Analyzing the Mental Health Realities Among DACA Recipients Within the Mexican Community

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Analyzing the Mental Health Realities Among DACA Recipients Within the Mexican Community

submitted to
Professor Mark Costanzo

by
Oscar Javier González-De la Rosa

for
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Professor Mark Costanzo
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Igual dedico esta tesis a mi “amá” Amelia Silva Cárdenas y a mi abuelito Miguel Angel De la Rosa Alvarez. Siempre pienso en ustedes. Les extraño.

Estoy tan orgulloso de mi latinidad y de ser Chicano. Dedico esta tesis a mi comunidad mexicana en cualquier parte del mundo; que nuestras voces nunca dejen de ser escuchadas. Dedico esta tesis a la comunidad DACA; su fortaleza me inspira hoy y siempre. Dedico esta tesis a todes que crecieron en los Estados Unidos con padres indocumentados; que la ley nunca nos quite el amor, el poder, y la fortaleza para seguir adelante.

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Y no dejes de decir que eres de gente humilde.
Abstract

Immigration to the United States, particularly from Mexico, has resulted in a significant population of undocumented individuals residing in the nation. Among them are those who arrived in the U.S. as children, with some eligible for protection under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, offering temporary relief from deportation and government benefits. This thesis analyzes the historical context of immigration and the DACA program, focusing on the often-overlooked experiences and mental health realities encountered by Mexican DACA recipients. These experiences encompass the pursuit of the American Dream, deportation fears, family separation, challenges in accessing government services, navigating the role of a first-generation student, cultural stigma, and encountering prejudiced social dynamics. The primary findings reveal that Mexican DACA recipients contend with numerous mental health struggles, including heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideations, stemming from the complexities of their legal status and its impact on their daily lives, and that of their families. To address this mental health crisis, this thesis proposes policy recommendations and outlines steps for future research.
Mexican Immigration and Relocation to the United States

The history surrounding Mexican immigration to the United States is a complex narrative rooted in the dynamics of unequal economic development, as well as the complexity of U.S. foreign policy-making regarding labor migration. The relationship between mutual benefit and burden for the U.S. government is a delicate balance that frequently shifts. After the annexation of Texas in 1845, minimal migration was recorded, with most migration coming from Texas to Mexican territory. However, around the start of the late nineteenth century, new developments in agricultural and mining industries in the U.S. began to attract Mexican migrant laborers (Hernandez, 2009, p. 25). Analyzing the history of Mexican immigration and relocation to the U.S. serves as a precursor to a comprehensive discussion on mental health within Mexican communities, providing insight into numerous factors that have shaped, and continue to shape, the experience of the migrant community.

Emergence of Mexican Mobility

Prior to the late nineteenth century, peasant farm laborers in Mexico, known as Mexican campesinos, found themselves geographically isolated in rural regions with inadequate transportation infrastructure. However, President Porfirio Díaz (1876-1910) ushered in a new era of Mexican mobility, expanding the country’s railroad system and promoting wage labor rather than debt servitude (Hernandez, 2009, p. 25). Meanwhile, Díaz’s desire to improve the country’s conditions through land privatization stripped Mexico’s rural population of their land, leaving them in extreme poverty, but now free wage laborers. These sudden changes motivated campesinos to search for any jobs that would provide a source of income. Given the lack of demand for wage laborers in rural Mexico, the emergence of a railroad terminal in El Paso,
Texas in 1884 provided direct access to jobs near the U.S.-Mexico border. Coincidentally, an industrial agricultural boom in the U.S. created a desperate need for wage laborers.

Industrial agriculture innovations in the southwestern U.S. territory began rapidly spreading over the course of three decades, transforming these lands into agricultural fields. Quantifying the expansion, acres of crops harvested in the southwestern U.S. territory amounted to over 39 million by 1920 (Hernandez, 2009, p. 25). As the agricultural industry continued to expand, the fields began requiring an even greater number of migrant workers to sustain development. During this time, however, the U.S. had already imposed immigration restrictions, leading to a lack of available workers from countries other than Mexico. For instance, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 barred Chinese laborers from entering the nation. Additionally, the Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907 significantly decreased the number of Japanese laborers able to enter the country (Hernandez, 2009, p. 25). Therefore, the U.S. began depending on *campesinos* as their primary source of labor workers, serving as the “backbone of [the United States’] agricultural force” (Hernandez, 2009, p. 25). Enticed by these economic opportunities, millions of Mexicans began the journey to the U.S. Thus, *campesinos* began crossing over to the U.S. pursuing job opportunities, often helped by their former “employer” in Mexico who often imposed a form of indebtedness on these workers. Many individuals were instructed to work in the U.S. until their debt was paid off, further explaining the surge in immigration to the rapidly advancing nation.

By 1930, more than 1.4 million Mexicans were living in the United States and had begun to settle down in regions further north, such as Illinois, rather than staying in regions near the border (Hernandez, 2009, p. 25). The movement of immigrants further from the US-Mexico border underscores a shift in perspective towards the U.S. Consequently, *campesinos* began to
perceive the U.S. as their new home rather than a location for a short-term employment arrangement. For many, permanently living in the U.S. meant continuous income for their families and those who depended on them. It is worth noting, however, the continuing brutalities endured by *campesinos* who lived in the U.S. For instance, *campesinos* in the U.S. faced “conditions of structural violence… forms of stigma and racism, occupational health and safety hazards… and the constant threat of deportation” (Benson, 2008, p. 591). Persistent “warnings” were issued to Mexicans, both through media channels and informal word-of-mouth communication regarding the frequent humiliations and racial discrimination they could expect to face in the U.S. Thus, as these *campesinos* established their lives in the nation, they faced numerous challenges that prohibited them from properly assimilating into common U.S. culture, leading to them being seen as foreigners. Ultimately, the perception of Mexican immigrants as outsiders within U.S. society can be traced back to the rise of Mexican mobility, exacerbated by the agricultural work being done coupled with harsh labor conditions.

Nevertheless, as Mexican workers established roots in the U.S., their U.S.-born children were granted birth citizenship, placing increasing pressure on Mexican families to consider permanently settling in the U.S. The promise of higher income and better prospects for their children served as a catalyst for permanent relocation. Consequently, Mexican immigrants found themselves grappling with the trade-offs of staying in the U.S., including facing frequent discrimination and limited opportunities within the confines of agricultural work. Additionally, if these immigrants chose to permanently stay in the U.S., they faced the pressure and necessity of assimilating into U.S. culture, simply driven by the desire to provide stability for their newly established family and their family in Mexico.
The Great Depression (1929-1941) pushed many Mexicans and their U.S.-born children out of the nation and back to Mexico, as U.S. citizens began viewing Mexican workers as burdens to the already collapsing economy. Mexican laborers were no longer needed, and both the U.S. and Mexican governments began pressuring Mexicans to leave the U.S., with the latter hoping these laborers would contribute to development in Mexico with their newly acquired agricultural skills and technology. Thus, as government-led campaigns to bring these *campesinos* back to Mexico began emerging from both sides, mass numbers of immigrants headed back to their home country voluntarily as they believed their new skill sets would be of advantage in Mexico. Many others, however, were forced out of the nation through mass deportations, known as “raids,” ultimately marking an end to the era of unregulated immigration of Mexican agricultural workers.

Ultimately, Porfirio Díaz’s efforts to enhance Mexico’s standing as a nation prompted a significant wave of Mexican immigration into the United States. This migration was mainly driven by access to better employment opportunities, which was facilitated by advances in transportation infrastructure, particularly near the U.S.-Mexico border. This transformative period had profound impacts on the lives of millions of *campesinos*, playing a pivotal role in establishing the Mexican population in the U.S.

**The Bracero Program**

After the Great Depression resulted in a temporary reduction in immigration to the U.S., World War II brought forth a renewed influx of Mexican labor migration. Demand for labor workers surged given the increased wartime agricultural production, thus prompting the U.S. government to find ways to properly handle the inflow of immigrants, as it had previously failed to find. Addressing this, the U.S. and Mexico signed an agreement establishing the *Bracero*
Program, a wartime initiative that granted millions of Mexican agricultural workers with “guest” contracts, allowing them to work in the United States for a set period of time. Most commonly, U.S. farmers would recruit young Mexican men and pay them extremely low wages under brutal working conditions. These workers, known as braceros, were abused and exploited by their employers while facing racism and discrimination. However, the assurance of stability, pay, housing, and transportation outweighed the inhumane conditions braceros faced (Zatz, 1993, p. 852).

While initially intended to operate solely for the duration of the war, the Bracero program continued until 1964, driven by its mutually beneficial nature. Mexico gained valuable insight into the modernization of the U.S. agricultural industry, contributing to the program’s longevity. Ultimately, about 4.5 million labor contracts were signed. During the existence of the program, however, illegal immigration into the nation began to rapidly increase (Mize & Swords, 2011).

