

# **Growing up without Status: The Integration of Children in Mixed-Status Families**

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### Abstract

Over the past three decades, a central new challenge confronting millions of children of immigrants has emerged: growing up in a mixed-status family in which at least one member lacks legal authorization to live and work in the United States. A body of recent research argues that unauthorized immigrant status is the *fundamental* determinant of integration for unauthorized immigrants, with inter-generational consequences for their U.S.-born children. We discuss the immigration and other policies that create the particular social context within which unauthorized immigration status becomes so detrimental for integration. Specifically, we focus on federal and state policies that undermine the very factors thought to protect children and support the integration of new generations of Americans: families and social networks, economic resources and opportunities, and health. We conclude with recommendations for future research.

Key words: children, immigrants, integration, unauthorized immigrants, legal status, family, education, health

## *Introduction*

Over the past three decades, a central new challenge confronting millions of children of immigrants has emerged: growing up in a mixed-status family, that is, as an unauthorized immigrant or as the U.S.-citizen child of unauthorized immigrant parents.<sup>1</sup> Since 1995, the population of U.S.-citizen children in mixed-status families has more than quadrupled to 5.7 million (Capps, Fix, & Zong, 2016; Warren & Kerwin, 2017). Mixed-status families include children who are themselves unauthorized, including children who were unaccompanied by adults upon migration to the United States but reunited after arrival, and the U.S.-citizen children of unauthorized parents. In spite of the differences between these groups, they share the common experience of facing multiple disadvantages brought about by their own and/or their parents' unauthorized immigration status (Zayas et al., 2017). Indeed, scholars who study mixed-status families have shown that the legal and socioeconomic disadvantages of unauthorized immigration status, and the distress caused by that disadvantage, can spill over onto family members and loved ones, even when loved ones are not unauthorized themselves, a process Laura Enriquez (2015) referred to as “multigenerational punishment” (see also Dreby, 2015; Gomberg-Munoz, 2016).

Over the past three decades, federal and state immigration and social policies have become more restrictive and threatening to mixed-status families (Coutin, 2011). In response,

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<sup>1</sup> Unauthorized immigrants include immigrants who entered the United States with a visa and overstayed its expiration and immigrants who entered without inspection—that is, without a legal document to enter. Immigrants with discretionary, temporary legal status, such as through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) or the Temporary Protective Status (TPS) programs, have authorization to work and deferral from deportation, but their previous unauthorized status, and the temporariness and uncertainty of discretionary programs, put them at substantial risk of future unauthorized status.

states have adopted widely different stances towards unauthorized immigrants, such that now there is substantial variation in state policies regarding local-federal collaboration in immigration law enforcement, labor market regulation and labor laws, access to post-secondary education, and provision of health care (Young, León-Pérez, Wells, & Wallace, 2018). What are the impacts of growing up in a mixed-status family in this policy context? How does unauthorized status interact with federal and state policies to structure the integration of children of immigrants in the contemporary United States?

A growing body of empirical research documents how unauthorized immigration status (of parents and children themselves) undermines the integration of children of immigrants (e.g. Abrego, 2006; Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Gonzales, 2011). In a comprehensive review of research on immigrant integration, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2015) concluded that legal status is a major area of concern for the integration of immigrants and their children and a central new axis of stratification in U.S. society more broadly. Similarly, several scholars have argued that immigrant legal status is a master status that affects all other factors that influence integration (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Gonzales, 2011; cf. Enriquez, 2017). Theoretically, we can understand this outcome as the result of *membership exclusion*—that is, “the curtailment of structural kinds of mobility owing to formal societal exclusion” via unauthorized migration status (Bean, Brown, & Bachmeier, 2015: 20).

In the contemporary context, being unauthorized—the result of federal immigration law—does not by itself confer disadvantage on unauthorized immigrants and their families. An increasingly restrictive set of state and federal policies creates disadvantages for unauthorized immigrants by, for instance, determining the risk of detention and deportation, guaranteeing or denying rights, and facilitating or limiting access to social services. These policies undermine

several of the forces that scholars of immigrant integration identify as crucial to the integration and wellbeing of children of immigrants, including strong family and co-ethnic networks, economic resources and opportunities, and good health (Alba & Nee, 2005; Portes & Zhou, 1993). Drawing on the work of scholars who have identified immigrant legal status as a fundamental determinant of immigrant integration, in this review we focus specifically on the federal and state policies that have emerged in the last three decades to make legal status increasingly detrimental to the wellbeing and integration of children of immigrants in mixed-status families.

