Childhood adversity, lifelong consequences: Implications for reducing risk and cultivating resilience in immigrant youth

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Ingredients for a healthy child
Childhood adversity

“Circumstances that are likely to require significant psychological, social, or neurobiological adaptation by an average child and that represent a deviation from the expectable environment”¹

Poverty, violence, neglect, family separation, institutional care

45% of child mental health problems are caused by childhood adversity²

30% of adult mental health problems are caused by childhood adversity³

20% of cardiovascular disease cases are caused by childhood adversity⁴

¹McLaughlin, 2016; ²Green et al., 2010; ³Kessler et al., 2010; ⁴Bellis et al., 2019
Adversity and immigrant youth

“Circumstances that are likely to require significant psychological, social, or neurobiological adaptation by an average child and that represent a deviation from the expectable environment”\(^1\)

Poverty, violence, neglect, family separation, institutional care

Country of origin $\rightarrow$ Journey to U.S. $\rightarrow$ Life in U.S.

>50% of Latino/a immigrants have experienced trauma in home country\(^2\)

Children with an undocumented parent are at high risk for anxiety and depression\(^3\)

Children Adversity and Mental Illness\(^4\)

<table>
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<th># of Childhood Adversities</th>
<th>Odds of Severe Impairment</th>
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\(^1\) McLaughlin, 2016; \(^2\) Li (2016); \(^3\) Potochnick & Pereira, 2010; \(^4\) McLaughlin et al., 2010;
Humans take a (very) long time to grow up

“Circumstances that are likely to require significant psychological, social, or neurobiological adaptation by an average child and that represent a deviation from the expectable environment”

Poverty, violence, neglect, family separation, institutional care

1. Long development = longer time for adversity to be impactful
2. Caregiving is essential for human brain development

1McLaughlin, 2016; 2Li, 2016; 3Potochnick & Pereira, 2010; 4McLaughlin et al., 2010;
Family separation and institutional care

**Helsinki Birth Cohort Study**
- Epidemiological study in 13,000 children born between 1934-1944
- During WWII, some children voluntarily placed abroad
- Temporary separations increased risk of severe mental illness, cardiovascular disease and diabetes¹

**Bucharest Early Intervention Project**
- Pro-natalist policies + limited foster care → institutional rearing
- Randomized trial of institutional care vs. foster care in 2000
- Institutional care harms cognitive, emotional, and physical development²
- Quality foster care improves outcomes²

¹Erikkson, 2013; ²Zeanah et al., 2017
Adversity changes the developing brain

Amygdala: Identify and remember threats

Prefrontal cortex: Self-regulation

Danger!
Adversity changes the developing brain

Amygdala:
Identify and remember threats

Prefrontal cortex:
Self-regulation

Danger!
Adversity changes the developing brain

Amygdala: Identify and remember threats

Amygdala size\textsuperscript{1}

Amygdala reactivity\textsuperscript{2}

\textsuperscript{1}Tottenham et al., 2010; \textsuperscript{2}Silvers et al., 2017
Adversity changes the developing brain

Prefrontal cortex:
Self-regulation

Prefrontal volume

Prefrontal activity?

1Mackes et al., 2020
Adversity changes the developing brain

- Institutionalization and other forms of adversity causes the brain to be vigilant to threats and makes it harder to regulate emotion.
- These biological changes increase short-term survival at a cost to long-term mental and physical health.
How can we cultivate resilience in immigrant youth?

- Keeping children with their parents promotes health\(^1\)
- Quality consistent caregiving is second best option\(^2\)
- Teach kids *and* their parents coping skills while satisfying basic needs\(^3\)
- Train teachers, pediatricians and other providers in trauma-informed care
- Support research in immigrant youth

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**Amygdala:** Identify and remember threats

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\(^1\)Callaghan et al., 2019; \(^2\)Humphreys et al., 2015; \(^3\)Johnson & Tottenham, 2015
THANKS

Immigrant Youth
Task Force at UCLA

SAND Lab
silverslab.psych.ucla.edu
EFFECTS OF ADVERSITY AND IMMIGRATION POLICY ON US-BORN MEXICAN AMERICAN YOUTH

Julianna Deardorff, PhD
Capitol Insights Panel
February 10, 2020
LIFE COURSE APPROACH TO ADOLESCENT HEALTH
ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACES)
ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACES)

- Physical abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Neglect
- Living with a parent with a mental health issue
- Living with a parent with a substance use issue
- Parental incarceration
- Parental separation or divorce
- Domestic violence
SURPRISING FINDINGS

