us	1	14.9
<b>Undocumented Parent Affect Social Interactions</b>		
It did not matter to me or others	5	71.4
Change was not due to undocumented status	1	14.9
It hurts when I hear people talking about visiting their families	1	14.9

Themes	Frequency n	Percent %
<b>Able to Say Goodbye Prior to Incarceration/Deportation</b>		
No	7	100
<b>Grief</b>		
I still grieve	3	42.9
I cried a lot/was sad/scared	3	42.9
Became the class clown/tried to normalize it	1	14.9
<b>Hoped for Reunification</b>		
I hoped for it/day-dreamed about it	5	71.4
Scared/thought we would never see him again	1	14.9
<b>Meaning of Hope</b>		
Made me feel happy	1	14.9
Kept me going	2	28.5
<b>Financial Impact</b>		
Had to downsize home/lost home	2	28.5
Applied for public assistance	3	42.9
Had plenty/parent got job/support of family	2	28.5
<b>Parents Experience of Discrimination Before or After</b>		
Not aware	5	71.4
Parent kept working	5	71.4
Other parent started working	2	28.5
<b>Lack of Food, Unstable Housing, Money Shortage</b>		
Not enough to eat/hungry	4	57.1
Not an issue/received help from family	3	42.9
<b>Victim of Abuse or Neglect</b>		
Neglect	3	42.9
Verbal Abuse	4	57.1
Physical Abuse	2	28.5
<b>Change in Remaining Parent/Relative Caregiver</b>		
Became short-tempered, angry	3	42.9
Substance Abuse	2	28.5
Distant	1	14.9
Changed behavior, thoughts, and feelings	1	14.9
<b>Involved with CFS</b>		
No	5	71.4
Foster care	2	28.5



Themes	Frequency n	Percent %
<b>Frequency of Thoughts about Experience</b>		
Every day	4	57.1
Often/On and Off	2	28.5
I don't like thinking about it	1	14.9
<b>Effects on Life/Thoughts about Self</b>		
Doubts about life	1	14.9
Lack of Trust	1	14.9
Feel broken	1	14.9
Stress and fear still present	2	28.5
<b>Reasons for Participation</b>		
Good to talk about what happened/Healing	3	42.9
Hope it will make a difference	3	42.9
Parent asked me to participate	2	28.5
You asked	1	14.9

APPENDIX E  
DEMOGRAPHICS

**Table 1.1 Demographics**

	N	Percent
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	4	57.1
Female	3	42.9
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Armenian	3	42.9
Latino	4	57.1
<b>Country</b>		
Peru	1	14.3
Mexico	1	14.3
Venezuela	2	28.6
Armenian	3	42.8

**Table 1.2 Age**

	N	Percent
18.00	1	14.3
19.00	2	28.5
20.00	1	14.3
21.00	1	14.3
26.00	1	14.3
29.00	1	14.3
Mean	21.71	
Std. Dev.	4.1519	

- 1 = 14.3%
- 2 = 28.5%
- 3 = 42.9%
- 4 = 57.1%
- 5 = 71.4%
- 6 = 85.7%
- 7 = 100%

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