#### *Policies that undermine families and social networks*

Families and social networks based in ethnic and national ties are considered an important protective mechanism for integration by shielding children of immigrants from negative or discriminatory contexts, providing social support, and connecting them to economic resources and opportunities (Landale, Thomas, & Van Hook, 2011; Zhou and Bankston 1998). Immigration laws undermine the immigrant family and social networks in several key ways: by preventing immigrants from entering or remaining in the United States legally, through long waiting lists for many immigrants who qualify for visas, and through enforcement.

Immigration policy determines immigrants' ability to enter the United States with legal status. Immigration policies have the effect of separating families when unauthorized migrants leave behind children and other family members in the country of origin because unauthorized family migration is too costly or risky (Abrego, 2014; Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007; Dreby, 2010; Suárez-Orozco, Bang, & Kim, 2011). By one estimate, as many as 9% of Mexican

children will experience their father's migration to the United States by age 14 (Nobles, 2013). In the era of U.S. border militarization (i.e., since the early 1990s), it has become increasingly difficult for unauthorized migrants to migrate circularly across the Mexico-U.S. border; thus, more and more immigrants settle permanently in the United States (Massey, Durand, & Pren, 2016). As longer-duration family separations become unbearable, many families seek to reunite in the United States (Hamilton & Hale, 2016). Many children who migrate to the United States unaccompanied by adults and without legal documents do so to reunite with parents who migrated years before them (Chavez and Menjivar 2010).

Other aspects of immigration policy keep families apart as well (Enchautegui & Menjívar, 2015). Although immigration law provides for the legal sponsorship of family members by U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents, most visas for these new immigrants are classified by priority and subject to country quotas, which produces long waitlists for lower priority visas from high immigrant-sending countries like Mexico, India, China, and the Philippines. According to recent estimates, as many as 3.5 million persons legally qualifying for a visa are waiting overseas for their visa priority date (Anderson, 2010); in some cases, the wait is as long as 21 years.<sup>2</sup> Some families qualifying for visas choose to reunite in the United States with members in unauthorized status rather than wait for visas. Jasso et al. (2000) found that half of immigrants adjusting to legal permanent resident status in national survey data had been living in the United States, most in unauthorized status, prior to adjustment. But residing in the United States in unauthorized status for 180 or 365 days triggers a penalty of a three- or ten-year bar,

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<sup>2</sup> The "priority date" for admission of unmarried sons and daughters of U.S. permanent residents from Mexico in October 2018 was May 15, 1997, meaning that visas for qualifying applicants in this category were issued in October 2018 for applicants who submitted their applications 21 years earlier. For other priority dates, see <http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/law-and-policy/bulletin.html>.

respectively, on adjustment of status. As a result, some families reunite in unauthorized status while waiting very long periods for a visa for which they qualify, and in doing so, risk far longer waits prior to adjustment of status (Enchautegui & Menjívar, 2015).

Immigration policy also impinges on family and community life through the U.S. detention and deportation regime. Deportations increased steadily from the mid-1990s, when approximately 50,000 immigrants were deported per year, to a peak of more than 400,000 deportations in 2012 (Patler & Golash-Boza, 2017), as the U.S. strategy towards enforcement shifted from a focus on the border to much greater effort to apprehend immigrants in the interior of the country. The Secure Communities Program and 287(g) agreements enabled collaboration between federal immigration agents and local law enforcement. These efforts have led some unauthorized immigrants to feel unsafe participating in their communities, undermining community-based social networks, and have eviscerated trust between immigrants and local police (Das Gupta, 2014; Hagan et al., 2011).

Some of the most severe consequences of the enforcement regime are felt by families that directly face detention or deportation. In the wake of two laws passed in 1996, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRAIRA) and the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA), judicial discretion was severely constrained in deportation hearings, including restricting judges from considering the interests of U.S.-citizen family members in most cases. That is, unless a noncitizen parent can demonstrate an “exceptional and extremely unusual hardship” for his or her child due to deportation, the child’s

interests are not considered in deportation hearings (Thronson, 2006).<sup>3</sup> Recent estimates suggest that between 2011 and 2013 alone, half a million children experienced the apprehension, detention, and deportation of at least one parent (Capps et al., 2015), and in 2011 an estimated 5,100 children of deported parents were in the child welfare system (Wessler, 2011, 2012). Parents' rights may be terminated when they cannot comply with court requirements, even if it is a result of their detention or deportation (Women's Refugee Commission, 2010).

