

Living arrangements of 'Dreamers' are more complex, less stable, study shows

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Undocumented Mexican and Central American immigrants who came to the United States as children or teens, commonly known as "Dreamers," live in more complex and less stable households than their documented or native-born counterparts, according to a new study from Cornell University researchers.

In "Living Arrangements and Household Complexity among Undocumented Latino Immigrants," researchers provide the first national estimates of the living arrangements for this group by comparing [undocumented immigrants](#)' households to those of documented immigrants and U.S.-born groups.

Results show that undocumented Latinos who were living in the U.S. before age 15 are significantly less likely than documented Latinos, U.S.-born Latinos and whites to be living with just a partner or a partner and children. Undocumented Latinos are more likely to live with extended family, with one-quarter sharing a household with aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews and more distant extended kin, compared with 12 percent of documented Latinos and 3 percent of whites. They are also twice as likely to live with nonrelatives than other groups, at 14 percent compared with about 7 percent.

"We find substantial complexity in the living arrangements of undocumented migrants, who are less likely than other groups to live in simple arrangements with partners and children and much more likely to co-reside with extended family and non-[family members](#)," said co-

author Matthew Hall, associate professor of policy analysis and management. "We also find that these households are characterized by greater instability, being most likely to change in size and form over time." The study was co-authored with professor Kelly Musick and doctoral student Youngmin Yi, both in the Department of Policy Analysis and Management.

According to the researchers, understanding these household dynamics is a critical piece of the broader social context of undocumented life, the household strategies that undocumented immigrants use to get by and the role of legal status in Latino social mobility and integration.

"Our work contributes to a growing literature on the life chances of undocumented immigrants, showing that the precarity and instability associated with lacking authorization impacts not only educational and work outcomes, but increases complexity and instability in [living arrangements](#)," Musick said.

This line of research is also important for understanding how the effect of legal status extends to legal immigrants and U.S.-born citizens to whom Dreamers are linked through family and co-residential ties.

"These patterns have potentially lasting effects on social and economic well-being, and are likely to reverberate across generations with implications that spill well beyond the unauthorized population—having direct consequences for their U.S.-born children and less direct but important consequences for the citizens to whom they are linked and communities in which they live," Hall said.

More information: Matthew Hall et al, Living Arrangements and Household Complexity among Undocumented Immigrants, *Population and Development Review* (2019). [DOI: 10.1111/padr.12227](https://doi.org/10.1111/padr.12227)

Provided by Cornell University

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