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PROTECTING CHILDREN IN THE AFTERMATH OF IMMIGRATION RAIDS

Study Finds Significant Behavioral Changes in Children after Raids

Children of unauthorized immigrant parents are often forgotten in debates over immigration reform. There are roughly 5.5 million children living in the United States with unauthorized immigrant parents—three-quarters of whom are U.S. born citizens. These families live in constant fear of separation. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) estimates that over the last 10 years, more than 100,000 immigrant parents of U.S. citizen children have been deported from the United States.

A new report by the Urban Institute, [*Facing Our Future: Children in the Aftermath of Immigration Enforcement*](#), examines the consequences of parental arrest, detention, and deportation on 190 children in 85 families in six locations across the country. The report found that raids and other ICE actions that separate parents and children pose serious risks to children's immediate safety, economic security, well-being, and long-term development. In most cases, two-parent homes became single-parent families after one parent was detained. At least 20 families in the study were forced to decide whether children—many of whom are native born U.S. citizens—would leave the country with their deported parent or remain with the other parent or other relatives. The Urban Institute interviewed families affected by ICE actions at the following six sites:

- **Grand Island, Nebraska:** In December, 2006, ICE agents raided a meatpacking plant in Grand Island and arrested 273 workers. 72 of the arrestees opted to take voluntary departure shortly after their arrest. Only 9 arrestees are known to have been released promptly after the raid to care for their children. Most of the arrestees were placed in detention in Georgia and Alabama. After 26 months, 10% of the arrestees had been criminally charged and were serving one year sentences. The remaining workers were released on bond or deported.
- **New Bedford, Massachusetts:** On March 6, 2007, 361 workers were arrested at Michael Bianco, Inc., a U.S. military contractor. Separation times for families varied widely, with 60 being released in the first three days, but two months after the raid, 191 workers were still in detention, while 149 had been released to await the result of their immigration cases. One year after the raid, 160 had been deported, and 190 cases were still being contested.
- **Van Nuys, California:** On February 7, 2008, ICE raided Micro Solutions Enterprises and arrested 138 immigrants. 48 immigrants were released the same day under the new humanitarian release policy, some with monitoring devices on their ankles. Within a few days, 99 of the immigrants were released. Finally, about half of the arrestees (60-70) had

their deportation withheld while attorneys challenged the legality of the raid itself and were still contesting it as of December 2009.

- **Postville, Iowa:** On May 12, 2008, 389 workers from Agriprocessors were arrested. They were then moved to Waterloo, Iowa, where ICE and the U.S. District Attorney's office set up trials over 10 days. On the day of the raid, 47 adults were released because they were parents, all with electronic monitoring devices (EMTs) on their ankles. 270 immigrants pled guilty to the misdemeanor charge of misusing Social Security Numbers and served five month terms in facilities across the Midwest.
- **Miami, Florida:** Home raids by Fugitive Operations Teams (FOTs) started in 2005. The study examined immigrant parents who were arrested in FOT sweeps or during court appearances between 2006 and 2008.
- **Rogers-Springdale, Arkansas:** Local enforcement of immigration laws through the 287(g) program started in the fall of 2007. In the first seven months of the program, 419 immigrants were arrested. None of the parents contacted in the study had been granted early release for humanitarian reasons, including three single mothers who were detained for between 12 days and six months.

When a working parent's income was lost because they were detained and/or deported, many families experienced housing instability and food insufficiency because of lost income.

- Across all six sites in the study, the average incomes of affected families declined to less than half because those arrested were no longer able to work.
- Crowded and poor housing conditions were another effect of the arrests. In Postville, one in four families moved in with others to save money, while of the eight families who owned homes before the arrest, four lost them.
- Families in the study reported food hardships at levels many times greater than those found in nationally representative samples. Families ate less of a variety of foods, parents cut back on their food consumption so their children could eat, and these hardships often lasted for more than a year.

Most parents observed significant, adverse changes in their child's behavior.

- In the six months following a raid or arrest, approximately two-thirds of children experienced changes in eating and sleeping habits. More than half cried or were afraid more often, and more than a third were more anxious, withdrawn, clingy, angry, or aggressive. The majority of children in the study experienced at least four of these behavior changes.

- Children who saw one or both parent(s) arrested during a home raid experienced even greater behavioral changes—including changes in eating and sleeping habits—as well as higher degrees of fear and anxiety.
- Children who were separated from their detained parents were more likely to experience behavioral changes than children immediately reunited with their parents after ICE raids or other ICE actions, and experienced higher degrees of change.
- Children’s grades in school declined in the short term, though students appeared to benefit from support provided by teachers and other school personnel.

Community-based organizations, churches, non-profit service providers, lawyers, public human services agencies, and child welfare agencies provided short-term aid to families affected by raids or other arrests.

- In most sites, many organizations—including community- and faith-based groups, schools, and legal services organizations—joined together to provide assistance to families affected by the arrests. However the response and capacity of these organizations varied from site to site. Sustaining relief efforts in the long-term has proven to be challenging in these communities.
- Public agencies in many sites stood ready to serve eligible family members, however many immigrant families were fearful to apply for benefits. In places where churches or advocacy groups served as intermediaries between families and government agencies, eligible families were better able to receive services and benefits.

The Urban Institute’s policy recommendations include:

- Congress should modify current immigration law so the interests of children, especially U.S. citizen children, are protected during deportation proceedings.
- ICE should continue its informal moratorium on worksite raids.
- ICE should continue to develop alternatives to detention so that parents who do not present a danger to the community or a flight risk are not detained.
- DHS and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) should work together to develop strategies to support state and local governments and non-profit organizations to ensure the well-being of children when their parents are deported.
- Networks of deportation defense lawyers should be established, perhaps through the American Bar Association and the American Immigration Lawyers Association. Such networks will be hardest to develop, yet most essential in smaller cities and rural areas.