Deportation sends family life into upheaval. Men, especially Latino and Black men, are vastly overrepresented among deported people (Das Gupta, 2014; Golash-Boza & Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2013). The deportation of fathers creates "suddenly single mothers" who frequently suffer severe economic consequences due to the loss of the primary wage earner (Dreby 2012: 837; Chaudry et al. 2010; Hagan, Castro, and Rodriguez 2009). A survey of 562 immigrant detainees in California estimated that lost wages within the sample were as high as \$77 a day per detainee (Patler 2015). Families of detainees experienced extreme financial insecurity during the detention; in the same survey, 63% of detainees reported that their family members had difficulty paying mortgage, rent, or utilities (Patler 2015). Another study of the consequences of immigration raids found that family income fell by an average of 70% six months after the detention of a parent (Chaudry et al., 2010). In addition to the devastating economic impacts of detention and deportation, the psychological trauma inflicted on children and families is vast, a topic we return to below, and the long-term consequences are not well understood. Parents have a strong desire to reunite with their children following deportation, and the majority state intentions to re-migrate to the United States in spite of the harsh penalties that are written into

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<sup>3</sup> This level of hardship can usually be demonstrated only due to a child's extreme illness or physical disability, and even that option is disallowed when the parent has been convicted of certain categories of crimes.



U.S. immigration law for re-entry following deportation (Cardoso, Hamilton, Rodriguez, Eschbach, & Hagan, 2016).

*Policies that undermine socioeconomic opportunities and supports*

The structure of opportunity that immigrants encounter upon arrival in the United States can facilitate or impede socioeconomic mobility (Portes & Zhou, 1993). Unauthorized immigrants and their children face restricted access to socioeconomic opportunities and supports through the labor market, social welfare programs, and education. In 2009, more than a third of children of unauthorized parents lived below the poverty line, compared to 17% of U.S.-born children of authorized immigrant parents and 18% of U.S.-born children of U.S.-born parents (Passel and Cohn 2009). This socioeconomic deprivation reflects the disadvantages that unauthorized immigrants face in the labor market: unauthorized immigrants earn lower wages, receive lower returns to their human capital, experience slower wage growth, are exposed to greater occupational hazards than authorized immigrants of similar skill and experience, and are less likely to report on-the-job violations (Donato, Wakabayashi, Hakimzadeh, & Armenta, 2008; Gleeson, 2010; Hall, Greenman, & Farkas, 2010; Hall & Greenman, 2015; Kandel & Donato, 2009). The disadvantages that unauthorized workers face in the labor market have grown since 1986, as laws that criminalize the employment of unauthorized workers have led

employers to pass off the costs of employing unauthorized workers onto the worker (Phillips & Massey, 1999).<sup>4</sup>

Unauthorized workers who face severe labor market disadvantages may also be unable to count on social networks or the social safety net to provide an economic cushion during periods of unemployment or other crises. As Menjivar (2006) has shown, the economic deprivation of unauthorized or “liminal” legal status—such as through the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) program—undermines the socio-economic foundation of social networks—that is, the multilateral financial support that members of a network provide to one another.

At the same time, federal laws have dramatically weakened access to public programs for immigrants over the past three decades, beginning with withdrawal of social welfare benefits for noncitizens in the early 1980s and followed by the passage of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), which tied eligibility for federal benefits to citizenship.<sup>5</sup> These reforms have resulted in reductions in receipt of food stamps, cash assistance, and public health insurance for the poor to a greater degree among children of immigrants than among children of natives, and to the greatest degree among foreign-born children themselves (Borjas, 2004, 2011; Hagan, Rodriguez, Capps, & Kabiri, 2003; Kandula, Grogan, Rathouz, & Lauderdale, 2004). U.S.-citizen children of unauthorized parents are eligible for social services, but studies suggest that unauthorized parents are often fearful of accessing

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<sup>4</sup> The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 provided a path to citizenship for many undocumented immigrants, while simultaneously increasing funding for border enforcement and, for the first time, creating a system of sanctions for employers who knowingly hire unauthorized workers.

