

# Report sheds light on long-term effects of immigration enforcement

January 7 2013, by Natasha Karaczan

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(Phys.org)—Imagine living every day with the constant fear of being separated from your family or the country you have grown to call home. For millions of undocumented immigrants and their families, this fear is very real and the effects may have a long-term effect on society as a whole.

In a new report by the Center For American Progress, Cecilia Menjívar, Cowden Distinguished Professor in the T. Denny Sanford School of Social and [Family Dynamics](#), and Leisy Abrego, Ford Post-Doctoral Fellow in the T. Denny Sanford School, shed light on the overwhelming problems undocumented citizens face during the legalization process. The report is titled "Legal Violence in the Lives of Immigrants: How Immigration Enforcement Affects Families, Schools, and Workplaces."

In the report, the pair states that while proponents of harsh [immigration laws](#) may feel stricter legislation, such as S.B. 1070, will force [undocumented immigrants](#) to "self deport," the reality is much more complicated as this population lives and works alongside documented immigrants and U.S. citizens. In fact, while there are 11.5 million undocumented people, 16.6 million people live in mixed-status families where legal status varies between members.

Menjívar states that it's important to understand that it isn't just the enforcement of immigration laws by means such as raids, traffic stops or deportation, it is the constant fear of these actions that are greatly impacting [immigrant communities](#).

Studies conducted by the duo found this fear creates what they call "legal violence," or harmful consequences of current immigration enforcement practices that deeply affect immigrants and citizens alike.

The studies and research for the report were based on more than 200 interviews spanning a decade with immigrant youth and adults in Los Angeles, Phoenix, Honduras, Mexico and Guatemala.

"What we found is that the constant fear of being deported has short-term effects but it may also have a serious long-term impact on individuals and communities. So the impact of enforcement practices we see today may last for much longer than people think," Menjívar said.

So how do we create a cohesive and prosperous community? Menjívar feels the solution is to remove legal blocks and allow. When undocumented peoples are given time to earn living with comparable wages, they can buy a home and improve their neighborhoods. Their children also will be adding value and diversity to school systems as well.

By removing the fear of legal violence, children of undocumented workers will feel more comfortable staying in school, thereby reducing the dropout rate and improving the access to a quality education that they may prosper from down the road.

Menjívar and Abrego offer suggestions for addressing this fear and violence that unjust [immigration enforcement](#) evoke. In the report they state that both Congress and the Obama administration must pass laws that provide a pathway to citizenship, especially for youth who complete high school and some college or military service. Other suggestions include immigration reform laws that will, in turn, affect laws governing equal employment, education and individual rights to determine best interests for their families.

"What we want for this report is to inform the public and the people in Washington, because there is a lack of information but also so much misinformation about immigrants and how the immigration laws are implemented," Menjívar said.

To read the report in full, visit the [Center For American Progress website](#).

Provided by Arizona State University

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