Given the specificity of the Bracero program’s eligibility requirements, as well as the expenses associated with the application process, many Mexican workers believed it was easier to simply enter the country illegally. For most Mexicans in poverty, the U.S. immigration fees were beyond their means, and the literacy tests posed further barriers. Notably, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization (INS) service began encouraging illegal immigration by offering those apprehended for illegal immigration a bracero contract (Hernandez, 2009, p. 27). Consequently, the U.S. began to implement measures to curtail illegal immigration, launching “Operation Wetback” in 1954 intending to deport all undocumented immigrants within the nation that either overstayed their contracts or entered the country illegally. This operation manifested through extensive raids, road blocks, and large-scale deportations throughout the southwestern U.S. during the summer of 1954. Strategically planning mass apprehensions, Border Patrol
agents identified and targeted towns housing undocumented immigrants and conducted comprehensive raids using sophisticated surveillance gear, including drones, and armored vehicles such as trucks and airplanes. These large-scale raids typically led to an average of about 5,000 apprehensions per raid (Hernández, 2006, p. 441). Ultimately, this military-like initiative exhibited a degree of effectiveness, leading to a notable reduction in both undocumented immigrants within the nation and a reduction in illegal immigration from Mexico, largely because of the fear it created among immigrants. Operation Wetback once more pushed Mexican immigration to a historic low (Mize & Swords, 2011a). Therefore, the prevailing strategy regarding Mexican immigration during the Bracero period revolved around pursuing improved job opportunities amidst wartime conditions. Consequently, many opted for illegal entry as a means of bypassing the extensive government application process, leading to the country becoming more vigilant about unauthorized residency within the U.S. borders.

**Economic Survival Through Immigration**

During the mid-1970s, the global economy was marked by numerous recessions that profoundly impacted Mexico. The Mexican economy faced various challenges during this period, including stagnant zero per capita growth, a decline in real wages, and widespread unemployment that affected a significant portion of the population (Hernandez, 2009, p. 27). The intertwining factors of economic recession, currency devaluation, soaring inflation, severe debt crisis, as well as political unrest resulted in vast turmoil across Mexico. The repercussions of this crisis were far-reaching, leading to the widespread diffusion of poverty throughout the nation and exacerbating pre-existing social and economic disparities. During this time, the percentage of Mexico’s population living in poverty surged from 40 to 60 percent. Additionally, the minimum wage saw a 40 percent reduction, and Mexican workers experienced an increase in their weekly
working hours from 50 to 85 (Hernandez, 2009, p. 27). The combination of these factors created a scenario where migration to the United States reemerged as an avenue for individuals and families to break away from poverty and pursue improved economic prospects. This time, however, migration became a necessity, a critical means of escaping poverty, rather than the simple illusion of better labor opportunities. By this time, opportunities were no longer flourishing, and impoverished Mexicans found themselves compelled to quickly leave their deteriorating nation seeking a better life.

Throughout this period, immigrants tended to settle along Mexico’s northern border region, drawn by the prospect of relatively higher wages in the existing industrial factories. However, inhumane working conditions continued to plague these workers, now facing a combination of greater economic opportunity and the brutal realities of their working conditions as they risked their lives to support their families in pursuit of a better life. At this point, Mexicans who considered immigrating to the U.S. began weighing the risks of their lack of employment prospects in Mexico with the dangers of entering the nation. Regardless of these conditions, most Mexican immigrants entered the U.S. legally, while many others entered the U.S. illegally, without inspection or proper documentation.

Illegal, or undocumented, immigration is much harder to quantify as data primarily relies on apprehension figures, which provide a very narrow perspective. Between 1942 and 1964, approximately 5 million Mexicans were apprehended and deported by U.S. authorities, with an additional 17 million Mexicans facing arrests and deportations since 1964 (Durand & Massey, 1992, p. 6). As stated, it is widely acknowledged within research that these apprehension statistics are not an accurate reflection of the actual number of illegal immigrants that entered the country. Millions of undocumented immigrants managed to evade apprehension and deportation,
complicating the task of reaching a complete understanding of Mexican presence throughout the country. Nevertheless, it is abundantly clear that the predominant driving force behind Mexican immigrants was the pursuit of escape from poverty. This desire was so compelling that millions chose to enter the U.S. through illegal means, risking apprehension and deportation. Immigrating to the U.S. illegally was an extremely dangerous journey, including treacherous border crossings, crossing vast deserts, and enduring severe weather conditions. Additionally, the constant fear of apprehension exacerbated the brutality of the journey. Ultimately, this demanding path underscores the extreme lengths to which those who chose to cross over to the U.S. illegally had to go through to escape poverty.

**Contemporary Mexican Immigration**

As illegal immigration from Mexico continued to rise, U.S. Congress attempted to mitigate the influx of undocumented immigrants, particularly agricultural workers, who continued to enter the country. Simultaneously, the government also aimed to address the legal status of those who had already established themselves illegally in the nation, given that millions were residing in the country without proper documentation. Thus, in 1986 Congress introduced the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), a comprehensive immigration reform aimed to provide an opportunity for undocumented immigrants to legalize their status (Schroeder, 1987, p. 5). IRCA provided amnesty, a form of legalization, to those who had resided illegally in the U.S. since 1982. Additionally, agricultural workers were given special provisions, allowed to apply for temporary resident status, and were then eligible to apply for permanent residency after two years. About three million undocumented immigrants applied to IRCA before the deadline expired and nearly 2.7 million individuals obtained legal permanent residency, alleviating their anxieties as they gained permanent protection from deportation (White et al., 1990, p. 94).
Additionally, these immigrants were no longer confined to agricultural work and were given a level playing field, allowed to take advantage of the resources available to all U.S. citizens. Both the U.S. government and millions of undocumented immigrants benefited greatly from this program, establishing it as a mutually advantageous program.

The nation’s main priority, however, was to continue discouraging and regulating the number of undocumented immigrants coming into the country. For instance, one of IRCA’s main provisions involved penalizing employers who hired undocumented workers, fully eliminating the few employment options undocumented immigrants had in the nation and completely removing a primary incentive for those considering relocation. Emphasizing the disdain for undocumented workers in the nation, IRCA enforced civil fines and criminal penalties on employers who were caught providing employment to those residing in the country unlawfully. Additionally, stringent eligibility requirements were upheld throughout the application process, forcing IRCA immigrants to meet specific standards for English proficiency and a comprehensive understanding of U.S. history and government as prerequisites for obtaining legal permanent status. This rigorous approach further underlines the government’s firm stance on undocumented immigrants. Moreover, IRCA provided greater enforcement capabilities through the INS, receiving substantial increases in funding to increase the number of Border Patrol agents and other security measures in the U.S.-Mexico border, for instance. Despite these measures, there are no discernible changes reflecting any significant impact of IRCA on illegal border crossings. This could be attributed to factors such as the adaptability and circumvention tactics employed by those overseeing border crossings, seeking ways to evade apprehension, as well as potential inconsistencies or lack of enforcement in IRCA measures. Consequently, IRCA ultimately led to a continuation of the illegal immigration problem that is still seen today.
Gradually, following the introduction of IRCA, the number of undocumented immigrants has stabilized. This trend persisted through the Great Recession in 2007. However, since 2009 more Mexicans have departed from the U.S. than have entered (Gonzalez-Barrera, 2015). Nevertheless, immigration from Mexico to the U.S. remains ongoing, characterized by persistent motivations rooted in the desire to escape poverty and pursue better employment opportunities. It is worth noting that Mexicans still constitute the largest undocumented population in the U.S. Consequently, it can be inferred that those who reside in the U.S. are most likely long-term residents with mixed-status families, possibly including American-born children. Specifically, six U.S. states, California, Texas, Florida, New York, New Jersey, and Illinois, are home to approximately 60 percent of the nation’s undocumented immigrants today (Gonzales & Raphael, 2017, p. 2). Now, however, undocumented immigrants have become more dispersed throughout the nation, residing in immigrant communities and emerging destination areas across the Midwest and Southeast, where they have adapted and assimilated to U.S. culture. The political landscape regarding immigration, specifically concerning undocumented immigrants from Mexico, remains in a constant state of evolution as various political leaders endeavor to address the ongoing issue of unauthorized residency and entry into the U.S., where many seek to escape poverty, pursue better opportunities, and establish stable lives.

As seen in the literature, the continuous stream of Mexican immigration to the U.S. is accompanied by extensive hardships, generationally impacting immigrants in numerous ways as they navigate assimilation and adaptation into a new societal context. Throughout history, the recurring cycle of economic instability, inequalities shaped by capitalism, instances of discrimination, and the pressure to reach stability in an unfamiliar environment have led to the manifestation of numerous traumas that have had detrimental impacts on the mental health of
Mexican communities. Specifically, the prevalence of conditions such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideations warrants specific attention when assessing the mental health landscape of the Mexican immigrant community. Despite the emergence of new legislation addressing the legality of undocumented peoples, like the introduction of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program in 2012, issues surrounding mental health within Mexican communities in the U.S. persists, primarily attributed to the complexities faced while navigating various spheres including educational opportunities, employment prospects, legal frameworks, and social relations.
Understanding the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Program

Over time, the presence of undocumented individuals in the United States became firmly established, constituting a significant proportion of the country’s population. As the immigrant population continued to expand, calls to address those the challenges of undocumented immigrants gained traction. These challenges encompassed numerous issues such as the lack of legal employment opportunities, government benefits, and educational resources. Many grappling with these challenges were young adults or children who, unknowingly, entered the country illegally as minors brought in by their parents, thereby lacking the autonomy to make independent decisions about immigration law. Navigating the U.S. without legal status, the adversities faced by these undocumented children and adolescents have led to a range of mental health struggles, further complicating the landscape of mental health issues within these communities. Although numerous proposals were drafted by governmental authorities aiming to address these issues, the one that came to fruition was the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program in 2012.