<sup>5</sup> These reforms reflect the idea that welfare receipt is a magnet for immigrants and a mechanism of dependence, assumptions that have been challenged in the research literature. Studies show that immigrant destination choice and employment rates are not affected by state welfare generosity (Van Hook & Bean, 2009). There is limited evidence for negative effects of welfare receipt among children of immigrants and in some cases benefits, suggesting that welfare receipt may support mobility and assimilation among immigrants (Balistreri, 2010).

services for their eligible children (Berk & Schur, 2001; Maldonado, Rodriguez, Torres, Flores, & Lovato, 2013). Several provisions of the 1996 IIRAIRA sought to reduce the social service usage of immigrants beyond the restrictions imposed by PRWORA. IIRAIRA expanded the criteria for determining a “public charge,” on which basis the U.S. government may deny an application for lawful permanent residence, a rule that is currently under consideration for further expansion by the Trump administration. The law also created a visa provision requiring sponsors for family-based visas to file affidavits promising to maintain the sponsored immigrant at 125% of the federal poverty level and to repay any means-tested public benefits the immigrant may receive. Finally, the law created a reporting provision requiring state agencies that receive federal funding for social security insurance, public housing, and welfare to report to the federal immigration agency persons whom the agencies determine are not lawfully present in the United States. Although these rules have not been heavily enforced in the past and some have since been modified, many immigrants believe that receipt of health or other social services may jeopardize their or their family members’ ability to adjust their status in the future, that the use of services will result in economic burdens for sponsoring family members, and that contact with agencies could lead to deportation (Fix & Zimmermann, 2001; Hernandez, 2004; Yoshikawa, 2011).

The limits that unauthorized status places on social networks, combined with federal laws restricting unauthorized immigrants’ access to the social safety net, mean that unauthorized immigrants and their children face far greater economic hardship than authorized immigrants and their children. In spite of these disadvantages, mobility can occur from the first generation to the second generation through education (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Unauthorized children and children in mixed-status families are guaranteed access to public education from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade (K-12) as a result of the 1982 Supreme Court decision in *Plyler v. Doe*

(Olivas, 2012). As a result, the K-12 educational disadvantages experienced by children in mixed-status families result from the same disadvantages that many children of authorized immigrants face: residential concentration in areas with low quality and underfunded schools, low levels of parents' human capital and English language ability; and few socioeconomic resources to dedicate to education (Baum & Flores, 2011; Crosnoe & Turley, 2011). However, unauthorized children and children of unauthorized parents may face additional disadvantage due to extreme socioeconomic deprivation and their unauthorized parents' fear of engaging with school officials (Yoshikawa, 2011).

The consequences of unauthorized status become manifold at the transition from K-12 to post-secondary schooling, as no federal laws guarantee access to higher education for unauthorized students. Scholars have shown how this shift in educational contexts serves as one of several ways that young unauthorized immigrants come to understand the degree of their social exclusion and the concomitant limited opportunities for their upward mobility (Abrego 2006; Gonzales 2011; Hill and Torres 2010; Rumbaut and Komaie 2010). States vary in policies to restrict or expand access to post-secondary schooling; for instance, as of early 2019, two states (Alabama and South Carolina) prohibited unauthorized students from enrolling at any public, postsecondary institution, twenty-one states and the District of Columbia had some provisions for unauthorized students to pay in-state tuition to attend public university, and ten allowed unauthorized students to receive state financial aid. Research shows that restrictive policies deter students from enrolling in college and accessing school-based resources during K-12 (Abrego 2006; Abrego and Gonzales 2010; Patler 2017), while the passage of state policies providing in-state tuition is associated with increases in college enrollment and completion among Latino noncitizens, the group most likely to be undocumented (Kaushal, 2008; Flores, 2009). Even

when undocumented students can enroll in college, they are categorically excluded from federal financial aid, and studies find that in spite of access to post-secondary education, the experience of being unauthorized in state universities can be one of stress and alienation (Enriquez, Hernandez, & Ro, 2018; Muñoz & Vigil, 2018).

