

Understanding the Needs of Immigrant Clients: Implications for Mental Health Providers

Anna Lopez, Ph.D., LPCC

Associate Professor

New Mexico State University

- ▶ Overview
- ▶ Activity
- ▶ Quiz
- ▶ Deconstructing Myths
- ▶ Definitions
- ▶ Understanding immigration
- ▶ Immigrant Experience- Factors to consider
- ▶ Working with immigrants- Clinical implications
- ▶ Reflective Questions
- ▶ What do you know about the immigrant population?
- ▶ What do you wish you knew more about when it comes to working with immigrants?
- ▶ What are some common stereotypes regarding the immigrant population?
- ▶ Quiz
- ▶ <https://play.kahoot.it/#/k/c1ca06b5-5bd5-4dcb-a35c-d59d1cb5cbe0> (Lopez, Bialik & Radford, 2018)
- ▶ DECONSTRUCTING MYTHS
- ▶ MYTH: “Our borders are not safe” or “Our borders are under attack”
- ▶ FACT: Our border is more secure now than it has been in the past
- ▶ DECONSTRUCTING MYTHS
- ▶ MYTH: “Immigrants are taking over our country”
- ▶ FACT: Immigration to the United States has experienced significant decrease over the last few years.
 - The number of unauthorized immigrants living in the US has declined to the level it was in 2004.
 - Out of the approximately 43.3 million immigrants in the United States:
 - 2010-2017: 21%
 - 2000-2009: 28%
 - Before 2000: 57%
 - *66% of unauthorized immigrants in 2017 had been in the country for more than 10 years
- ▶ (Migration Policy Institute, 2017; Pew Research Institute, 2019)
- ▶ DECONSTRUCTING MYTHS
- ▶ MYTH: “Illegal immigrants did not migrate legally because they are lazy and/or entitled”
- ▶ FACT: Many undocumented immigrants do not meet criteria for a legal pathway to immigration
- ▶ DECONSTRUCTING MYTHS
- ▶ MYTH: “Undocumented immigrants don’t contribute to our country’s economy”
- ▶ FACT: Undocumented immigrants pay taxes just like everyone else.
- ▶ DECONSTRUCTING MYTHS

- ▶ MYTH: “Undocumented immigrants are all criminals”
- ▶ FACT: Taking away the criminalization attached to “illegal entry,” studies have confirmed that immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than native-born Americans.
- ▶ Other Facts
- ▶ Mexican immigrants account for only 26% of total immigrant population
- ▶ Only 34% of all Hispanic individuals in the United States identify as immigrant
- ▶ In 2016, approximately 18 million children out of the 70 million children under age 18 in the United States lived with at least one immigrant parent. This translates to 26% or roughly 1 out of 4 children. (*Zong, J., Batalova, J., & Hallock, 2018*)
- ▶ Introduction: Definitions
- **Migrant:** a person who moves regularly in order to find work.
- **Immigrant:** a person who comes to a country to take up permanent residence.
 - ▶ Introduction: Definitions
- **Refugees:** a person who has fled his/her country because of violence, conflict or fear of persecution. Engaged in what is sometimes described as “forced migration.”
 - ▶ Migration takes place without opportunity for preparation
 - ▶ Primarily consist of women, children, and people with disabilities (*as cited in Bemak & Chung, 2015*).
- ▶ Introduction: Definitions
- **Undocumented immigrants:** a person who resides in the country without any legal documentation.
 - 4.9 of the 10.5 million unauthorized immigrants living in the United States are of Mexican nationality
 - Over the past few years, millions of individuals have been deported.
 - An estimated 1.5 million individuals of Mexican origin were removed or returned to Mexico from 2014-2016 (*U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2015; 2016*)
- ▶ Introduction: Definitions
- **Return:** “The confirmed movement of an inadmissible or deportable alien out of the United States not based on an order of removal. Data on returns in this report include voluntary returns, aliens leaving the country under an order of voluntary departure, and withdrawals under docket control.” (*U.S., Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2015*).
- **Removal:** “compulsory and confirmed movement of an inadmissible or deportable alien out of the United States based on an order of removal. An alien who is removed has administrative or criminal consequences placed on subsequent reentry owing to the fact of the removal” (*U.S., Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2015*). Used to be referred to as “**Deportation**.”
- **Deportation:** Prior to the enactment of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRAIRA), the legal process of deporting a foreign national was called *deportation*. Although this term is still utilized, the official name for deportations is now *Removal*.

