

## Chapter 5

# Invisible Borders: School Counselors and Mixed- Status Children

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter focuses on children in mixed-status families. The authors provide demographic data and the definition of a mixed-status family, then outline the challenges experienced by these families. The authors delineate developmental, educational, and psychological risk factors for these children. Intervention and advocacy initiatives in which school counselors can engage are examined. Authors provide practical solutions, suggestions for future research, a glossary of terms, and further readings. Finally, each topic discussed includes application strategies for school counselors.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Anti-immigration rhetoric, zero-tolerance immigration policies, and lack of resources create many challenges for undocumented immigrants, including those connected to mixed-status families (Gray, 2019). The **detention, deportation**, or undocumented status of parents in mixed-status households puts their undocumented and U.S. **citizen-children** at risk for psychological trauma and developmental, social, and educational issues which can result in profound collateral damage and negative academic outcomes if not addressed appropriately.

In the summer of 2019, **Immigration and customs enforcement** (ICE) agents raided agricultural plants in Mississippi and arrested over 600 people in the largest single-state immigration enforcement action in U.S. history (United States Immigration and customs enforcement, 2019). Left behind were devastated communities and children without parents. Community support, including those within the school setting, serve as **protective factors** for mixed-status children impacted by **deportation** through the development of meaningful relationships (Rojas-Flores, 2017). School counselors, by virtue of their skill and training in addressing the holistic needs of all students (ASCA, 2016) are positioned to advocate for the diverse needs of this student population, provide necessary supports, and implement strategies to foster optimal development for these students.

This chapter focuses on the challenges of mixed-status children and families and outlines the impact of the families' undocumented status on the children's future outcomes. The chapter begins with demographic data, a definition of mixed-status families, and presents challenges children in mixed-status families encounter. Educational, developmental, and mental health concerns and needs are examined. Interventions are also delineated. Advocacy initiatives conclude the chapter.

## BACKGROUND

In 2017 the United States population of undocumented immigrants was approximately 10.5 million, and of those, 73% were of Latinx descent (Gonzalez-Barrera et al., 2020). Further, according to the Migration Policy Institute (2016), 2.5 million undocumented children and youth under the age of 25 live in the U.S., representing nearly 23 percent of the total **undocumented immigrant** population. This section outlines the status types, family structure, and common experiences among members.

The term "undocumented immigrants" refers to individuals born outside of the United States who lack legal permission to enter or remain in the U.S. after the expiration of their visa (Frisby & Jimerson, 2016; Zayas et al., 2015). Undocumented immigrants are not authorized to work, receive public benefits, or obtain a driver's license (Enriquez, 2015). This marginalized group and their children regularly encounter the fear of detainment and **deportation**, which engenders constant stress and anxiety. Nearly half of undocumented immigrants are parents of minor children, many of whom are citizens and are severely impacted by their parents' undocumented status. Zayas and Gulbas (2017) referred to these children as **citizen-children** and the family composition as *mixed-status families*.

Mixed-status families are families whose members have varying citizenship or immigration statuses. A mixed-status family includes one or both **undocumented immigrant** parents (in some instances, undocumented children who immigrated with their parents) and U.S. born children (Enriquez, 2015). Mixed-status families present complicated family dynamics, as they consist of any combination of legal immigrants, undocumented immigrants, naturalized citizens, and U.S. born individuals. The family's

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