### *Policies that undermine health and health care*

As with families, social networks, and opportunities for upward mobility, the good health of immigrants is a remarkable buttress against disadvantage. Immigrants generally have better health than would be otherwise predicted by their socioeconomic status, a phenomenon referred to as an “epidemiologic paradox” or “immigrant health paradox” (Perreira & Ornelas, 2011; Hayes-Bautista et al. 2002). The paradox at least in part reflects the strong family and social supports in which many immigrants are embedded (Perreira & Ornelas, 2011). As immigration policy separates families and threatens the communities of unauthorized immigrants, these supports are undermined. Educational and labor market disadvantages uniquely faced by unauthorized immigrants mean that unauthorized immigrants have fewer socioeconomic resources with which to protect and promote their own and their families’ health. So the health of unauthorized immigrants is affected by the same policies that affect families, social networks, and economic resources and opportunities, which are key social determinants of health. The immigrant health advantage identified by the paradox literature tends to disappear across generations; however, this process may be especially rapid and profound for children of unauthorized immigrants (Torres and Young, 2016).

State policies and their implementation also influence the health of unauthorized immigrants (Acevedo-Garcia & Stone, 2008). Unauthorized individuals are ineligible for Medicaid, Medicare, and for subsidies provided to low-income households to purchase private insurance through the insurance exchanges established by the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Unauthorized immigrants can make use of emergency room services, food packages and other services through the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program and prenatal care funded through the State Child Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) under the 2002 “unborn child” ruling adopted in seventeen states and the District of Columbia. Some, though not all, U.S. states provide additional access to health services for unauthorized immigrants.

The experience of being unauthorized is stressful and alienating, which can take a toll on health. These impacts unfold across the life course (Cebulko, 2014; Torres & Young, 2016). As children age, growing awareness of the implications of unauthorized status translates to an experience of “interminable liminality,” meaning being stuck indefinitely in an in-between social position where one’s social identity (as an immigrant or an American) is not recognized or reflected by society (Suárez-Orozco et al. 2011: 443; Abrego 2006; Gonzales and Chavez 2012; Gonzales, Suárez-Orozco, and Dedios-Sanguineti 2013). Exclusion from mainstream rites of passage into adulthood leads many young unauthorized immigrants to feel hopeless and isolated (Gonzales, 2011; Gonzales & Chavez, 2012; Gonzales et al., 2013). Furthermore, children’s identities, feelings of self-worth, friendships, and relationships with school-based adults are compromised as they become aware of the hostile and disparaging portrayal of unauthorized immigrants in the media, as well as of the common stigma associated with being undocumented (Abrego 2006; Suárez-Orozco et al. 2011; Gonzales, Suárez-Orozco, and Dedios-Sanguineti 2013; Patler 2014, 2018). While the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program,

which granted deferral from deportation, work authorization, and other benefits to a subset of unauthorized immigrants who arrived as children, overcame some of these formal and informal exclusions for some young unauthorized immigrants and was associated with improvements to mental health at least in the short-term (Patler & Pirtle, 2018; Venkataramani, Shah, O'Brien, Kawachi, & Tsai, 2017), DACA is at best a form of liminal legality—that is, it is temporary and uncertain (Cebulko, 2014). Research has shown that while programs like DACA have had many positive effects on the lives of recipients, unauthorized youth nevertheless continue to worry about their futures, academic and financial concerns, and their unauthorized family members (Cebulko & Silver, 2016; Enriquez et al., 2018; Patler & Pirtle, 2018). Yet DACA is not a universal experience: the federal policy interacts with state immigration policies to determine the extent to which DACA recipients feel hopeful and included versus fearful and excluded (Cebulko & Silver, 2016).

The health implications of these circumstances are revealed in a small but growing body of research documenting differences in the health and wellbeing of children in varying legal statuses and with different experiences of immigration enforcement. The most severe of these is arguably experiencing a parent's deportation, and, indeed, studies find that the deportation of a parent has profound and long-lasting psychological consequences for spouses and children left behind (Allen, Cisneros, and Tellez 2015; Dreby 2012; Chaudry et al. 2010; Hagan, Castro, and Rodriguez 2009; Zayas et al. 2015). One study, for example, found that children whose parents had been deported were significantly more likely to present externalizing and internalizing behavior problems than similar children with unauthorized parents not facing deportation (Allen et al., 2015). A greater number of studies focuses on the experience of the threat and fear of deportation among unauthorized children and children in mixed-status families, and this research

also finds that children are negatively affected by their own and their parents' legal status vulnerability (Arbona et al., 2010; Brabeck & Xu, 2010; Cavazos-Rehg, Zayas, & Spitznagel, 2007; Dreby, 2015; Gulbas et al., 2016; Sirin et al., 2015; Yoshikawa, 2011).

