



**SCRA**  
SOCIETY FOR COMMUNITY  
RESEARCH AND ACTION

# THE EFFECTS OF DEPORTATION AND FORCED SEPARATION ON IMMIGRANTS, THEIR FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES

*A Policy Statement Summary by the Society for Community Research and Action: American Psychological Association Division 27*

## **The US deports people without criminal histories who have lived here for decades.**

In 2017, 340,056 people were deported from the United States, up from only approximately 20,000 annually between 1900 and 1990. The majority of people who are deported have lived in the US for over a decade and do not have any criminal convictions. A growing number of those deported are caregivers of US citizens. Family reunification is not the primary goal of current immigration policies. Current policies have the potential to harm US citizens by separating families—including children—from their parents and caregivers.

## **Deportations have psychosocial consequences for immigrants.**

Many of the immigrants who are deported are forced to return to dangerous places where they may have faced trauma and violence prior their migration. In fact, nearly four in five families screened in family detention centers have a 'credible fear' of persecution. Immigrants have been kidnapped, tortured, raped, and murdered in their countries of origin following deportation from the US. Those immigrants who survive deportation often struggle to support their families from afar and maintain contact with them.

## **Deportations have psychosocial consequences for children and families.**

Approximately 5.9 million US citizen children have at least one caregiver who lacks authorization to live in the US. Deportation is associated with a host of negative psychosocial effects for children and other family members left behind. Children whose caregivers are deported become more at-risk for food insecurity, housing instability, and economic hardship. Because men are more frequently deported, mothers frequently become single parents, often with low incomes and sometimes facing large legal bills. Consequently, they must often work longer hours and have less contact with their children. Older school-aged children frequently become primary caregivers of their younger siblings and/or work to support the family, impacting their own academic achievement. Children have many symptoms of psychological distress following a caregiver's deportation, including eating and sleeping problems, anxiety, sadness, anger, withdrawal, and school performance and persistence issues. Following family reunification, the negative impacts of family separation often remain.

## **Deportations have psychosocial consequences for communities.**

Following immigration raids and deportations, immigrant community members often become more fearful and mistrustful of public institutions. Immigrants are less likely to contact the police for any reason, including to report a crime, in communities where local law enforcement participate in immigration enforcement and following deportation. Immigrant children living in communities where immigration raids have taken place feel abandoned, isolated, fearful, traumatized, and depressed. Children, regardless of immigration status, experience fear and shame regarding deportation, which impacts their sense of self and wellbeing. Immigrant adults are especially emotionally taxed following deportations and threats of deportation; their increased stress has been linked to cardiovascular risk factors. Moreover, immigrants become less likely to seek needed medical and mental health services, participate in schools and religious institutions, and access other vital social services. Withdrawal from civil society weakens the social fabric, which negatively impacts the entire community.

## **In sum, deportations impact the emotional and behavioral health of our nation.**

To access the full policy statement summarized in this brief and review sources, please see: Society for Community Research and Action (2018). Statement on the effects of deportation and forced separation on immigrants, their families, and communities. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 62, 3–12. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ajcp.12256>. This policy statement is an official statement of the Society for Community Research and Action, Division 27 of the American Psychological Association, and does not represent the position of the American Psychological Association or any of its other Divisions or subunits.

1700%

increase in annual deportations from 1900-1990 to 2017.



5.9 million children have one caregiver who lacks authorization to live in US.

14

median years in US at time of deportation.



Four of five families at detention centers have a 'credible fear' of persecution.

60%

of those deported in 2016 had no criminal convictions.



Detainment reduces trust in churches, schools, hospitals, and law enforcement.



Deportations and threats of deportation negatively impact mental health. Both children and adults can experience sleeping issues, anxiety, anger, depression, and fear.



## Local Municipality Policy and Practice Recommendations

Policymakers should take a public health perspective on deportation, recognizing the direct and indirect psychosocial impacts of deportation on communities. To protect human rights and mitigate the myriad of adverse consequences of deportation and forced family separation, the Society for Community Research and Action has several recommendations. Local municipalities should:

1. declare themselves as sanctuary cities to enhance the protection of unauthorized immigrants and their families.
2. not detain or deport people solely for immigration violations in local law enforcement.
3. build communications with their communities that prioritize safety and inclusion for all immigrant families, regardless of status.
4. end 287(g) agreements so that local law enforcement is not a delegate for immigration related issues.
5. foster supportive social networks and create a sense of belonging among families. Provide important resources, both tangible and emotional. Programmatic efforts should be intentional with supporting mental health/healing and building community to foster hope and wellness for children and families.
6. educate immigrants on their rights and ways to protect themselves.
7. strengthen and/or create departments dedicated to supporting immigrant community members. Such departments may serve multiple purposes: to direct individuals to appropriate resources, to listen and respond to the challenges experienced by immigrants in the municipality, and to provide public awareness campaigns focused on valuing immigrant community members.
8. intentionally connect the above efforts to an overarching community health equity plan that prioritizes equal access to services and supports (mental health and well-being, education, health care, civic engagement) for all community members, regardless of status.