The DREAM Act

The undocumented population in the U.S. continued to expand, as millions of immigrants remained in the country without legal status. Families often entered the U.S. through unauthorized border crossings, visa overstays, or other methods that often rendered a family “out of status” (Olivas & Richardson, 2020, p. 25). Most notably, however, a significant portion of these families arrived with their minor children, essentially subjecting them to permanent relocation without their knowledge or consent. As time passed, the children of these immigrants encountered formidable obstacles that contributed to a consistently challenging way of life. For instance, pursuing higher education became a notable struggle for undocumented students as
public higher education institutions began to impose stringent restrictions on and barriers to enrollment eligibility given the absence of students’ legal documentation (Olivas & Richardson, 2020, p. 25). This, coupled with the denial of federal and state financial aid, posed formidable challenges to their academic aspirations. Moreover, the complexities of their status also restricted their employment opportunities, as employers were not allowed to harbor and employ individuals lacking legal documentation (Olivas & Richardson, 2020, p. 27). Thus, these individuals were forced to explore other ways of garnering income, further exacerbating the strain on their daily lives and perpetuating a cycle of hardship.

In response to these challenges, numerous proposals were drafted aiming to provide a substantial portion of the undocumented community with a viable path to citizenship. Among these initiatives was the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, first introduced in 2001. The DREAM Act proposed a route to citizenship for undocumented individuals, sometimes called “aliens,” actively enrolled in college, pursuing employment, or enlisted in the armed services (The Dream Act, 2021). Individuals meeting the specified criteria would be granted lawful residency, paving the way for eventual citizenship attainment. This proposal marked a pivotal moment in which the voices of the undocumented community were heard, gaining meaningful traction in the media and solidifying the perception of the daily challenges faced by undocumented immigrants and their children while navigating their very existence in the U.S.

The DREAM Act, however, did not advance past Congress, potentially due to the profound polarization these immigration issues caused among political parties, along with complex public opinions and shifts in political priorities. Although this legislation failed to advance, it remains a notable act that gained substantial traction and, most importantly, instilled
hope within an established population seeking solutions to their challenges. Ultimately, this piece of legislation served as a catalyst for greater advocacy efforts from and on behalf of the undocumented community, allowing for further policy proposals aimed at addressing the needs of these marginalized individuals.

**Introduction of DACA**

With the rejection of numerous legislative proposals, a rapidly increasing number of undocumented youth intensified their advocacy efforts for a proper path to citizenship, or at the very least, some form of legalization. Their central argument emphasized their lack of agency in the decision to immigrate to the country, highlighting the establishment of their lives amidst the complexities of their legal status and the numerous inequalities they have experienced as a consequence. Scholarly discourse highlights how the absence of legal documentation impedes the upward mobility of undocumented individuals, hindering their educational, professional, and economic progress and stalling social advancement (Abrego, 2006, p. 217). Moreover, these hurdles lead to a variety of consequences ultimately impacting their mental and physical well-being, as well as influencing the trajectory of their lives and outlook for their ethnic population (Wong & García, 2016, p. 702). These issues were spotlighted, emphasizing the intolerable living conditions this community continued to endure, as well as the systematic obstacles that hindered their success in a foreign land. While a straightforward solution would involve offering legalization and citizenship to these immigrants, the practical implementation of this legislation is extremely complex.

Although many proponents insist that undocumented immigrants should simply return to their home country to avoid these hardships, it is important to recognize that these individuals, particularly minors, often have limited prospects to return to. Those who do return may even face
even tougher challenges in readjusting to life in their home country. Many had only spent a brief period in their country of origin, and have little memory of their earlier experiences. Thus, the notion of simply “returning home” is not an ideal or feasible solution for many undocumented individuals.

In 2010, a year after Barack Obama was elected as President, an estimated one million undocumented immigrants under the age of 18 resided in the U.S. (Wong & García, 2016, p. 702). A large majority of these immigrants during this time were from Mexico, accounting for more than half of the percentage of unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. (Passel, 2005). This growing number further incentivized those in power, given the sense of urgency, to seek effective solutions to these pressing issues. Since the year 2000, immigration policy has been at the forefront of political discourse, specifically focused on comprehensive immigration reform with the addition of increased border security, interior immigration enforcement, and culminating in the legalization of millions of immigrants (Wong & García, 2016, p. 702). However, despite bipartisan recognition of the issue’s impact on a significant portion of the U.S. population and continuous efforts to reform the nation’s immigration system, Congress encountered multiple stalemates, similar to the stagnation of the DREAM Act in 2001.

With mounting pressure on the U.S. government, immigration reform once again emerged as a prominent topic of discussion given the looming 2012 presidential election. Public attention was fixated on the media, eagerly awaiting the proposed strategies of presidential candidates in response to the pressing issues and increasing advocacy efforts. As a direct response to these demands, President Barack Obama announced the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program on June 15, 2012. DACA provided temporary relief from deportation and granted work authorization to eligible undocumented immigrants who had
arrived in the U.S. as minors. Given the mixed reception and Congressional stalemate of previous legislation, this program was strategically announced as an executive order rather than a law. An executive order can be issued by the President without the need for Congressional approval, however, it is subject to potential reversal by future administrations. Thus, this program bypassed Congressional debate and faced an easier path toward implementation, with numerous caveats, that allowed for immediate relief for the undocumented community.

**DACA Logistics**

Upon approval, approved DACA applicants are granted a two-year renewable grant providing them protection from deportation, as well as proper work authorization (Wong & García, 2016, p. 703). Consequently, during this time frame, undocumented individuals are permitted to reside in the U.S. without the constant fear of deportation, fostering a sense of stability and security for these individuals, allowing them to focus on educational, occupational, social, and personal development. At the time of DACA’s introduction, about 1.7 million DACA-eligible youth resided in the country. From this group, 32.5% of eligible youth applied for DACA in its first year (Wong & García, 2016, p. 700). Despite a significant portion of the undocumented population applying, a majority did not, possibly due to the extreme complexity of the application requirements.

The intricacies of the DACA application dissuaded many from applying, as many hurdles surfaced during the application process. Specifically, the requirements included applicants having arrived in the U.S. before the age of 16, being at least 15 years old, and being under the age of 31 as of the program’s announcement on June 15, 2012. Additionally, applicants had to have continuously resided in the U.S. since June 15, 2007, and have been physically present in the country on June 15, 2012. Moreover, interested candidates must have met specific education
criteria, such as having obtained a high school degree or its equivalent, providing proof of current school enrollment, or having received an honorable discharge from a branch of the armed services. Applicants were also required to have no criminal history, be able to demonstrate proof of their identity, and provide other documentation upon request (Wong & García, 2016, p. 703).

The stringent application requirements not only deterred many potential applicants from applying because of their intimidating nature of the process, but also because the requirements simply rendered many immigrants ineligible.

Furthermore, numerous hardships faced by the undocumented community acted as additional barriers preventing them from completing their DACA applications. For instance, the application fee totaled $465 and could rise for those seeking legal assistance, particularly due to the high demand for these services (Wong & García, 2016, p. 703). It is crucial to recognize that individuals within the undocumented community, who were applying for DACA, often came from backgrounds where this disposable income was not readily available. Thus, economic feasibility often became an additional issue. Indeed, many services would exploit individuals seeking DACA application assistance, inflating the cost of legal counsel or engaging in various scams, further exacerbating the difficulty of the process.

Moreover, it is important to consider the lack of social capital among many undocumented individuals, which could have been instrumental in providing guidance as to how to navigate the application process. For many, the DACA application represented their first encounter with official U.S. government paperwork. This novel experience, coupled with the lack of comprehensive guidance and resources for DACA applicants, alongside the complex legal jargon involved in the application forms, posed significant barriers for many young
individuals already grappling with navigating a complex legal system. In fact, many minors had their parents apply on their behalf, further heightening their difficulties.

Other obstacles included the fear instilled in young applicants, as they were apprehensive about disclosing sensitive information in their application that could potentially jeopardize other undocumented family members, such as their parents (Wong & García, 2016, p. 707). Additionally, applying to this program was extremely time-consuming as it involved gathering multiple documents, potential consultation with legal counsel, and ultimately necessitated taking time away from work, school, and family obligations. Individuals from these communities often lacked the flexibility and resources to allocate time away from these crucial responsibilities. Thus, considering the array of barriers that applicants encountered, including economic constraints, lack of social capital, fear of repercussions, and time constraints, many opted to not pursue the application process altogether.

**DACA Criticisms and Reception**

Although DACA provided temporary relief to millions of undocumented immigrants, a key point of contention was the program’s inability to provide a clear pathway to citizenship given its status as an executive order (Wong & García, 2016, p. 703). While DACA recipients were granted protection from deportation, received work authorization, and obtained a valid Social Security number, the establishment of a pathway to citizenship would require Congressional action (Bruno, 2021, p. 1). While this executive order provided protection, citizenship would wield considerably more authority as it entails a permanent law, unlike an easily reversible executive order. Thus, despite offering individuals a certain level of security from deportation, the lingering uncertainty regarding one’s legal status after the expiration of DACA continues to evoke a sense of fear among recipients. Many individuals are left pondering
the potential expiration of their DACA status or the discontinuation of the program, and how their lives would be affected as a result.

Despite its imperfections, millions of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. celebrated DACA as a significant milestone, recognizing its role in providing protection and benefits despite the absence of a formal legal status through citizenship. The program garnered substantial support from immigrant communities, immigrant rights groups, and Democrats, who perceived DACA as a crucial step for protecting individuals who were brought to the U.S. as children. In contrast, many conservatives criticized DACA as an executive overreach and an incentive for illegal immigration. The program’s announcement continued to fuel debates on immigration reform and policy, further amplifying the existing discourse. Regardless, for those directly impacted by the program, who grappled with numerous daily hurdles, DACA’s announcement was a cause for celebration. In many ways, receiving DACA essentially “reshaped the meaning of illegality overnight” (Enriquez, 2020, p. 161). Suddenly, individuals could emerge from the shadows and properly incorporate themselves into society. These people could now legally secure employment, support their families, pursue higher education, make significant investments such as purchasing houses, access government benefits, and most importantly, live within their communities without constant fear. The tangible impact of DACA’s announcement was not merely individual but communal, ultimately fostering a sense of unity, belonging, and security that was once not attainable.