- 2/3 of people had experienced at least one adverse event
- One in 8 had experienced at least 4 or more
- The more ACEs = the poorer health outcomes
HEALTH OUTCOMES
NADINE BURKE HARRIS, CA SURGEON GENERAL
STRESSORS AFFECTING MEXICAN-ORIGIN FAMILIES

- Acculturation stress – learning another language, cultural norms
- Discrimination
- Navigating institutions: medical, school, social services
- Immigration policies and rhetoric
- Fear of deportation – self or loved ones
US-BORN MEXICAN-ORIGIN YOUTH

- Generational gap with parents – differences in cultural norms
- Language brokering
- Deportation (family separation) fears related parents and other family members
Center for the Health Assessment of Mothers and Children of Salinas (CHAMACOS)

A community-university partnership – PI Brenda Eskenazi
BETWEEN 1999-2000, WE RECRUITED 601 PREGNANT WOMEN

- 92% spoke Spanish
- 85% were born in Mexico
- 54% <5 years in the United States
- 96% were living in poverty
- 44% had 6th grade education or less
- 44% worked in agriculture
- 84% had farmworkers in the home
MANY TYPES OF ASSESSMENTS

- Interviewed the mothers and teachers.
- Measured their height and weight.
- Tested the children.
- Determined when they entered puberty.
- Evaluated their respiratory function.
EARLY ADVERSITY AMONG YOUTH IN CHAMACOS

From age 0-5y*

- 40% had at least one stressful event
- 60% ever had mother with depression
- 64% only Spanish spoken in home
- 13% had a parent who died
- 8% had a parent jailed

*Linked to dysregulated stress responses and to alcohol use.
2016-2017 ushered in a new administration

Negative rhetoric about immigrants started early, during the election campaign

ICE raids

DACA

Family separation publicized in the media
Did you fear that you or a family member would be reported to immigration officials?

Did you worry about family separation due to deportation?

In the past 3 months...
RESULTS – IN OUR US-BORN SAMPLE OF YOUTH

Despite being US citizens:
- 45% reported concern about immigration policy in terms of their family
- 45% were worried about separation due to deportation
- 41% were worried about family being reported to deportation officials
- 38% of mothers were depressed
THESE CONCERNS HAD HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Those with high immigration policy concerns had…

Poor sleep

High Anxiety
CHAMACOS MOTHERS

“We know that many families are worried about deportation, either for themselves or for their family and friends. How much worry would you say this causes you?”

- Not too much worry
- A moderate amount of worry
- A lot of worry

2012 — 2014
(12-yr visit)

Analysis Baseline

2014 – 2016
(14-yr visit)

2016 – 2018
(16-yr visit)
Prevalence of Deportation Worry, 2012 – 2014, Latina Women in a Community Based Cohort (n = 572)
Also, worry about deportation was related to higher obesity.

Taken together, increase risk for cardiovascular problems.
The Good News! Family is protective
As clinicians, we tend to try to intervene clinically

Mental health professionals - teach kids and their parents better coping strategies to emotionally regulate or “manage” adversity

Doesn’t get at the core problem, which is contending with an environment of fear that singles you or your family out

Especially when the adversity involves policy that threatens family separation and harsh or discriminatory rhetoric
FAMILIES NEED STRONG POLICIES TO REMAIN HEALTHY!
Acknowledgments

- Brenda Eskenazi (PI of cohort)
- CERCH team & CHAMACOS field staff and families
- Funders: NIDA, NIEHS, US EPA
THANK YOU!
Immigrant Youth in Schools: How to Foster Sense of Safety and Belonging?

JAANA JUVONEN, PROFESSOR OF DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY, UCLA

Immigrant Youth Task Force at UCLA
Rights of Immigrant Students

- All school-aged children—regardless of their legal status—are entitled to public education.

- California State Board of Education: "there is no Rational, educational or fiscal purpose in excluding children of illegal aliens from receiving the educational opportunities available to all other children".

the Function of Schools

- Schools play a critical role facilitating societal integration.

- Are schools sensitive to the needs of (recent) immigrants?

- Research cited in the current presentation based on relevant findings—longitudinal research on newcomer youth =high priority.
Needs of immigrant youth

Schools focus on
- Language
- Mental health
- Health (e.g., nutrition)

Important not to forget other BASIC DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS

- **Feeling safe & supported** → trust, lower distress (1)
- **Sense of belonging** → health & wellbeing (2)

(1) Bowlby (1969/1982); (2) Baumesiter & Leary, 1995
Feeling isolated & targeted

Compared to US-born non-immigrant youth, immigrant students:

- experience more social exclusion, feel more isolated, and are more likely to be verbally and physically attacked (1)
- are likely to be targeted because of their race, religion, English proficiency, and socioeconomic status (2)
- are less likely to report mistreatment they experience at school for fear of immigration-related retaliation such as deportation (3)

