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The Journey of Undocumented Latinx Immigrant Youth: Mental Health Considerations

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Objectives

- Identify current immigration statistics and trends in the United States.
- Describe traumatic experiences and mental health considerations of undocumented, Latinx immigrant children.
- Review resilience factors and mental health treatment approaches for working with immigrant youth and families.

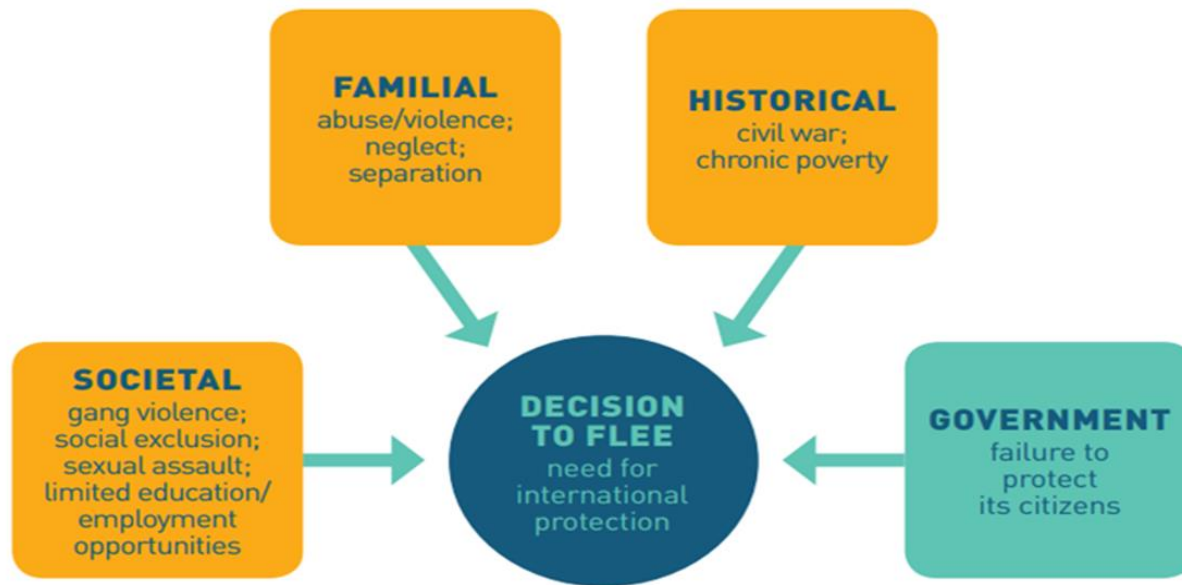
Immigration Facts & Statistics

- According to the World Migration Report (2020), 50.6 million immigrants reside in the U.S. (15.3% of population)
 - Top percentage of immigrants travel from Mexico, India, China, the Philippines, El Salvador, Vietnam, Cuba, Dominican Republic, South Korea, & Guatemala
- Approximately, **11 million** immigrants are undocumented (MPI, 2018)
 - Approximately 68% of undocumented immigrants from Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries.
 - More than half reside in California, Texas, New York, and Florida.



Pre-migration

- The Immigration Psychology Working Group (2018, p. 33) states, “Due to the widespread insecurity and crime in the region, fleeing for survival has overtaken leaving in search of opportunity and a more promising future as the primary reason for migration.”



During Migration

- Minors are often aware of numerous dangers that they can face in route to the United States, yet they believe those risks are lesser than the risks in their host country. Dangers may include:



- Malnutrition, physical injuries, infections, and diseases
- Robbery, intimidation, extortion, or coercion by “coyotes”
- Physical and/or sexual abuse
- Harassment by local authorities and detention
- Separation and/or Loss of family members
- Traveling long distance by foot or hazardous train rides (i.e., “La Bestia”)

Detention

- Some minors cross to the U.S. undetected by U.S. Customs and Border Protection.
- Other minors may be detained and separated from adult traveling companions and placed in detention centers, often referred to as “hieleras.”



Ongoing Toxic Stress

- Once migrant youth begin to settle in the community, they are often met with a reality that does not meet their idealistic expectations:
 - Ongoing neighborhood violence and exposure to gangs
 - Substandard living conditions and limited resources
 - Physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, as well as neglect
 - Racial profiling and discrimination
 - Acculturative stress & migratory grief
 - Loss of prior role, economic and social status
 - Concern for family and friends continuing to live in home countries
 - Bullying and academic stressors/limitations
 - Ongoing legal proceedings with persistent fears of detention and deportation

Mental Health Challenges

- Immigrant youth are at a significantly higher risk for experiencing multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), which increases the likelihood of poor outcomes and health risk behaviors.
- Studies have found high levels of anxiety, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, and suicidal ideation among 30-50% of refugee minors (Baily, 2017).



Vulnerable, but Resilient

- Despite high levels of adversity, many migrant children demonstrate incredible resilience (Rodriguez & Dobler, 2021)
 - **Individual factors-** prosocial behaviors, problem-solving skills
 - **Lifetime relationships-** positive early family relationships, connection with family and country of origin, positive peer and adult relationships in host country
 - **Acculturation-** integration of own and new culture, positive relationships with prosocial institutions
 - **Care Arrangements** - supported but less restrictive living arrangements

Mental Health Treatment

- Provide culturally-competent treatment & incorporate social justice principles in providing service (i.e., provision of progress letters that can support legal proceedings)
- Explore case management needs and partner with community-based organizations (i.e., legal, educational, social, housing, and food insecurity assistance)
- Integrate evidence-based practice with practice-based evidence
 - Child Parent Psychotherapy
 - Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavior Therapy
 - Community support groups (i.e., La Monarca)



La Linterna



La Linterna is an interdisciplinary, co-located clinic providing holistic and trauma-informed assistance to migrant children and families:

- ✓ Medical Services
- ✓ Mental Health Screener
- ✓ Legal consultation
- ✓ Case Management

Questions?