Profile of a DACA Applicant and Recipient

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of those impacted by their legal status and DACA, it is crucial to consider the holistic profile of the average DACA recipient. A 2012 survey, utilizing data from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
(USCIS), the agency responsible for administering DACA, returned data from a total of 573,404 applicants of which 465,509 were included in the sample (Wong & García, 2016, p. 708). The survey’s data ranged from August 15, 2012, the initial date of application acceptance, to March 8, 2013. Analysis of the results indicated that the average age of a DACA applicant during the time period specified was 20 years old (Wong & García, 2016, p. 708). Additionally, it was found that the likelihood of application denial tended to increase with the age of the applicant. A possible explanation for this trend could be that an older applicant had a longer stay in the U.S., leading to more difficulties in meeting and proving the stringent eligibility criteria. Furthermore, the analysis of the survey indicated that the average year of a DACA applicant’s arrival in the U.S. was 1999, with the average age at the time of arrival being 7 (Bruno, 2021, p. 1). These statistics further emphasize the youthful demographic of these undocumented individuals, while highlighting the lack of autonomy they had in their decision to come to the U.S. Ultimately, the data further contextualizes the necessity of applying as these individuals seek relief from the challenges faced given their lack of legal status.

Other survey results indicate a higher number of applicants assigned female at birth compared to those assigned male at birth, with percentages of 51.2% and 48.7%, respectively (Wong & García, 2016, p. 708). Consequently, males faced a higher likelihood of application denial, resulting in a majority of DACA recipients being individuals assigned female at birth (Wong & García, 2016, p. 708). This trend emerged due to both the larger pool of female applications, and the higher rate of application denials among males (Wong & García, 2016, p. 708). These findings highlight potential gender disparities within the DACA applicant pool, underlining possible consequences faced by recipients given their gender. Moreover, results recognized the homogenous socioeconomic status of applicants and their households, revealing a
pattern of low-income backgrounds. Additionally, these findings underscored the substantial barriers posed by the application fee within the community, revealing that states facing more challenging economic conditions exhibited lower DACA application rates (Wong & García, 2016, p. 708). These statistics further contextualize the magnitude of challenges these applicants faced, spotlighting gender disparities but also the immense economic hurdles encountered by DACA applicants, emphasizing the need for comprehensive support, particularly in legal and financial aspects, to alleviate the hurdles faced within these communities.

Most importantly, results provide insight into the diverse origins of DACA applicants, given that applicants could be immigrating from various parts of the world. Within the sample, applicants originated from 205 countries and territories, with a significant majority born in Mexico, accounting for 74.9% of the total (Wong & García, 2016, p. 708). Consequently, with a substantial proportion of DACA applicants being of Mexican descent, the Mexican population emerges as the primary focus of interest within the broader DACA applicant and recipient pool. This specific demographic emphasizes the significance of fully comprehending the array of challenges faced by the Mexican DACA population within the larger context of the program’s impact and influence.

A more recent survey by the American Immigration Council revealed that the average age of a DACA recipient in 2020 was 27 years old (Bruno, 2021, p. 2). This finding further contextualizes the youthfulness of this demographic, helping to better understand the challenges this population faces as they navigate their young adulthood in the shadow of legal uncertainties. Furthermore, the survey findings indicated that a significant concentration of recipients tended to reside in California and Texas, with estimated populations of 168,800 and 97,970, respectively (Bruno, 2021, p. 2). This observation aligns with the proximity of these states to the U.S.-Mexico
border, where the Latine population is extremely prominent.¹ Results further showcased the substantial benefits derived from DACA, with 53% of respondents reporting securing improved job opportunities, leading to an 86% average increase in hourly wages, and 76% of respondents stating they reached financial stability and independence (Bruno, 2021, p. 1). These statistics provide a slight glimpse into the meaningful impact of DACA on the undocumented community, further proving the necessity of having comprehensive legislation that addresses the issues they face, facilitating their expansion of personal development in ways that mutually benefit the nation.

Ultimately, understanding the comprehensive profile of a DACA applicant and recipient offers important context that significantly contributes to the understanding of specific challenges and experiences faced by current DACA recipients. Specifically, this understanding is particularly valuable in the context of the mental health challenges experienced by DACA recipients within the Mexican community.

¹ “Latine” is a term used to inclusively refer to individuals of Latin American descent, removing gender-specific associations (Slemp, 2020, p. 22).
**The Mental Health Realities of Mexican DACA Recipients**

DACA’s inception yielded a ray of hope for undocumented immigrants, providing significant benefits and advantages to a community that had long pleaded for governmental support. However, most of these promises and benefits proved to be fragile and short-lived, emphasizing how DACA was far from a full resolution. For the vast number of undocumented individuals who managed to secure DACA status, their existence remained precarious, continuing to grapple with numerous everyday challenges. Operating under a temporary legal status, these individuals constantly contend with complexities and uncertainties. Their pursuit of reaching *el sueño Americano*, the American Dream, frequently collided with deportation, a constant fear overshadowing their aspirations. Additionally, equal access to government service remained a distant hope, not fully accessible. Meanwhile, first-generation students are forced to traverse a landscape with unique challenges and a lack of support. These challenges all intersect with the intricacies of social relations and dynamics, continuously shaping their lives in U.S. society. Such realities serve as significant catalysts for the manifestation of profound mental health issues. Stemming from the tenousness of their legal status, anxiety, depression, stress, and suicidal ideations continue to significantly impact this community (Morales & Garcia, 2021, p. 374; Vaquera et al., 2017, p. 304, 308). Notably, Mexican DACA recipients, constituting the largest subgroup within this narrative, confront mental health challenges on an amplified scale. Thoroughly analyzing these factors allows for a greater understanding of the unique tribulations faced by DACA beneficiaries as they navigate a land painted with promises of opportunity and success. For Mexican-born DACA recipients, the pursuit of success along with the mere navigation of society with this status culminates in diverse mental health implications, rippling throughout the greater Latine community.
Defining the Scope

To thoroughly examine the mental health experiences of Mexican DACA recipients, it is important to define the research scope while acknowledging potential limitations and existing gaps. One crucial aspect to address is the limited data available pertaining to this community. Given the sensitive nature of the issues involved, many individuals are reluctant to participate in studies, fearing potential repercussions related to their legal status. Furthermore, mental health itself carries a stigma within the broader Latine community, resulting in limited data available. However, existing research highlights that a significant majority of DACA recipients are of Mexican descent, suggesting that much of the available information pertains explicitly to this group. Additionally, while numerous studies tend to focus on the undocumented population, it is important to note that DACA recipients still fall within this category due to their lack of permanent legal status. In fact, many DACA recipients express the belief that their lives will “always be shaped by [their] undocumented status (Enriquez, 2020, p. 158). The intersections between the law, cultural norms, and family dynamics make illegality a consequential aspect of everyday life for Mexican DACA recipients, something they are unable to escape. Given these experiences, available research tends to group the undocumented and DACAmented communities together, providing specific insights regarding those within the Mexican community.2 For the purpose of this greater study, a comprehensive review of the existing literature was conducted to properly capture the mental health experiences of DACA recipients within the Mexican community.

Specifically, the mental health areas of focus include anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideations, given that these are the most commonly disclosed issues within this collective.

2 “DACAmented” is a term used to denote recipients of the DACA program (Morales & Garcia, 2021).
However, feelings of stress, worthlessness, loneliness, and hopelessness were also accounted for in the research, considering their similarity to the aforementioned focal points. Nevertheless, these areas of focus are interconnected to a large extent. Anxiety is broadly defined as a psychological response characterized by feelings of worry and fear. In a study examining anxiety among DACA recipients, research revealed that a significant majority of the sample, particularly those of Mexican descent, reported heightened levels of anxiety (Morales & Garcia, 2021, p. 374). Depression can be characterized by persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and a lack of interest in everyday things. These feelings are also prevalent within this community, with numerous individuals reporting bouts of prolonged sadness leading to depression and its associated symptoms (Vaquera et al., 2017, p. 304). Lastly, suicidal ideations generally involve thoughts or preoccupations with suicide. A study suggests that over one in five individuals within this community of interest have expressed engaging in harmful actions towards themselves, leading to suicidal ideations and attempts (Vaquera et al., 2017, p. 308). Considering these statistics, it becomes evident that thoroughly examining the contributing factors related to these mental health issues among DACA recipients of Mexican origin is imperative.

**The American Dream**

Most DACA recipients actively pursue the American Dream, serving as their primary motivation for applying to the program. Their aim can be synthesized in that they hoped to secure a form of legal status enabling them to fully pursue and capitalize on the benefits that the nation has to offer. The popular definition of the American Dream, consistently propagated across the country, portrays the U.S. as a highly acclaimed sought-after land of endless opportunities (Tinoco, 2018, p. 1). Theoretically, this definition can be universally applied and accepted, however, it gains added significance among marginalized groups, such as the
undocumented community, where it evolves into an “aspirational goal.” This enhanced definition encompasses the idea of obtaining a successful career with a fair wage, the ability to have a stable life, the ability to properly educate their children, and homeownership, among other aspects (Tinoco, 2018, p. 1). Evidently, the definition of the American Dream holds amplified significance within the context of undocumented immigrants.