- ▶ Introduction: Definitions
- **Transnational immigrants:** “work, pray, and express their political interests in several contexts rather than in a single nation-state. Some will put down roots in a host country, maintain strong homeland ties, and belong to religious and political movements that span the globe. These allegiances are not antithetical to one another” (*Levitt, 2004*)
- **Transnational families:** May be defined as “families who are separated from each other by international borders and who maintain significant emotional or economic ties in two countries” (*Dreby, 2010, p. 5*)
 - ▶ Understanding Migration
 - ▶ **Migration Patterns**
 - Historically, the migration pattern has been of the father migrating first (*Suarez-Orozco, Bang, & Kim, 2011*).
 - Border enforcement has lengthened the trip durations (*Donato & Patterson, 2004*).
 - Decline in Mexican unauthorized immigrants entering the country
 - ▶ Immigrant Experience
- ▶ Pre-migration stressors
- ▶ Immigration process
- ▶ Language Barriers
- ▶ Employment challenges
- ▶ Acculturation/ Acculturative Stress
- ▶ Experiences with Racism and Discrimination
- ▶ Legal Status/ Fear of deportation
- ▶ Living a “transnational lifestyle”
 - Financial/ emotional responsibilities
- ▶ Immigrant Experience
- ▶ **Pre-migration stressors**
 - Can be financial, familial, or associated with pre-migration violence/trauma
 - Immigrant Experience
- ▶ **Immigration process**
 - Loss and grief
 - It may involve a number of “host of complex stressors that affect the mental health and quality of life” (*Chung, Bemak, Ortiz, & Sandoval-Perez, 2008, p. 311*)
 - Complex stressors may include:
 - family separation and reunification
 - foregoing relationships in home country
 - the act of border crossing
 - fear of deportation and
 - the power inequalities, prejudice, and discrimination encountered in the host country
 - Immigrant Experience
- These stressors may cause or exacerbate mental health difficulties, including anxiety, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance abuse, suicidal ideation, and severe mental illness (*American Psychological Association, 2013*).

- Immigration process is responsible for a greater risk of mental health disorders and suicidality among immigrants (*Reitmanova & Gustafson, 2009*)
- ▶ Immigrant Experience
- ▶ **Language Barriers**
 - May make it difficult for immigrants to access health-care (*Ding & Hargraves, 2009*).
 - May affect the psychological well-being of immigrants because it may keep immigrants from securing gainful employment (*Bemak & Chung, 2008*).
 - The immigration experience and learning a new language can lead to additional stress related to acculturation (*Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007*).
 - May increase experiences of discrimination
 - Immigrant Experience
- ▶ **Acculturation/ Acculturative Stress**
 - Many factors have been linked to acculturative stress: number of family members living in the U.S., legal status, social support, English proficiency, among others
 - Some of the potential challenges related to acculturation include:
 - Changes in gender roles/expectations
 - Intergenerational conflicts
 - Role reversal
 - Navigating between new culture vs. culture of origin
 - Immigrant Experience
 - **Racism and Discrimination**
 - Experiences with racism/discrimination and pressure to acculturate
 - Immigrant Experience
- ▶ **Legal Status**
 - Fear of deportation- leading to anxiety, stress, negative self-concept
 - Affects employment possibilities and access to healthcare services
- ▶ **Deportation**
 - Experiencing the deportation of a loved one
 - Personal experience with detention/deportation
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xum3ix_g2jl
- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsOPbN8ViEg>
- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v9zLchnWQcs>
- ▶ Immigrant Experience
- ▶ **Family Separation**
 - The length of separation during immigration varies by country of origin and between mothers and fathers (Patel et al., 2016)
 - The separation of immigrant children from their fathers has been found to last longer than separation from mothers (Gonzalez, Kula, Gonzalez, & Paik, 2017)
 - ▶ Immigrant Experience- Family Separation *Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, and Louie (2002)*:
 - 77% of youth participants reported being separated from their mother for up to 2 yrs; 23% for 2-4 yrs

