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Author

Lopez, Monica

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Immigration-Related Family Separations Among Latino Immigrant Families

*Monica Lopez, Doctoral Student
School of Social Welfare*

Immigration literature suggests that immigrant families typically migrate in a “step-wise” fashion, commonly involving a pattern of separation of children from parents and siblings during the process of migration for Latinos. Immigration-related family separations can result in negative outcomes for both children and their families. Negative consequences include depressive symptoms and behavioral problems in children, as well as family conflict. Given the prevalence of these types of separations in Latino families and the consequences attributed to them, a deeper understanding of how these events are experienced is imperative. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore the separation and reunification experiences of Latino immigrant families and to recommend policy initiatives to ameliorate the negative effects.

In order to understand how immigrant families experience separations and reunifications, semi-structured interviews were

conducted with ten Central American and Mexican families recruited from the LISA (Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaptation) study. The questions focused on events related to separation and reunification processes in attempt to gather as much information as possible about how each informant makes sense of these events.

My preliminary findings are as follows:

- Most of the parents in the sample migrated to the United States without proper documentation. Many stated the perils of undocumented migration as a reason for migrating without their children.*
- Immigration policies, primarily family sponsorship requirements, prolong family separations. Parents wishing to bring their children to the United States through authorized means must wait years in order to meet entry requirements.*
- Parents unable to meet family sponsorship requirements often rely on unauthorized means to bring their children to the United States.*

Monica Lopez was a Mini-grant recipient in Spring 2002.