Conversely, an operational definition of the American Dream can be seen in more practical terms. To properly attain an operational definition of the American Dream, a study was conducted among self-identified females from the Latine community, a key demographic given the majority of DACA recipients being female assigned at birth. Participants were asked to associate specific terms with their understanding of the American Dream, drawing from their own life experiences. Results revealed three key focal points in the participants’ conceptualization of the American Dream, reflected in “educational attainment,” “financial stability,” and “overall wellness of family” (Marquez, 2022, p. 68). More specifically, terms such as “degree” were often cited for “educational attainment,” while expressions such as “home” and “enough money” were frequently mentioned for “financial stability.” Additionally, phrases such as “for my parents,” “for my family,” and “future children” were often linked to the idea of “overall wellness of family” (Marquez, 2022, p. 67). These terms continuously emphasize the significance of Latine individuals achieving specific levels of success, applying significant pressure on themselves, to provide for their families, mirroring the enhanced theoretical definition of the American Dream. Thus, it becomes evident that for marginalized groups, such as Mexican DACA recipients, the practical definition of the American Dream is observable through the pursuit of more tangible objectives that ultimately measure success for themselves, and for those who depend on them.
The aforementioned definitions further contextualize the motivations behind immigrating to the U.S. For instance, agricultural workers affected by the Bracero Program had aspirations centered around achieving financial stability and ensuring the well-being of their families, essentially pursuing the American Dream before the term was officially coined (Zatz, 1993, p. 852). Similarly, DACA recipients and their families aspire to realize the American Dream, commencing with the acquisition of legal status, which serves as the primary reason for applying to the program. Moreover, the American Dream has historically been a prevalent topic of discussion within Mexican communities, permeating households and holding significant influence on the mental health experiences and perceptions of youth, specifically those who are undocumented (Marquez, 2022, p. 20). Specifically, the American Dream holds a substantial sway over these individuals, serving as a primary source of motivation for those who simply recognize it. This concept represents “something” for those who have been consistently exposed to negativity throughout their lives (Marquez, 2022, p. 20). It is worth noting, however, that the definition tends to fluctuate based on individuals’ experiences. Thus, it is contingent on numerous factors specific to their lives. While various influences may cause slight shifts in the definition, the core essence of the American Dream remains largely the same, possibly holding greater significance for DACA recipients within Mexican communities.

The varying significance of the American Dream among different communities often rests on the influence and immense expectations imposed upon youth by their families. The reasoning behind these perspectives often lies in the belief that legal status acts as a catalyst for immediately improving lifestyles. Many undocumented families perceive their newly legalized children as pathways to immediate success, positioning them as beneficiaries of the new opportunities available to them. However, even as these individuals receive support from both
the government and their families, this aid introduces a unique form of pressure, defined as “positive pressure,” urging them to leverage these new resources and opportunities effectively (L. Enriquez, 2011, p. 491). For DACA recipients, this dynamic translates into a commitment to meet this pressure, compelling them to engage in educational and career pursuits. In turn, they are expected to extend the same support to those who lack it (L. Enriquez, 2011, p. 491). Consequently, DACA recipients face immense pressure to attain the American Dream, driven by not only government expectations but also by the expectations of their immediate support system, resulting in various mental health consequences.

**Deportation Fears and Family Separation**

Deportation fears inflict a profound psychological toll on DACA recipients, particularly those within Mexican communities, given their widespread presence in the nation. A primary concern regarding deportation centers around the uncertainty facing recipients after their DACA status expires or if the program were to be terminated. A study focusing on participants ages 18-32, with the Mexican DACA recipient community as the majority and primary population of interest, explored the direct impact of deportation fear on anxiety levels among DACA recipients. The study revealed that pressure, fear, and anxiety are significantly triggered by concerns regarding the deportation of both themselves and others (Vaquera et al., 2017, p. 302). While recipients are currently shielded from deportation, the lingering sentiments and fears associated with being undocumented, are fueled by the perpetual need to renew their status and the looming expiration thereof, especially in the tumultuous political climate that leaves their future uncertain. Topics related to deportation are often publicized throughout the media, discussed by politicians, and permeate everyday conversations. In many Mexican communities, discussions surrounding deportation are commonplace, involving strategies to evade police
encounters or guidance on handling requests for documentation. These constant reminders of uncertain futures serve as ongoing triggers for recipients, prompting them to address the anxiety associated with their immigration status.

Moreover, deportation fears are often intertwined with a sense of general mistrust in everyday life, extending from fellow community members to government agencies, contributing to heightened anxiety levels. A study underscored that a significant source of anxiety for both undocumented and DACAmented individuals revolves around the decision to disclose their immigration status and determining who is safe to confide in. Many, especially students, must continuously assess those they interact with, such as faculty and staff, and must decide whether to share their status with them (Salas et al., 2016, p. 148). Essentially, looking out for themselves, individuals must exercise caution in choosing whom to trust with such sensitive information, as past instances have shown that this type of information could be weaponized against them, making them susceptible to deportation. In everyday scenarios, this caution manifests in discussions related to college applications, job opportunities, and other contexts where such information is pertinent, thus, it is inescapable. Additionally, this study revealed heightened anxiety about disclosing sensitive information in the DACA application itself, indicating a profound mistrust in the U.S. government based on past actions. Many individuals are apprehensive about voluntarily registering themselves and disclosing their status in a national database of undocumented people (Salas et al., 2016, p. 148). Registering such information with the government could have severe consequences. For instance, in the event of a change in administration that opts for mass deportations of all undocumented individuals, agencies would have the necessary information for identification and deportation readily available. Ultimately,
mistrust permeates the lives of these individuals, as they face heightened anxiety stemming from factors related to divulging information that has historically put them at risk.

Deportation fears among DACA recipients extend beyond personal concerns, encompassing worries for immediate family members, often the parents of the recipients. This concern is further emphasized when considering recent political campaigns that drew significant attention to Latines in the nation, thrusting the Mexican community to the forefront of the discourse. During Trump’s 2015 Presidential campaign, he depicted both DACAmented and undocumented immigrants as solely originating from Mexico, characterizing them as “criminals, rapists, and drug dealers” while promising mass deportations (Valencia, 2017, p. 183). Consequently, this harmful portrayal targeted the entire Mexican community, further exacerbating divisions among those protected from deportation. A study indicates that DACA recipients remain concerned about family members who do not qualify for DACA protection. Consequently, when compared to their non-DACA counterparts, DACA recipients exhibit heightened levels of anxiety, partly attributed to concerns regarding family deportation worries (Morales & Garcia, 2021, p. 389). Within DACA households where parents are undocumented, recipients must act with caution, recognizing the actions that could place their family at risk for apprehension and deportation. The dependency between recipients and their families is reciprocal, thus, the prospect of family members’ deportation is extremely profound and a significant source of worry. Another study underscores the detrimental mental health effects of the looming threat of deportation on the development of young DACA recipients (Zaidi & Kuczewski, 2017, p. 14). This is further contextualized when recognizing that these children are growing up in a world marked by the harsh reality of the potential deportation of their parents.
Thus, anxiety becomes a pervasive and common experience within this community, further emphasizing the unique mental health struggles faced by Mexican DACA recipients.

Ultimately, a profound influence shaping the lives of Mexican DACA recipients revolves around their relationship with their families, many of whom are separated at the US-Mexico border. The vulnerability of DACA recipients’ families highlights a stark reality: while the law is willing to “absorb” and extend protection to migrant children under DACA, it does so “at the cost of devaluing their parents and the rest of their family members” (Lee, 2019, p. 2378). This cost emphasizes the government’s disregard for the well-being of DACA recipients and their families, as it fails to safeguard the reciprocal immediate support network for these communities. The impact of family separation within immediate families extends beyond legal or logistic consequences. Those experiencing family members’ deportation are “likely to experience long-lasting trauma, anxiety, and depression” (Lee, 2019, p. 2367). The abrupt removal of a family member by the government neglects the well-being of the individuals, usually children, left behind, forcing them to navigate life with fractured relations across borders. Often, children are left to fend for themselves without one or both parents, rendering them dependent on others for basic necessities and emotional support, amplifying their feelings of vulnerability. For most, the possibility of reuniting with the deported family member is incredibly slim, as unauthorized border crossings are extremely difficult in modern times. This scenario not only subjects individuals to various mental health challenges, such as anxiety and depression but also creates an unstable household environment. The emotional turmoil resulting from family separation frequently leads to severe consequences related to “emotional and physical harms such as depression and alcohol abuse,” and ultimately increases the risk of suicidal ideation, “[reducing] the number of life chances available to migrants” (Lee, 2019, p. 2382). Fear regarding family
separation, a very common occurrence, persists among this community given political promises to deport all unauthorized immigrants in the nation. Thus, DACAmented individuals are forced to live with the constant fear of being separated from their loved ones. The looming thought of family separation inflicts emotional turmoil, leading to issues ranging from anxiety to severe suicidal ideations.