(1) Maynard, Vaughn, Salas-Wright, & Vaughn, 2016; Qin, Way, & Rana, 2008; Sulkowski, Bauman, Wright, Nixon, & Davis, 2014; (2) Sulkowski et al., 2014; (3) Aung, 2013; Chaudry et al., 2010
Isolation: Feeling unsafe and targeted increases mental health

Why does friendlessness in the beginning of middle school predict distress (internalizing difficulties) by the end of middle school? → Because friendless youth feel unsafe and targeted

Lessard & Juvonen, 2018

n=6,000 students from 26 ethically diverse Ca. public middle schools studied across 3 years
Bullied immigrant youth at risk for health problems and substance use

- Health Behavior in School-Age Children:
  - n=12,000 5th-10th grade students in the US across 314 schools;
  - n=1,000 non-US born
  - Latinx immigrant students most likely bullied; males at highest risk
  - Bullied immigrant youth reported more health problems and substance use compared to non-bullied immigrant youth
Can schools protect immigrant students?

In spite of efforts to increase multi-cultural sensitivity, progress made increasing awareness of social-emotional development and the negative consequences of bullying...

- Teachers and other school staff feel unprepared to intervene in incidents involving newcomer students (1)
- Teachers demonstrate their biases in ways that hurt rather than help (2)
  - Not allowing native language use
  - Calling students by Anglicized nick-names

→ **Teachers lack --and need -- more training**

(1) Closs et al., 2001; (2) Davila, 2019; Kohli & Solórzano, 2012
School instructional practices & marginalization of immigrant youth
A case in point: English Language Learning Programs

ELL programs often segregate immigrant youth from peers, thereby...

- hindering acculturation by limiting opportunities to engage with and learn from peers about the US culture (1)

- reducing contact across groups → prejudice toward ELL students (2) and increased risk of peer mistreatment & social isolation

- Due to semi-permanent classification in ELL, immigrant students perceived as less capable and have less access to college preparatory classes (3)

(1) Gibson, Gándara, & Koyama, 2004; Gándara & Hopkins, 2010; Gándara & Orfield, 2012; (2) Chan & Birman, 2009; (3) Harklau & Moreno, 2019; Valenzuela, 1999
Beyond language: Alternative approaches for schools

- Rather than focusing solely on the special needs of immigrant youth, critical to consider their normative needs: how to facilitate sense of safety & belonging among immigrant youth?

- By addressing the normative needs, it is possible to ameliorate the unique challenges facing immigrant youth.
Sense of safety—related to greater ethnic diversity

- Providing a better balance of power and opportunities to form cross-ethnic ties

Juvonen, Nishina & Graham, 2006; Juvonen, Kogachi, & Graham, 2017
Inclusive school practices
A case for cross-group ties:

- Cross-ethnic friendships reduce racial prejudice\(^{(1)}\)
- Friendships with different-race, US-born peers related to greater levels of acculturation\(^{(2)}\)
- Friendships with same-race US-born peer can help foster connection to the heritage culture -- i.e., greater enculturation\(^{(3)}\)

\(^{(1)}\) Harris, Harker, & Guo, 2003; \(^{(2)}\) Chan & Birman, 2009; \(^{(3)}\) Chan & Birman, 2009; Harris, Harker, & Guo, 2003

Juvonen, Lessard, Rastogi, Schacter, & Smith, 2019
The Function of Schools: Facilitating societal integration

- Successful integration is a 2-way process: entails both positive attitudes toward immigrants and positive attitudes of immigrants toward the host society (Berry, 2001)

- When facing social isolation & bullying; when instructionally segregated from peers, is it reasonable to expect development of positive attitudes?

- Schools need resources to support immigrant --especially newcomer -- students in multiple ways, starting with normative developmental needs: creating trusting and diverse relationships, while helping maintain strong ties to their heritage cultures
Re-conceptualizing schools as...

- “Safe havens,” (Dutton, 2012)
- “Sanctuaries” (Quartz, Murillo & Rabin, upcoming)*

for immigrant youth

*UCLA Community School recognizes the cultural richness of its students and their families; relies on an inclusive bilingual education model; provides services (e.g., legal) to families as well as engages students as agents of social change
What do we need in California—to lead the way?

1. **Support schools supporting immigrant students**
   - Teacher training – cultural sensitive practices
   - Restructure ELL programs; rigorously monitor their success
   - Experiment with new approaches to foster the normative developmental and the unique needs of newcomer students

2. **Support research**
   - on the effects and effectiveness of school practices (old and new) involving immigrant students—accountability!
   - Longitudinal research on various groups of newcomer youth because the insights inform educational practices
Thank you

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