- 35% of youth reported being separated from their father for up to 2 years; 33% for 2-4 years and 33% for more than 5 years
- A total of 85% of Mexican youth reported being separated from one or both parents during the process of migration
- Study shows that levels of depression are higher among immigrant children who experienced separation prior to migration compared to those who migrated with their parents
- ▶ Immigrant Experience- Family Separation
- *Dreby (2008)*
 - Children of migrant men may withdraw emotionally from their fathers
 - Children of migrant women may feel they lack intimacy and affection and have been abandoned
 - Immigrant Experience- Family Separation
- ▶ Although family separation and transnationalism is perceived as a common occurrence in families of undocumented immigrants, even immigrants who have found a way to legalize their stay in the United States may “face years-long bureaucratic backlogs as they wait for visas for their spouses and children” (*Aronoff, 2008, p. 15*)
- The following, also contribute to family separations in immigrant families:
 - *Reentry bars for those who have lived unauthorized in the U.S.*
 - *Laws that prevent permanent residents from petitioning for family members*
 - *Deportations/Detentions*

(*Enchautegui & Menjivar, 2015*)

- ▶ Immigrant Experience- Family Separation
- ▶ **Impact on Educational Attainment**
 - *“Education Gap”*
 - Children separated from parents during migration were much more likely to have an education gap than immigrant children born in the U.S. or who migrated with parents (12.1%; 4.7%, 4.9%, respectively)
 - Impact of migration was greater for children who migrated at older ages or who were separated from their parents during the ages of 13-18.
 - Length of separation appeared to have a less significant impact than age at separation. (*Gindling & Poggio, 2012*)
 - ▶ Immigrant Experience- Family Separation
- ▶ **Impact on Educational Attainment**
 - *Dropout Rates*
 - Regardless of region of origin, dropout rates were higher for students who were separated during migration.
 - For Latin American children, dropout rate for children separated from their parents during migration was 40% compared to those who migrated with parents (17%) and 20% for U.S.-born children. (*Gindling & Poggio, 2012*)
 - ▶ Immigrant Experience

► **Family Reunification**

- Separation and reunification processes involve difficult psychological experiences for both the parents and children.
- Challenges at the time of reunification also occur despite the fact that many parents maintained contact during the separation period through letters, phone calls, or personal visits (*Suarez-Orozco, Bang, & Kim, 2011*).

► **Immigrant Experience**

○ **Children:**

- Attachment issues related to separating from the parent(s) and possibly from their primary caretaker [if other than parent], may lead to psychological stress (*Dreby 2007; Suarez-Orozco, Bang, & Kim, 2011*)
- Adjusting to dual-earner household (related to loss of maternal supervision/ less family time)
- Potential loss of close relationships with extended family
- Reunification may trigger fear of their children losing their connection to their family as they assimilate to the host culture (*Partida, 1996*)

○ **Parents:**

- Stress at the time of reunification may stem from adjusting to structural changes resulting from new configurations of roles, boundaries, and communication processes (*Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007*)

► **Family Separation- Considerations for providers**

- Emotional challenges
- Financial responsibility/ remittances
- Children left behind/ children in U.S.
- Impact of new technology
- Role of family in the decision-making process
- Other recommendations:
 - Encourage the client to describe future goals, specifically related to migration (i.e, are they planning on going back, if so, when? Is family migrating?)
 - Assist the client in exploring the stressors related to living a transnational lifestyle
 - May need to focus on goals related to re-negotiating the relationship with family abroad

► **Family Reunification- Considerations for providers**

► **Children and adolescents**

- Events that contributed to the decision of children to migrate to the U.S.
- What has the adjustment process for the child been like?
- Who migrated with the parents/ who stayed behind?
- Who took the role of care-taker when parents migrated?
- How is the child's relationship with previous caretaker/ parents?
- What have been the most difficult changes for the child?