**Accessibility Gaps in Government Services**

Furthermore, inequalities in access to government services intensify the stress experienced by Mexican DACA recipients, as they grapple with navigating healthcare systems. These barriers toward accessing healthcare pose challenges to individuals’ well-being but also compound the psychological toll on them, further contributing to the unique mental health struggles faced by this community. Additionally, it is worth noting that DACA recipients’ immediate family members, such as their parents, are not granted legal status in which they are able to reap the benefits of the U.S. healthcare system. Thus, as members of marginalized families already contending with limited resources due to restrictive laws and legal institutions, their lack of access to proper care amplifies the risk of long-term negative consequences (L. E. Enriquez, 2020, p. 159). These repercussions are seen through the amplification of pre-existing conditions such as feelings of anxiety and depression (Mohyeddin & D’Avanzo, 2023, p. 2). Hence, the obstacles to proper access for both undocumented and DACAmented individuals further contribute to the active challenges faced by this community, often manifesting in adverse effects on their mental health. Additionally, many individuals are uninformed about available resources and, crucially, lack the knowledge of how to maneuver them. These inequalities persist throughout generations, with DACA recipients being the first in their families to learn to navigate U.S. healthcare systems. Despite the assumption that legal status facilitates easy access
to government services, DACA recipients consistently report significant barriers and challenges in obtaining health insurance coverage. Studies indicate that DACA recipients are nearly three times as likely to be uninsured compared to the general population (Mohyeddin & D’Avanzo, 2023, p. 1). Notably, nearly half of DACA respondents in a study, acknowledging their mental or behavioral health issues, disclosed that they are not receiving counseling, therapy, or other forms of professional mental health services (Mohyeddin & D’Avanzo, 2023, p. 2). These statistics further highlight the profound disparities among DACA recipients, emphasizing that the obstacles to healthcare access are not only physical impediments but also contributors to the complex landscape of mental health challenges within this collective.

It is important to note that a distinct challenge encountered by the Mexican DACA population aligns with that of the Mexican-American community, in that seeking both physical and mental health support continues to be stigmatized. Research through numerous interviews pertaining to these communities revealed reluctance among both documented and undocumented members in these households to seek help for their struggles, even when aware of the availability of services, resources, and support groups (Padilla & Villalobos, 2007, p. 27). The stigma surrounding mental health is deeply ingrained in Mexican communities, transcending generations and creating a barrier that inhibits individuals from seeking help. Within these households, mental health is often considered a taboo topic, met with resistance and avoidance when attempts are made to discuss it. More specifically, this stigma is rooted in the perception of mental health struggles as a sign of weakness among Latine households (Padilla & Villalobos, 2007, p. 27). The cultural ties dating back generations, which characterize mental health challenges as weaknesses, contribute to the perpetuation of generational traumas. The intersectionality of cultural norms and generational perspectives creates a challenging
environment for discussions regarding mental health within Mexican communities, further exacerbating established barriers to this support. Significantly, research indicates that this stigma contributes to a greater incidence of depression and stress (Padilla & Villalobos, 2007, p. 27). Additionally, a point of interest is that these psychological factors are possibly intertwined with processes associated with simply navigating the world, such as dealing with complex applications and government documents. Thus, Mexican DACA recipients face the unique challenge of navigating pre-existing cultural notions surrounding mental health, along with the inequalities in receiving access to proper care. This dual burden takes a further psychological toll on this community, further shaping the nuanced nature of their mental health struggles.

**DACAmented Students: First-Generation Experiences and Navigating Adulthood**

The first-generation experience for students entails navigating pre-established institutional barriers that often seem inherently biased against marginalized communities, posing difficulties that manifest themselves in various mental health struggles. Conventionally, being a first-generation student is understood as being the first member of a student’s immediate family to pursue higher education (Terenzini et al., 1996, p. 2). Thus, under the DACA umbrella, all students are regarded as first-generation as they pioneer and navigate educational opportunities within the United States for their families. It is worth noting that many U.S. students also identify as first-generation without holding DACA status, and face comparable institutional obstacles. For instance, these students are forced to independently maneuver through intricate systems under constant stress, anxiety, and pressure. However, DACA students face an intensified level of hardship as they deal with these challenges, as well as the complexities surrounding their legality within the education system.
As these students navigate their academic careers, their unique challenges intersect with their academic pursuits, often leading to educational underperformance and potential shifts in their future aspirations. Research indicates that DACA students, particularly those in the Mexican community, experience disproportionately high levels of anxiety and “toxic” stress within educational settings, given their complex status and lifestyle (Gándara, 2018, p. 48). Balancing academic demands alongside familial responsibilities and numerous other factors puts these students’ academic performance at risk, as they may prioritize other aspects of their lives. Educators often witness manifestations of “depression, trauma, and a sense of helplessness” in the classroom, direct consequences of students’ legal complexities as they intersect in their daily lives. Concerns regarding parental deportation or assuming caretaking responsibilities for themselves and siblings are common, even among students as young as fourth graders, directly influencing students’ overall well-being (Gándara, 2018, p. 48). Consequently, this burden leads to students’ academic performance suffering, often leading to significant setbacks and irregular attendance, initiating a detrimental cycle (Gándara, 2018, p. 48). The intersection of being first-generation and grappling with a complex legal status consciously and unconsciously affects students’ mental health and well-being, influencing their educational pursuits. Often, these challenges strip away their motivation to persist in academic pursuits when other daily factors, such as familial responsibilities, take precedence.

Furthermore, the transition into early adulthood serves as a significant source of mental turmoil for many DACAmended students, as they grapple with navigating complex systems independently, often with minimal external support. Parental guidance, typically a vital resource, proves limited for most first-generation students due to their parents’ unfamiliarity with the U.S. education system. Therefore, seeking third-party assistance from school counselors, mentors,
extended family, or friends who do have the social capital becomes pivotal for these students in pursuing educational opportunities. However, for DACA students, this pursuit presents additional hurdles leading to hesitation and diminished motivation to explore other forms of aid or higher education in general. Research examining the emotional challenges faced by undocumented youth, particularly within the Mexican DACA community, highlights the copious amounts of frustration stemming from the “perceived exclusion” from customary “rites of passage,” such as attending college or securing favorable work opportunities (Vaquera et al., 2017, p. 302). Limited social capital combined with systemic institutional barriers, making it harder for marginalized students seeking out higher education, creates a sense that these students lack access to the same opportunities as their peers, fostering feelings of exclusion. Consequently, this perceived exclusion becomes a main source of loneliness, sadness, and even depression, while also contributing to social and physical isolation among these youth (Vaquera et al., 2017, p. 302). The mere task of exploring higher education opportunities is an overwhelming ordeal for many DACA students, thus, without proper support, many perceive themselves as unfit or unable to benefit from the education system, which further perpetuates their feelings of exclusion. In turn, their sense of estrangement compounds their sense of loneliness and sadness, intensifying the belief that higher education is not a viable path. Ultimately, this transition into the intricacies of the higher education system, coupled with the lack of direct guidance and social capital, amplifies frustration within this population and emphasizes the unique challenges faced by Mexican DACA students. Moreover, individuals aspiring to pursue higher education encounter numerous institutional barriers, notably the immense costs associated with attending college, further exacerbating their mental health struggles. These students face the duality of a lack of social
support intertwined with financial barriers hindering their pursuit of higher education. Despite their DACA status and protections, these individuals remain classified as unauthorized entrants by the federal government, rendering them ineligible for federally qualified student loans, an option available for their documented counterparts (Perreira & Spees, 2015, p. 642). Primarily hailing from low-income backgrounds, Mexican DACA recipients face significant hurdles in embarking on the college application process, mainly in affording the expenses related to applications, entrance exams, and escalating tuition fees. While some may be eligible for state or institutional financial aid, as well as scholarships, the availability of such support remains limited and dependent on the specific institution and state policies (Perreira & Spees, 2015, p. 642). Additionally, this aid often carries a stigma due to students’ inability to cover costs without assistance, leading to internalized feelings of worthlessness (Vaquera et al., 2017, p. 302). Despite being aware of eligible aid, many Mexican DACA recipients reported feeling hindered from exploring it due to the perceived stigma attached to seeking financial assistance (Murillo, 2017, p. 103). Moreover, only a small fraction of this population might secure the necessary support. Consequently, all of these factors diminish students’ motivation to pursue high school graduation (Vaquera et al., 2017, p. 302). Considering the immense effort required without the guarantee of a desired outcome, these students become disheartened at the prospect of attending college, recognizing the financial and institutional barriers and fearing stigmatization among their peers. Counselors often witness feelings of “anger, isolation, depression, and anxiety” among DACA recipients in predominantly Mexican communities as they confront the financial realities of pursuing higher education (Talleyrand & Vojtech, 2018, p. 3). These first-hand accounts emphasize the distressing reality faced by children and youth, dealing with emotional burdens such as depression and anxiety, conditions that are unsuitable for their developmental
stage. Stemming from the governmental refusal to recognize them as legal entities, this simple denial of proper legality catalyzes mental health crises within this community. Despite their academic diligence, these students are impeded by their legal complexities, excluding them from access to government aid that could significantly benefit this marginalized group. As students navigate this reality, the resulting struggles continue to impede their journey, further contributing to profound mental health issues.