Even without the experience of deportation threat, studies find that unauthorized children and children of unauthorized parents are disadvantaged in terms of health. For instance, in North Carolina, unauthorized adolescent children have higher rates of anxiety than authorized adolescents (Potochnick & Perreira, 2010). In California, children of unauthorized Mexican parents are 53% more likely than children of U.S.-born Mexican American and White parents to be at risk of developmental problems, net of differences in socioeconomic and English language ability between parents (Ortega et al., 2007). Unauthorized college students experience high levels of stress related to discrimination, education, finances, deportation, and more general concerns about the future (Enriquez et al., 2018; Muñoz & Espino, 2017; Muñoz & Vigil, 2018). The cumulative stress and social deprivation that arises from unauthorized status in the contemporary policy environment has led scholars to argue that it should be conceptualized as a fundamental cause of immigrant health (Asad & Clair, 2018).

### *Data needs and remaining questions*

The research reviewed herein reaches a common conclusion: the experience of living in a mixed-status family negatively impacts the wellbeing and integration of children in the United States. Diverse methodological approaches support this conclusion. In the thick descriptions of qualitative research (e.g., Dreby, 2015; Gonzales, 2011), in studies comparing the outcomes of authorized and unauthorized immigrants (e.g., Greenman & Hall, 2013; Patler, 2017), and in



approaches that seek to estimate the causal impact of changes to legal status (e.g., Bean et al., 2011; Cortes, 2013), unauthorized status is found to be a unique source of disadvantage, while securing permanent legal status supports integration, mobility, and wellbeing.

Although the current research findings are consistent, scholars could improve on existing work in at least two important ways. First, scholars need to think carefully about how data on legal status of U.S. residents is collected and how data collection affects the direction of bias. Most national surveys used in quantitative analysis of legal status do not ask detailed questions about immigrant legal status. This omission reflects concerns that unauthorized immigrants will be fearful of participation due to concerns that contact with agencies will increase risk of detention and deportation (Carter-Pokras & Zambrana, 2006). Note, for example, the widespread response against the U.S. Census Bureau's 2018 announcement that it will include a legal status question in the 2020 census, including from six previous directors of the Census Bureau, multiple academic research organizations, and at least 19 states that have filed legal challenges. These arguments are driven by concerns that the question will have significant "chilling effect" on participation, producing severe undercounts of the immigrant population.

Methods to identify the unauthorized in national data have therefore largely relied on residual and probabilistic techniques; that is, researchers use other sources of information to estimate the size of the unauthorized population and predict who is most likely to be unauthorized within national data (Passel, Lopez, Cohn, & Rohal, 2014; Warren & Warren, 2013; Young & Madrigal, 2017). However, these studies may undercount unauthorized Mexican migrants or underrepresent younger, single, male, and less educated unauthorized Mexican migrants (Genoni et al., 2017). A systematic review of 61 quantitative and qualitative studies that purport to measure undocumented status shows that more than half do not fully explain how they

identify legal status (Young & Madrigal, 2017). We join other scholars in making two interlinking suggestions for future research: 1) that studies including a measure of legal status be transparent about their measurement approach so that, 2) researchers can accurately evaluate the potential sources of bias in the techniques.

That said, a small number of U.S. surveys do ask detailed legal status questions. For the most part, these surveys allow researchers to identify likely-unauthorized migrants by omission, that is, by assigning a likely-unauthorized status to anyone who is not a citizen, permanent resident, or, occasionally, a non-temporary visa holder. Bachmeier and colleagues (2014) recently evaluated two such surveys, the Survey of Income and Program Participation and the Los Angeles Family and Neighborhood Survey, and concluded that the data on legal status were generally reliable. A major research effort moving forward should be to determine how best to achieve representative samples of the unauthorized in national data sources and to better measure legal status, while maintaining strict standards of confidentiality.