► **Parents**

- Events that contributed to the decision of children to migrate to the U.S.
- What has the adjustment process for the parents been like?

- Who migrated with the parents/ who stayed behind?
- Who took the role of care-taker when parents migrated?
- How is the child's relationship with previous caretaker/ parents?
- What have been the most difficult changes for the parents/child?
 - ▶ Working with Immigrants
- ▶ Use of culturally relevant strategies
- ▶ Awareness
- ▶ Self-reflection
- ▶ Advocacy
- ▶ Research
- ▶ Working with Immigrants: Culturally Sensitive Strategies
- Psycho-educational activities
 - Although other psycho educational topics are important, it is necessary to Include information about the counseling process (confidentiality, overall expectations)
- Readiness
 - Assessing Emotional vs. Practical needs (long vs. short term goals)
- Supporting relationships (social networks)
 - May include home visits, higher involvement in community and assisting immigrants in forming relationships in their communities
- Bilingual services (including bilingual supervision/ on-going training)
- Advocacy
- ▶ Working with Immigrants: Awareness
- ▶ Increase critical awareness of discrimination, prejudice, and overall experiences of the immigrant population
 - Includes learning about:
 - Country of origin- inquiring about what it was like to live there, what does it look like, overall description
 - Pre-migration, migration and post-migration experiences
 - Role of family, support network, family left behind
 - Cultural values, customs, and traditions
 - Factors that may contribute to the mental health of immigrants
 - THIS INCLUDES LEARNING ABOUT CURRENT EVENTS impacting this population.
- ▶ Working with Immigrants: Self-Reflection
- ▶ *Self-reflection includes increased awareness of own:*
 - *Privileges*
 - *Power*
 - *Strengths and weaknesses*
 - *Cultures*
 - *Values*
 - *Biases*
 - *Assumptions*
 - *Worldviews*

- *Stereotypes*
- *When working with undocumented immigrants, own beliefs about undocumented immigration and immigration law*
- Working with Immigrants: Access to Services
- Higher visibility in the immigrant community
- Awareness of information required at time of intake
- Cost of services
- Services in clients' native language
- ▶ Working with Immigrants: Advocacy
- The importance of "acting as an advocate; questioning and challenging policies, rules, regulations, and systems that adversely affect the mental health of immigrants when necessary; and, at times, "rocking the boat." (*Chung, Bemak, Ortiz, Sandoval-Perez, 2008*)
- ▶ Working with Immigrants: Other Considerations
- ▶ Importance of intersectionality
 - Not all immigrants are undocumented
 - Take into consideration potential differences related to:
 - Racial and ethnic diversity
 - Level of education
 - Language and religious diversity

(American Psychological Association 2013)
- ▶ Working with Immigrants: Research
- Need for identifying creative recruitment strategies for future research that minimize the risk of the participants without establishing distance between participants and researchers
- Need for identifying appropriate alternatives for recruiting/protecting undocumented participants
- ▶ Lastly..
- ▶ Given the politically charged atmosphere that currently exists in the United States regarding immigrants, it is crucial that mental health professionals be aware of the impact that the current sociopolitical environment, immigration policies, premigration experiences, postmigration challenges, and various forms of racism and discrimination have on the mental health of immigrant and refugee clients. Counselors can no longer provide professional services with this population without taking into account the complexity and multidimensional factors associated with immigrant populations (*Bemak, Chung, Ortiz, & Sandoval-Perez, 2008*)