Those within the DACA recipient community, particularly within the Mexican segment, encounter significant hardships when seeking employment opportunities or pursuing career goals. Post high school, numerous DACA recipients struggle to secure employment. Even those who attend college, earning their degrees, often encounter limited job prospects, emphasizing the uncertainty surrounding the program and its interplay with the job market. Although being legally authorized to seek employment under the DACA program, many face barriers due to employers’ limited understanding of the executive order. Employers’ hesitation for hiring most commonly stems from uncertainties linked to the DACA program, amplified by former President Trump’s disdain and pledges to end it, along with a subtle prejudice against unauthorized immigrants, such as DACA recipients (Salas et al., 2016, p. 148). Consequently, these uncertainties impact DACA recipients’ employment prospects, primarily due to promises of legislative changes and the constant spread of misinformation. Employers, grappling with DACA’s precarious future, often hesitate in hiring individuals who might face work eligibility issues in the near future, fostering reliability concerns. Therefore, DACA recipients develop a prevailing sense of insecurity and hopelessness in their career aspirations, stemming from the existing belief that employers are generally hesitant to hire from this community. Additionally, the labor market limitations faced by DACA recipients, primarily concerning professions
dependent on legal status, intensify distress and dampen expectations within the Mexican community (Perreira & Spees, 2015, p. 642). For instance, professions requiring specific licenses or certifications, such as careers in legal, medical, and educational fields, often pose challenges due to DACA recipients’ temporary status or imposed restrictions. Moreover, jobs requiring security clearances, typically limited to U.S. citizens or permanent residents, remain inaccessible to DACA recipients, further excluding them. These numerous restrictions and uncertainties in employment opportunities further perpetuate feelings of hopelessness and anxiety, leading to a pervasive lack of motivation within this collective. Evidently, the labor market poses formidable hurdles for DACA recipients, particularly within the Mexican population, further exacerbating the profound mental toll they endure.

Given the limited opportunities within education and the job market, DACA recipients face a sense of insecurity and uncertainty regarding their future as they navigate adulthood. A study focused on the Mexican DACA community highlights the immediate and long-term angst and anxiety stemming from general future insecurity, mainly concerning the absence of a “safety net” (Vaquera et al., 2017, p. 302). Beyond the uncertainty of their future, young DACA recipients also contend with a society that is actively working against them due to their status, significantly limiting their future direction, goals, and plans, ultimately exacerbating their stressors. While their documented peers often have backup plans, financial stability, and the social capital to rely on while outlining their future plans, Mexican DACA recipients often lack the resources to craft a safety net. This scarcity emphasizes their lack of security across multiple crucial facets of their lives, potentially impacting their housing, access to healthcare, support networks, and other essential aspects. Moreover, this lack of certainty undermines the sense of “ontological security” experienced by Mexican DACA recipients, referring to the sense of
stability and continuity in one’s identity within their immediate environment (Vaquera et al., 2017, p. 302). Tethering their identity and sense of belonging to an uncertain legal status disrupts Mexican DACA recipients’ self-assurance within their immediate community, impacting their aspirations and overall well-being. Consequently, their daily existence becomes a delicate balancing act between yearning for stability and the persistent uncertainties rooted in their legal standing. Further intensifying pre-existing anxieties, this tension becomes these individuals’ harsh reality (Vaquera et al., 2017, p. 302).

Additionally, it is important to acknowledge the heightened stress and anxiety imposed on Mexican DACAmented individuals due to the perceived privileges and benefits accompanied by their status. Regardless of their circumstances, such as their future outlook, stability, network, or other factors, there is an expectation, both from their families and themselves, to succeed and provide. Consequently, research indicates that individuals within this community often grapple with feelings of guilt regarding the rights and privileges they possess, something that their family and friends might not have (Salas et al., 2016, p. 149). As these individuals become increasingly aware of the advantages afforded by DACA, the pressure to overcome obstacles and achieve success continues to grow. This pressure, however, becomes harmful as it fosters unrealistic expectations that are often unattainable due to the everyday challenges associated with being DACAmented. While familial pressure for success is common among youth, having one member in an immigrant family with legal status can unlock numerous advantages, potentially benefiting the entire family should the DACAmented member succeed. Scenarios such as these show how this community is often burdened by their sense of guilt, privilege, and expectations of not disappointing others, manifesting in copious amounts of anxiety (Vaquera et al., 2017, p. 302). Constant reminders of their perceived luck and privilege, along with the weight of unrealistic
expectations imposed onto these individuals, cultivate a cycle that fosters a lasting cycle of anxiety and other mental health challenges.

**Social Relations and Dynamics**

DACA recipients encounter considerable challenges concerning their social lives, notably in romantic relationships, where decisions regarding establishing families and lives must be carefully weighed against the limitations imposed by their status. Particularly for Mexican DACA recipients, their status tends to restrict family formation by limiting whom undocumented individuals can pursue romantic relationships with, given societal perceptions and legal logistics (L. E. Enriquez, 2020, p. 159). Given the extent of their protections and concerns about the program’s longevity, many DACAmented individuals hesitate to venture into romantic relationships for fear of disclosing their status, dreading a potentially negative reaction that could terminate the relationship solely due to legal status complexities. Consequently, the prospects of family formation are constrained for this community, as they must carefully plan when and how to pursue romantic relationships and start a family while considering their ability to fulfill their parental responsibilities (L. E. Enriquez, 2020, p. 159). The increased pressure on this collective results in significant stress and anxiety as their aspirations for family establishment might not be favorable. Contrarily, for those who do decide to start families, their citizen romantic partners and children must contend with the tangible and emotional costs of these punitive immigration policies (L. E. Enriquez, 2020, p. 159). These costs include financial strain, stress and anxiety given the uncertainty of the immigration process, and overall fear and trauma associated with these processes. Such restricted conditions profoundly affect the lives of undocumented adults, and their citizen family members, leaving lasting effects that persist even as they move toward more secure immigration statuses (L. E. Enriquez, 2020, p. 159). Should a DACA recipient
marry a U.S. citizen, the entire family is forced to contend with the burden placed on the undocumented individual, likely creating tensions, anxiety, and distress within the household. This burden further contextualizes the weariness Mexican DACA recipients face when wanting to establish a family. Ultimately, this community is forced to endure profound limitations in their romantic aspirations, constantly fearing the repercussions of exposing their status and the devastating legal ramifications that could disrupt their families. These unique experiences further intensify their mental health struggles, exacerbating the weight of their uncontrollable legal complexities, looming over their well-being and future.

Furthermore, Mexican DACA recipients often encounter brutal social dynamics, often marked by heightened discrimination primarily tied to their legal status. Misinformation, ignorance, media portrayal, and the visibility of the Mexican community foster a landscape where racism and discrimination become overt, perpetuating assumptions about ethnicity and the legal status of others among documented individuals. Studies focusing on this marginalized community revealed that, in educational settings, students often directly face racism and their peers’ lack of understanding regarding immigration laws and pathways to citizenship (Nichols & Guzmán, 2017, p. 105). The assumption that all Mexican individuals are undocumented often leads to ignorant and inappropriate conversations regarding citizenship or the challenges faced by DACA-protected individuals, creating extremely uncomfortable situations. Confronting explicit racism, discrimination, and harassment while navigating adulthood presents significant challenges, predisposing individuals to feelings of sadness, anxiety, and worthlessness. The persistent negative encounters and the forced vulnerability experienced by recipients not only diminish their self-esteem but also significantly fracture their sense of belonging. This constant fluctuation leads to profound social isolation and a perpetual state of hypervigilance, where
everyday interactions are tense with the anticipation of encountering prejudice and stigma.

Ultimately, forcing this community to deal with this type of social dynamic further highlights the unique societal hurdles faced by this community, where their legal status becomes a focal point for targeting and societal discomfort.
Policy Recommendations and Future Research

Exploring the unique mental health landscape of Mexican DACA recipients provides profound insights into the complex and pervasive challenges they navigate daily. Spanning generations, these challenges impact children and adolescents, persisting into adulthood, intersecting in the realms of first-generation education, disparities in government benefits, and family separation fears. Central to these experiences are prevalent mental health issues including anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideations, signaling urgent crises within this population. Addressing these challenges demands a strategic approach, involving comprehensive immigration reform alongside nuanced, community or state-specific legislation. Enacting such changes requires new legislation, a responsibility held by government authorities. Moreover, enhancing mental health resource accessibility is vital, while simultaneously elevating the visibility of such issues. Consequently, empowering these marginalized communities involves destigmatizing mental health discussions and bringing them to the forefront of community dialogue. Future research should be grounded in continuous conversation and concentrated efforts to delve deeper into the intersections of cultural context and mental health, potentially fostering tailored strategies to address the multifaceted challenges encountered by the Mexican DACA community.

Previous Immigration Policy Proposals

Immigrant and undocumented communities have become focal points in national conversations given the unique experiences and challenges they confront in the United States. Various Presidents have responded to these communities’ concerns through policy proposals, yet there have been no significant legislative advancements directly benefiting undocumented immigrants. During his campaign, President Obama voiced support for comprehensive
immigration reform and policies aimed at providing undocumented immigrants with a proper path to citizenship (Piper & Alaniz, 2018, p. 147). However, comprehensive reforms stalled in Congress during his time in office. Surveys found that this stagnation led to dissatisfaction among the Latine community and advocacy groups (Piper & Alaniz, 2018, p. 147). Subsequently, President Trump took an aggressive anti-immigration stance, further intensifying negative perceptions of the Mexican population, and attributing violence and drug smuggling to unauthorized border crossings (Piper & Alaniz, 2018, p. 146). Additionally, Trump proposed drastic measures such as constructing a border wall along the US-Mexico border, ending DACA, and mass deportations (Piper & Alaniz, 2018, p. 146). This rhetoric fueled the fears of the Latine community, leaving their futures in the U.S. uncertain. More recently, President Biden introduced the U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021, aiming to provide a pathway to citizenship for the undocumented population (House, 2021). This bill, however, encountered familiar congressional hurdles, establishing a recurring theme where promises to assist undocumented immigrants fail to yield progress. These legislative gridlocks do not merely stall bills but directly impact the lives, well-being, and sense of belonging of millions of immigrants residing in the U.S. Despite recurring stalls in immigration policies and reforms, advocacy from Mexican DACA recipients, undocumented immigrants, and the larger Latine collective persists, seeking increased support and recognition.