Second, the existing literature raises several key questions that should motivate research moving forward. The first regards mechanisms. As our review has suggested, it is not unauthorized status alone that undermines wellbeing and impedes integration, but the interaction between legal status as determined by federal immigration law and various federal and state policies that threaten and deny rights to unauthorized immigrants. Understanding the precise mechanisms through which unauthorized status disadvantages children and families therefore becomes crucial, as some mechanisms imply different policy responses than others. The power of qualitative research can be employed, for instance, to further understand how immigration policy affects kinship structure, transnational families, and community networks (see, for example, Dreby 2015 and Flores, 2018). Research should continue to document the impacts of

family separations; socioeconomic disadvantage of unauthorized status, the psychosocial hardship of enforcement regimes, and the social isolation, exclusion, stigma, and discrimination faced by undocumented communities over time and across differing policy contexts.

Another area of unanswered questions involves how policy interacts with different aspects of the unauthorized immigrant experience, both within the lives of immigrants and between immigrants defined by local contexts, such as states or communities, and sociodemographic characteristics, such as national origin, race, ethnicity, class, gender, age, and sexuality (Flores & Schachter, 2018; Rusczyk & Yrizar Barbosa, 2016). While several compelling qualitative studies suggest that state policy moderates the impact of federal immigration law (Cebulko & Silver, 2016; Martinez, 2014), and other studies have estimated the direct impact of state policies on unauthorized immigrants (Young et al., 2018; Flores, 2009), more research is needed to explore the propositions raised by this research: to understand how and why states may moderate the impact of federal immigration law for the integration of children in mixed-status families. While other studies demonstrate that the unauthorized experience varies by, for example, gender, race, and stage in the life course (Das Gupta, 2014; Flores & Schachter, 2018; Golash-Boza & Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2013), we suggest that attention to how the interaction between immigration policy, federal and state social policies, and individual characteristics would help further articulate the disadvantages of unauthorized immigration status.

Furthermore, immigrants can experience substantial change in their own legal status, but most analyses of legal status consider only status at one point in time (for an exception see Bean et al., 2011). Studies should consider whether the impacts of unauthorized legal status accumulate or change with time, how a transition into or out of unauthorized legal status affects

immigrants, and whether the life-course timing of unauthorized immigrant status—as a child versus an adult—moderates its impacts (Abrego, 2006; Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012).

### *Conclusions*

In this review, we have argued that it is not just the straightforward formal exclusion through the denial of legal membership that undermines the wellbeing of unauthorized immigrants and their children. Rather, multiple aspects of immigration policy—including the U.S. visa system, immigration enforcement policies, and rules regarding judicial discretion in deportation proceedings—and federal and state policies regarding the labor force, access to post-secondary education, and eligibility for and access to social services and health care, intertwine to create a uniquely disadvantaged legal context of reception for unauthorized immigrants and their children. Especially troubling is that these policies target the very social structures that are thought to protect immigrants and promote their integration—that is, social supports, economic supports and opportunities, and health and health care. We join a growing group of scholars in emphasizing that unauthorized status is a unique stressor and a categorical form of membership exclusion and argue that legal status should therefore be understood as the primary determinant of immigrant integration for unauthorized immigrants and their children.

Our review suggests that the current political moment creates an especially harsh environment for unauthorized immigrants and their families. The Trump administration has reduced legal immigration, enhanced immigration enforcement, and further restricted immigrants' access to the social safety net. The administration has sought to terminate two programs, DACA and TPS, that provide temporary protection to large groups of immigrants—

young unauthorized immigrants who migrated as children and immigrants who fled crises in their home countries. What is more, the Trump administration recently proposed to further expand the criteria upon which a public charge is determined—and therefore the grounds for exclusion—to include immigrants who have received non-cash benefits such as food assistance. Our review suggests that this decision, if enacted, will have profound negative effects on unauthorized immigrants’ willingness to make use of such programs, even for their eligible children. These implemented and proposed policy changes aside, the president’s anti-immigrant rhetoric creates a climate of antagonism, fear, and isolation.<sup>6</sup> Research will undoubtedly document that the disadvantages of being unauthorized are exacerbated in this hostile context, when one considers those impacts in light of the broad set of federal and state policies that create the context of reception for unauthorized immigrants.

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<sup>6</sup> In his speech on June 16, 2015 to announce his presidential bid, Donald Trump stated immigrants from Mexico are *"people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people."* In that speech he also said, *"I will build a great, great wall on our southern border. And I will have Mexico pay for that wall. Mark my words."* See: <http://time.com/3923128/donald-trump-announcement-speech/>

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