References

- Donato, K. M. & Patterson, E. (2004). Women and men on the move: Undocumented border crossing. In J. Durand & D. S. Massey (Eds.), *Border: Research from the Mexican Migration Project* (pp. 111-130). NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Dreby, J. (2007). Children and Power in Mexican Transnational Families. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 69, 1050-1064.
- Enchautegui, M.E., & Menjivar, C. (2015). Paradoxes of family immigration policy: Separation, reorganization, and reunification of families under current immigration laws. *Law & Policy*, 37(1-2), 32-60.
- Falicov, C.J. (2007). Working with Transnational Immigrants: Expanding meanings of family, community, and culture. *Family Process*, 46(2), 157-171
- Fortuna, L. R., Porche, M. V., & Alegria, M. (2008). Political violence, psychosocial trauma, and the context of mental health services among immigrant Latinos in the United States. *Ethnicity & Health*, 13(5), 435-463. doi: 10.1080/1355785070837286
- Gonzalez-Barrera, A. (2015). More Mexicans leaving than coming to the United States. Retrieved from <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2015/11/19/more-mexicans-leaving-than-coming-to-the-u-s/>
- Gonzalez, J.J., Kula, S.M, Gonzalez, V.V., & Paik, S.J. (2017). Context of Latino Students' Family Separation During and After Immigration: Perspectives, Challenges, and Opportunities for Collaborative Efforts. *School Community Journal*, 27(2), 211-228.
- Hagan, J., Eschbach, K., & Rodriguez, N. (2008) U.S. deportation policy, family separation, and circular migration. *The International Migration Review*, 42(1), 64-88. DOI: 10.1111/j.1747-7379.2007.00114.x
- References
- Hixson, R. (2009). When social change isn't fast enough to prevent pain and death. *Annals of the American Psychotherapy Association*, 12(2), 64-66.
- Hoefler, M., Rytina, N., & Baker, B. C. (2010). Estimates of the Unauthorized immigrant population residing in the United States: January 2009. Office of Immigration Statistics, Policy Directorate, US Department of Homeland Security.
- Hoefler, M., Rytina, N., & Baker, B. C. (2011). Estimates of the unauthorized immigrant population residing in the United States: January 2010. Office of Immigration Statistics, Policy Directorate, U.S. Department of Homeland Security.
- Hovey, J. D. (2000). Psychosocial predictors of acculturative stress in Mexican immigrants. *The Journal of Psychology*, 134(5), 490-502
- Juarez, M., Gomez-Aguinaga, B., & Bettez, S.P. (2018). Twenty years after IIRIRA: The Rise of Immigrant Detention and its effects on Latinx communities across the nation. *Journal of Migration and Human Security*, 6(1), 74-96.
- Lopez, G., Bialilk, K., & Radford, J. (2018). Key findings about U.S. immigrants. Retrieved from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/09/14/key-findings-about-u-s-immigrants/>
- Marin, G., & Gamboa, R. J. (2003). Acculturation and changes in cultural values. In K. M. Chun, P. B. Organista, & G. Marin (Eds.), *Acculturation: Advances in theory, measurement, and applied research* (pp. 83-93). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Maciel, J. A., Van Putten, Z., & Knudson-Martin, C. (2009). Gendered power in cultural contexts: Part I immigrant couples. *Family Process, 48*(1), 9-23.

► References

Organista, K. C. (2007). Mexican migration for dummies: What social workers and the public need to know. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work, 16*(3/4), 189-198.

Partida, J. (1996). The effects of immigration on children in the Mexican-American community. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 13*(3), 241-254.

Reitmanova, S., & Gustafson, D. L. (2009). Mental health needs of visible minority immigrants in a small urban center: Recommendations for policy makers and service providers. *Journal of Immigrant Minority Health, 11*, 46-56.

Suarez-Orozco, C., Todorova, I. L. G., & Louie, J. (2002). Making up for lost time: The experience of separation and reunification among immigrant families. *Family Process, 41*(4), 625- 643.

Suarez-Orozco, C., Bang, H. J., & Kim, H. Y. (2011). I felt like my heart was staying behind: Psychological implications of family separations and reunifications for immigrant youth. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 26*(2), 222-257. doi: 10.1177/0743558410376830

Zong, J., Batalova, J., & Hallock. (2018). *Frequently requested statistics on immigrants and immigration in the United States*. Retrieved from <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states>

► Additional Resources

► <http://www.apa.org/topics/immigration/index.aspx>

► <http://healing-the-immigrant-family.com/2014/02/>

► <https://americasvoice.org/blog/new-to-immigration-reform-read-faq/>

► <https://immigrantdefenseproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Deportation101-1-11HiRes.pdf>