**Policy Recommendations**

Historically, administrations under various Presidents have acknowledged the broader calls from immigrant and Latine communities, promising aid. However, tangible change has yet to be seen, with little attention given to the mental health struggles of immigrants. Thus, not only does progress stall, but the mental well-being of those directly affected continues to be
overlooked. While comprehensive immigration reform is often seen as the solution, expecting it to resolve deeply rooted trauma and mental health issues is unrealistic. Such expectations can be perceived as dismissive, disregarding the complex realities faced by undocumented individuals and their families. In fact, a study focusing on the mental health of undocumented Mexican communities revealed that undocumented immigrants are considered an at-risk population for mental disorders (Garcini et al., 2017, p. 2). Therefore, any proposed policy at the congressional level should acknowledge the mental health challenges of undocumented immigrants and seek to address this pressing mental health crisis. A comprehensive immigration reform, inherently offering a viable path to citizenship, remains a vital goal, providing immediate assistance in various forms, including mental health support by alleviating numerous stressors. However, a comprehensive reform alone cannot address all challenges and is not the complete solution. To truly support these communities, policies must actively acknowledge and address the mental health challenges intertwined with their immigration status, ensuring a holistic approach tailored to their needs.

As first-generation students, undocumented immigrants face diverse challenges that require a strong support system throughout their academic journeys. Higher education institutions should be mandated to offer transparent and robust networks of connection for these marginalized populations. Colleges and universities can provide critical assistance through mentorship opportunities offered by fellow students, faculty, and staff, fostering a sense of belonging and importance among these students, thereby reducing stress and anxiety (Raya, 2018, p. 32). Establishing these support systems facilitates connections with individuals sharing similar identities, promoting trust and providing avenues for students to confide in trusted mentors. Specifically, colleges must take proactive steps, such as initiating pairings of groups or
individuals during students’ orientation, involving themselves with mentorship clubs, and directly meeting with students, faculty, and staff of diverse identities to assess the needs of these marginalized communities. Ultimately, these efforts go beyond networking, fostering relationships that might otherwise remain inaccessible or even replace those that could be intimidating, significantly improving students’ support systems, well-being, and academic success as they work through new environments.

Furthermore, establishing dedicated safe spaces tailored to students with similar backgrounds and identities, including undocumented, DACA recipients, or those from Latine communities, holds great importance. The creation of a centralized hub or designated student resource center provides a tangible symbol of support within the college environment, offering marginalized students, specifically those who are first-generation, a place where they feel acknowledged and embraced. Research highlights that designated spaces foster connections, enable programming, and cultivate community building, significantly enhancing the college experience and providing students with support networks and access to resources (Raya, 2018, p. 10). These designated spaces play an important role in alleviating mental health struggles experienced by these communities, offering a sanctuary for solidarity, belonging, well-being, and support that are often led by affinity groups across campus. However, the mere establishment of these spaces is insufficient. Institutions should be required to ensure that these affinity groups and designated areas receive consistent funding, maintenance, and proper oversight. Moreover, a mandated direct line of communication between deans and administration should be established, ensuring that those in positions of authority remain consistently informed about the status and needs of these groups, allowing colleges to remain accountable for fostering inclusive and supportive environments for marginalized communities.
Additionally, it is imperative that individuals seeking healthcare, particularly mental health services, can easily access affordable care, regardless of their legal status. Many individuals struggle to obtain therapy or psychological services due to financial constraints. To address this, legislation should extend healthcare coverage to allow undocumented individuals, including DACA recipients and their immediate families, eligibility for Medicaid or similar state-funded healthcare programs. Specifically, proposed legislation should grant access to health insurance exchanges and subsidies offered by the Affordable Care Act (ACA) for those who might not be DACA-eligible, but are otherwise eligible for Medicaid, despite their legal status (Park et al., 2023, p. 2). In cases where nationwide legislation may pose challenges in its implementation, initiating these policies at a state level seems like the most viable starting point. Therefore, states would have the autonomy to decide how to distribute healthcare coverage. Regardless of the approach, making healthcare, specifically mental health services, more accessible at a low cost would directly and significantly alleviate common struggles faced by the majority of the Latine communities, irrespective of their legal status.

In collaboration with established nonprofit organizations dedicated to advocating for undocumented immigrants’ rights, national, state, and local governments can partner to establish clinics or programs offering affordable, low-cost healthcare services. While these initiatives would provide general healthcare support, they should particularly focus on addressing mental health challenges and their respective impacts. An important aspect of these partnerships lies in providing culturally competent mental healthcare, provided by those who uniquely understand the various stressors and challenges faced by specific communities. Specifically, cultural competence is the acquisition of “academic and interpersonal skills that allow individuals to increase their understanding and appreciation of cultural differences and similarities within,
among, and between groups” (Warda, 2000, p. 203). In the medical realm, this would entail having individuals equipped with the skills to properly discern the needs of specific populations. Ideally, these healthcare providers should possess not only cultural competence but also shared backgrounds, understanding the stressors faced by DACA recipients and undocumented individuals. Additionally, the inclusion of culturally competent providers who share similar backgrounds further incentivizes marginalized populations to seek assistance, creating a sense of comfort and reducing hesitancy, which could lead to the dismantling of the stigma associated with seeking mental health support. Ultimately, having predominantly Latine healthcare providers fosters an environment of trust and confidentiality within this community, crucial for effective mental health support.

It is crucial to acknowledge that some individuals, despite facing circumstances such as family separation or deportation, may not actively want to seek support for their mental health. Therefore, legislation should mandate direct outreach services tailored specifically for individuals and family members directly experiencing issues related to family separation or deportation. One survey, seeking to delineate healthcare access and utilization patterns, examined a sample of about 50,000 nonelderly adult U.S.-born Latine and undocumented Latine participants and concluded that among both groups, undocumented Latine individuals were the least likely to have sought mental health support in the past year (Ortega et al., 2018, p. 921). These results suggest that, despite the availability of resources, undocumented Latine communities are not accessing help, prompting the need for government outreach. This outreach is essential given the government’s access to specific information regarding deportations and family separation. While government authorities may argue that the mental health concerns of deported individuals are not their responsibility, given their status as non-citizens, it is vital to
recognize the residual impact on family members remaining in the United States. Thus, legislation should prioritize allocating funding and resources specifically to assist individuals experiencing any form of separation or deportation fears, supporting and prioritizing their mental health during their most vulnerable times.

Legislative initiatives aimed at destigmatizing mental health conversations within marginalized communities, particularly the Mexican DACA community, are of great importance. As highlighted earlier, there exists a “high stigma and low use of mental health care services" among Latine populations (DuPont-Reyes, 2022, p. 823). Essentially, the stigma surrounding mental health conversations and seeking assistance can be partly attributed to the limited coverage of this topic in Latine and Spanish-language media, thereby perpetuating existing mental health inequities (DuPont-Reyes, 2022, p. 823). Addressing this issue demands strategic media outreach through channels tailored to the Latine community, conveyed primarily in Spanish or a mixture of both English and Spanish, ensuring accessibility for Spanish-speaking individuals and families. Simply making mental health information available and easily understandable can contribute significantly to destigmatizing this topic within the broader Latine population. Additionally, legislative support for initiatives such as hosting programming in collaboration with nonprofit organizations and advocacy groups can enhance promotion, visibility, funding, and overall support. Such programs can actively involve communities like DACA recipients and provide education and support on navigating mental health conversations within their immediate environments, including interactions with their parents, a necessary step toward achieving collective well-being.
Recommendations for Future Research

Future research is imperative to comprehensively gauge the mental health challenges and specific needs of Mexican DACA recipients. This research involves conducting extensive surveys within the Mexican DACA community, aiming to reveal prevalent and recurring mental health issues unique to this group. Through these surveys, researchers can accurately identify common themes and patterns, offering a fuller, more nuanced understanding of their mental health needs. For instance, gathering statistics on stressors directly related to having uncertain legal status, first-generation experiences, and facing discrimination can provide crucial insights. Complementing quantitative surveys, qualitative research methods such as case studies can more accurately illustrate a portrayal of the daily lives of Mexican DACA recipients. Following individuals longitudinally, researchers can shed light on the complexities of these recipients’ experiences, endurance, and coping mechanisms amid societal struggles. Specifically, these case studies would allow for a greater understanding of the multifaceted nature of mental health within this collective, capturing the lived realities amid the intricate intersections of cultural context that statistics might not properly capture. Moreover, employing quasi-experimental approaches, such as presenting and evaluating policy proposals directly within Mexican DACA recipients, could reveal valuable insights. This experimental framework could assess the potential impact of proposed policies on mental well-being. Essentially, evaluating policy responses directly from the community’s perspective can inform more effective policy for government authorities. Additionally, collaborating with undocumented immigrant advocacy groups and community organizations in research endeavors could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by Mexican DACA recipients. These groups possess invaluable experience and knowledge, offering crucial insights into navigating the complexities
of this research. Such collaborations would allow researchers to gather insights and recommend specific targeted interventions to address mental health challenges.

Ultimately, the complex nature of mental health realities experienced by the undocumented community, Latine, and specifically Mexican communities demands a deeper exploration, recognizing the intersections of culture, identity, and legal status. Addressing these intricacies requires extensive and focused research to accurately comprehend and address the unique needs of these groups.
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