

SURVIVING THE STRESS:

Mental Health Struggles of Undocumented Immigrants



For millions of undocumented folks, the fear of deportation is a constant presence. Immigration raids are increasing, hospitals and schools are being invaded, federal policies are shifting rapidly, and legal protections are being eroded. The anxiety of being separated from family, losing employment, or facing sudden detention is an everyday reality. Below are some of the concerns experienced by undocumented folks mere months after Trump's re-election this year:

ESCALATION OF IMMIGRATION RAIDS & ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS

- Federal agencies have been ordered to increase arrests, targeting both documented and undocumented individuals.
- Large-scale raids are occurring in cities like Chicago, Atlanta, Los Angeles, and Denver.
- "Collateral arrests" are rising—undocumented people with no criminal history are being detained.
- People who are legal citizens are being detained after being racially profiled.
- ICE is now allowed to enter hospitals, healthcare facilities and schools which were previously off limits.



EROSION OF LEGAL PROTECTIONS & POLICY SHIFTS

- Trump signed an executive order attempting to revoke birthright citizenship, which grants U.S. citizenship to anyone born on U.S. soil, regardless of their parents' immigration status.
- This right is protected under the 14th Amendment, ratified in 1868, which ensures that "all persons born or naturalized in the United States" are U.S. citizens.
- A federal judge blocked the order, but appeals are expected.
- A Supreme Court ruling in favor of the administration could permanently change U.S. citizenship laws.

EROSION OF LEGAL PROTECTIONS & POLICY SHIFTS

- The high-profile arrest of Anderson Zambrano-Pacheco, a suspected Venezuelan gang member, has been used to justify broader enforcement actions.
- ICE officers in tactical gear, labeled “Police ICE” and “Homeland Security,” are appearing frequently on social media.



MILITARIZATION OF IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT

- Thousands of active-duty military personnel have been deployed to the U.S.-Mexico border.
- Military aircraft are being used for deportation flights.
- Trump has hinted at invoking the Insurrection Act, which would allow military forces to conduct domestic immigration enforcement.

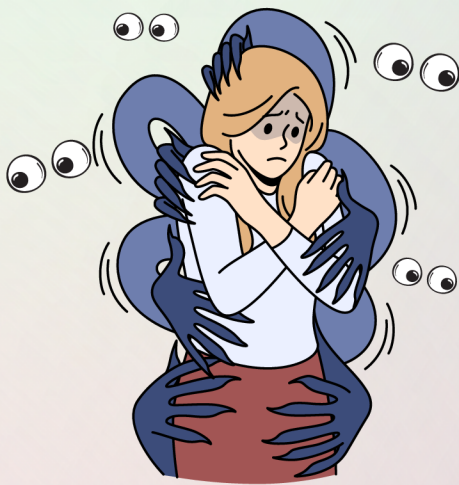
DEEPENING COMMUNITY IMPACT

- Latinx, Black, Middle Eastern, and Asian undocumented populations are disproportionately affected.
- Fear of arrest is deterring people from seeking medical care, attending school, or even going to work.
- Immigration policies are creating instability within mixed-status families, exacerbating economic and emotional stress.



The Mental Health Crisis Among Undocumented Immigrants

The consequences of this relentless crackdown extend far beyond policy changes. Many people are experiencing severe psychological distress at the thought of being deported away from a country that may have known their entire lives.



CHRONIC ANXIETY & HYPERVIGILANCE

- The fear of deportation leads to persistent stress and hyperawareness, making everyday activities like commuting to work or picking up children from school feel dangerous.
- Many feel the need to stay invisible to avoid encounters with law enforcement.

PTSD-LIKE SYMPTOMS

- The unpredictability of ICE raids and enforcement actions causes trauma similar to PTSD.
- Many report sleep disturbances, flashbacks, and a constant feeling of being watched.
- Even children of undocumented immigrants, despite being U.S. citizens, suffer from secondary trauma after witnessing the detention of family members.



DEPRESSION & HOPELESSNESS

- The constant instability and lack of legal protections contribute to high rates of depression.
- Many undocumented individuals feel trapped in an uncertain future with no legal pathways to secure their status.

SOCIAL ISOLATION & AVOIDANCE OF PUBLIC SPACES

- Many undocumented individuals are withdrawing from social spaces, including churches, schools, and workplaces, to avoid the risk of arrest.
- Some parents have stopped sending their children to school out of fear that they will be taken away by authorities.



WORKPLACE EXPLOITATION & MENTAL STRAIN

- Undocumented workers are at higher risk of workplace abuse, wage theft, and unsafe working conditions.
- Many endure mistreatment in silence, knowing they lack legal protection, which increases stress, burnout, and mental exhaustion

BARRIERS TO MENTAL HEALTH CARE

- Fear of deportation, financial constraints, and language barriers prevent many undocumented folks from seeking mental health services.
- Additionally, cultural stigma around mental health issues in some immigrant communities leads to further avoidance of care.



INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA & FAMILY SEPARATION

- The trauma of family separation leaves lasting emotional scars, especially for children.
- Many undocumented folks also struggle with guilt for leaving family members behind in their home countries, compounding their emotional distress.



NATIONWIDE ORGANIZATIONS

National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC) – immigrantjustice.org | 312-660-1370

Provides legal services, policy advocacy, and litigation to protect the rights of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

RAICES – raicetexas.org | (833) 372-4237

A nonprofit offering legal representation, social services, and advocacy for immigrant families, children, and refugees, with a focus on Texas.

U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) – refugees.org

Works to protect the rights of displaced persons, providing resettlement services, legal assistance, and advocacy for refugees and immigrants.

ARIZONA-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Arizona Immigrant and Refugee Services (AIRS) – airsaz.org | 602-944-1821

Supports immigrants and refugees in Arizona through job placement, legal assistance, and access to essential resources.

Florence Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project – firrp.org | 602-307-1008

Provides free legal services to detained immigrants in Arizona, advocating for asylum seekers, children, and those facing deportation.